

PE 100 - Spring 2021
First Response Paper Assignment (20% of course grade)

Main instructions:

1. Write a 1,400-2,000 word-long (~6-8 pages, double spaced) paper on **one of the three prompts shared below**.
2. Submit it on bCourses by 11:59 pm, Wednesday, March 10 (the assignment will accept either a Word doc or a pdf).
3. Include the word count, along with the following sentence, at the end of your essay: "I, ***Your Name***, understand that submitting work that isn't my own may result in failure of this midterm assignment and this course."

Pointers on what we will look for as we grade:

- We will look for evidence of close and substantial engagement with the texts.
- An excellent essay will be one that demonstrates mastery and understanding of the texts (along with their historical contexts), ability to compare/analyze the texts, evidence of moving beyond the lecture powerpoints, a clear and well-substantiated argument, and clean organization.
- We will look for your response to the prompt itself and we will look for demonstrations of your familiarity with the texts.

Three prompts (choose ONLY ONE of these three):

1. Texas recently decided to drop its mask mandates and most other Covid 19 related restrictions in order to "reopen" its economy. Read about the decision and reactions to it [here](#) and [here](#).
 - a. Hypothetically, how might the thinkers we have encountered so far in this class respond to the state government of Texas' decision. Also discuss how they might approach the issue of Covid 19 restrictions, such as mask wearing, quarantining, and bans on large gatherings. How would their views on human nature and/or natural rights inform their approach? What about their theories on the role of the state, the common good, liberty (political vs economic), security, and property?
 - b. The goal is to put these authors into conversation with each other, drawing upon everything you know about them from the readings and contrasting how they might respond to this issue. In your discussion, it may be interesting to acknowledge how different aspects of a thinker's theory might be in conflict, and also to consider any relevant historical context. In your

discussion, please draw on one thinker from each of the following groups (total 3 thinkers):

(i) Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau

(ii) Adam Smith

(iii) Ricardo, Bentham, John Stuart Mill

2. A recent winter storm in Texas—[a state with a privatized power grid](#)—left millions of people without electricity and some with astronomical electrical bills.

a. Hypothetically, how might the thinkers that we have encountered so far in this class have answered the question, “Who should own a nation’s power grid?”

b. The goal is to put these authors into conversation with each other, drawing upon everything you know about them from the readings and contrasting how they might respond to this issue. In your discussion, it may also be interesting to acknowledge how different aspects of a thinker’s theory might be in conflict, and also to consider any relevant historical context. In your discussion, please draw on one thinker from each of the following groups (total 3 thinkers):

(i) Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau

(ii) Adam Smith

(iii) Ricardo, Bentham, John Stuart Mill

3. In our readings so far in PE 100, we have come across many different views on liberty, and on the relationship of individual liberty to government and to economy/market. Our readings have brought us up to Classical Liberalism. These views have been articulated over time, and as Europe has become more interdependent with other parts of the world. As Europe experiences greater interconnection with (dependence upon) the rest of the world, its thinkers have continued to refine their theories of independence/liberty.

a. Drawing on one thinker from each of the following groups (total 3 thinkers), write a paper comparing and contrasting their (the classical liberal) views on liberty/freedom and political economy:

(i) Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau

(ii) Adam Smith

(iii) Ricardo, Bentham, John Stuart Mill

More writing pointers:

1. Use specific examples/evidence drawn from the readings to substantiate the points you are making in your essay.
2. When citing the course readings, use this simple in-text format: (Locke: 29; or, Rousseau: 113). No *Works Cited* or *Bibliography* required at the end.
3. Be prudent in your use of quotations. Where possible, paraphrase and cite as above. Keep any quotes you use short (no more than 1-2 sentences), applying them in a targeted manner to back-up your assertions. In other words, it is best to use quotes to emphasize your own logic, rather than to take a step for you in the logic of your essay.
4. Please do not handle your lecture/section notes as though they are an actual reading. After all, your notes are a version (your version) of what was shared during lecture and section. It is always safer to cite directly from the readings themselves. Save any references to your class notes for (i) those occasions when the lecture covered material not in the reading, and (ii) when you feel reasonably certain your lecture/section notes are reliable. Please use the following format for lecture/section note citing: (Class Notes, PE 100: 2/16/21).
5. You're free to discuss your prompt with classmates. **Your final written responses, however, should be written on your own and without input from others.** Nor should you borrow phrases or chunks of text from online sources and other motley sources not assigned for this course. Both these would count as plagiarism and we would tackle any instance of it with the seriousness that charge requires.