

SOSC 1700 What Is Democracy?

Spring semester 2021

Classroom: zoom

Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 13.30 to 14.50

Instructor:

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Office hour: 1 pm to 2 pm, Friday; or by appointment

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Course Description:

Should China become a democracy? How to achieve a true democracy in Hong Kong? Is democracy the only good regime? These questions are being debated among the students not only in classrooms and dormitories, but in the street protests as well. Nonetheless, there is no course at HKUST that teaches basic theories of democracy. The students thus do not have a chance to systematically learn various viewpoints for or against democracy. Without a deeper understanding of democracy and training in critical reasoning, miscommunication and confusion result when students debate the merits and shortcomings of democracy. This is why I plan to offer “What Is Democracy?” as a common core course to undergraduate students of HKUST.

This course will cover the classic theories about democracy from ancient Greece to the contemporary world. The major topics introduced will include the relationship between individual rights and rule by majority; equality as the normative foundation of democracy; the tension between a procedural understanding of democracy and the substantive, participatory aspects of democracy; and how to conceptualize the common good or public interest in a democratic society. By teaching the students how to engage in reasoned discussions of various aspects of democracy with people holding different views, this course aims to enhance their capacity for critical reasoning as applied to social issues and help them become responsible, well-informed citizens.

Grading:

Participation: 10%

Three weekly responses: 20 %

Starting from the second week, you are required to write three short responses to the weekly readings according to your interest and schedule. The response should be your question or argument in regard to the issues addressed in that week’s reading. The response should be

submitted before the class on Tuesday on that week. Each response is around 2 double-spaced pages.

One 8 page double-spaced essay at the end of semester: 40 %
I will give the essay topic and you will have one week to work on the essay.

One group project (2 students as one group): What would happen to Hong Kong if Hong Kong becomes a democracy? 30 %

Assigned Readings:

Week 1: Introduction and Plato's Republic

Plato, *The Republic*, edited by G. R. F. Ferrari and translated by Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Book 1, Book 2, Book 4, Book 5, Book 7, and Book 8.

Week 2: Excellence and the best state

Aristotle, *The Politics and Constitution of Athens*, edited by Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 11-24; 30-38; 43-46; 61-63; 65-83; 85-93; 95-109; 112-114; 119-122; 127-128; 134-139; 154-161; 166-168; and 170-173.

Week 3: The Moment toward the real politics?

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 9

Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses*, Book I: Chapter 2-10; 18-20; 33-40; 46-48; 57-58.

Both are in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, edited by Alan Gilbert, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989)

Week 4: The state of the nature and the sovereignty

Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, chapters 13--19; 21; 26; 29-30.

Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, edited by Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 91-101 and pp. 115-126.

Week 5: The state of the nature and the popular sovereignty

John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (1679-1689), edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 268-278; 280-282; 283-295; 318-326; 330-333; 347-349; 350-363; 370-374; 406-415; 427-428.

Week 6: The state of the nature and the general will

J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and other Latter Political Writings*, edited by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 41-86; 90-94; 99-108; 110-116; 121-125; 146-151.

Week 7: Natural Rights or Human Rights

Thomas Paine, "Rights of Man, Part II," in Bruce Kuklick, ed., *Paine: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 155-205.

Week 8: Equality, Association, and Democracy

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), pp. 58-105; 138-170; 230-253; 262-308; 503-524; 561-571; 604-608.

Week 9: Parties, factions, and the common good

The Federalist Papers, by A. Hamilton, J. Maddison, and J. Jay (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009), Federalist 10, 51, 57.

Week 10: Representation and Democracy

J. S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991), Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 15.

Week 11: Revolution and Democracy

Karl Marx and F. Engels, "The Communist Manifesto,"; Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," and "Critiques of the Gotha Programme," all in David McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)

Week 12: The minimal version of democracy

Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976), pp. 235-302.

Week 13: Questioning the liberal democracy

J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with assistance of Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998), page

Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, translated by Ellen Kennedy, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988).