What holds a society together? This course will explore one influential answer to this foundational question within philosophy and social theory, namely social contract theory as it developed within early modern European political philosophy. Modern assumptions about the relationship between individual and society, private property and ownership, rationality, economics and the market, and rights and responsibilities of citizenship have all been shaped by social contract theory. But, even though this theory has enjoyed great influence, it has been severely criticized as unrealistic and biased towards individualism and property holders. We will read the foundational social contract works in this course and try to understand their assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses.

Required Readings*


*Note: All texts have been ordered at the New York University bookstore. Students should use the editions cited above.

Course Requirements:
1) Attendance: Attendance is mandatory.
2) Papers: Your written work should be a genuine attempt to fulfill the paper topics. If I find your paper not to be a genuine attempt I will tell you. All papers must be handed in. No late papers are accepted. There are no extensions for papers. Papers must be typed and double-spaced. See paper requirement options below.
3) Class Participation: This class is a seminar so regular participation is required. A seminar class won’t work if you don’t participate in discussions. Each day of class students will come prepared to discuss the text assigned to be read by that day.
4) Being prepared to discuss the text entails bringing questions about the text to class. Students are required to bring two questions to class every day. These questions are to be written down and handed in at the beginning of class.
**Paper Requirement**
There are two options that fulfill the paper requirement. You can choose either one.

**Paper requirement option A: one term paper**
Requirement A is a 4000-word term paper on a topic of your choice relevant to the course. All papers must be handed in by 6pm on Monday, December 17\textsuperscript{th}. Papers are due by email. A 300-word description of your topic is due no later than Friday, November 16\textsuperscript{th}. Please send your topic descriptions to my email address.

**Paper requirement option B: three papers**
Requirement B is four papers each 1000-words in length. Paper 1 is due on Friday, October 12\textsuperscript{th}. Papers are due in class. Paper 2 is due on Friday, November 2\textsuperscript{nd}. Papers are due in class. Paper 3 is due on Friday, November 30\textsuperscript{th}. Papers are due in class. Paper 4 is due on Monday, December 17\textsuperscript{th} by 6pm. Papers are due by email.

**Topics for paper 1 requirement B**
Select one:
1. Discuss Hobbes' conception of human nature. Argue for or against his conception.
2. Discuss Hobbes' conception of justice. Argue for or against the use of his conception in political philosophy.
3. Discuss Hobbes' argument for the formation of states. In light of what we know today, does his argument make sense?
5. Argue whether or not Hobbes provides a theory of political revolution.

**Topics for paper 2 requirement B**
Select one:
1. Discuss the different theories of state formation and/or human nature in Hobbes' *The Citizen* and Locke's *Second Treatise*. Argue why one of their theories concerning state formation and/or human nature is superior or inferior to the other.
2. Discuss the capacity for democratic political arrangements in Hobbes' *The Citizen* and Locke's *Second Treatise*. Is it possible to derive an argument for democracy from either of their writings?
3. Discuss Locke's theory of property. Argue for or against his theory. Or argue if his theory of property can be applied to problems of environmental crisis.
4. Argue whether or not Locke provides a theory of political revolution.

**Topics for paper 3 requirement B**
Select one:
1. Discuss Locke's and Rousseau’s theories of property. Argue why one of their theories of property is superior to the other.
2. Discuss Rousseau's and Hobbes' or Locke's theories of state formation. Do either of their theories on state formation assist us in evaluating our political world?
3. Argue whether or not Rousseau provides a theory of revolution.
4. Discuss Rousseau's and Hobbes' or Locke's theories of human nature. Argue why one of their theories of human nature is superior or inferior to the other.
Topics for paper 4 requirement B
Select one:
1. Does Kant provide a political or ethical theory?
2. Discuss Kant's theory of justice with any other author read in this course. Which author offers a superior means of analyzing our political world?
3. Is Kant's kingdom of ends a social contract theory?
4. Discuss Shakespeare's Richard III and any other author read in this course. Who offers more insight into understanding our political condition?

Note on plagiarism:
All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the dean. If you have any questions regarding what is considered plagiarism please ask me.

Schedule of Readings:
9/7, First day of class, read Hobbes The Citizen: chapters I, II, and III
9/14, Hobbes The Citizen: chapters IV, V, VI, and VII
9/28, Hobbes The Citizen: chapters XIV and XV
10/5, Locke Second Treatise of Government: chapters I to IX
10/12, Locke Second Treatise of Government: chapters X to XIX
10/19, Locke A Letter Concerning Toleration
10/26, Rousseau Discourse on The Origin of Inequality
11/2, Rousseau Social Contract: Books I and II
11/9, Rousseau Social Contract: Books III and IV
11/16, Rousseau
11/23, No class
11/30, Kant Grounding: pages 1-67
12/7, Kant
12/14, Shakespeare Richard III