S Y R ACU SE U NI V ER S I T Y
S P R ING 2022

A A T I F ABB A S
A A A BBA S @ SY R. EDU

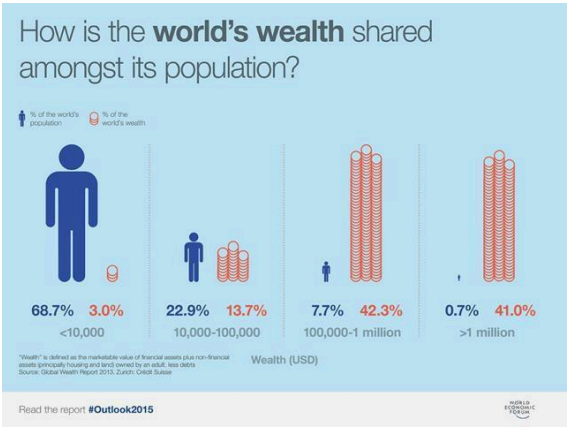
P H I 17 5 — S OC IA L AN D P O L I T IC A L P H I LO S O P HY

This course introduces students to major philosophical debates about democracy, freedom, and equality.

First, we explore the ancient roots of political philosophy by reading Plato's critique of democracy and his reflections about justice. The second unit invites students to engage with John Stuart Mill's seminal work, *On Liberty*. We ask: should citizens be free to express themselves regardless of the consequences of their speech? Or, should the government regulate expression? Finally, we turn our attention to equality. Students encounter the radical thoughts of Karl Marx as well as the writings of contemporary egalitarians and libertarians. Drawing insights from these different philosophical traditions, we wrestle with current social and political issues.

Should the government institute a limit to inequality? Or, are inequalities necessary to incentivize workers and grow the economy? Our course is designed to introduce students to philosophical thinking and encourage them to reflect on their own sociopolitical views.







Learning Objectives:

- Understanding complex philosophical texts and assessing their validity and soundness
- Applying philosophical theories to contemporary issues and grappling with their implications
- Writing argumentative essays that analyze, apply, and criticize

political philosophers
- Discussing politics and philosophy with others congenially and productively

Course Format, Requirements, and Policies

Attendance and In-Class Reading Responses

Our class sessions will feature a mixture of seminar-style discussions, group work, and individual exercises. Because the course format is interactive, your attendance and active participation are essential for creating a vibrant classroom community and for furthering your own learning. Attendance is therefore mandatory, and you should bring the assigned reading to class. If you are absent more than two times during the semester, your participation grade will be reduced accordingly.

Of course, active participation requires more than simply attending class. I expect that you will carefully read the assigned materials and come to class prepared to share your ideas and questions with your classmates. We will frequently reconstruct the argument from the day's reading and then assess it. I also expect that you will engage actively in any in-class group work and occasionally volunteer to present your group's ideas to the class as a whole. All that being said, I recognize that speaking in class can be more challenging for some of us – if that's the case for you, then come chat with me during office hours. We can discuss the readings together and perhaps devise some strategies to make you feel more comfortable in the class.

Your attendance is also important because you will often complete in-class reading responses. If you miss an in-class reading response, then you will receive a zero on that assignment. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. If you face certain extenuating circumstances (an illness, a family emergency, etc.) that prevent you from attending class, please contact me in as much advance as possible so that we can arrange a plan for you to complete a reading response at another time or make up the response with an alternative assignment.

Required Texts:

Plato, *Republic*, trans. Reeve (Hackett, 2004). ISBN: 978-0-87220-736-3.
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Elizabeth Rapaport (Hackett, 1978). ISBN: 9780915144433.

These books are available at the bookstore (syracuse.redshelf.com); please buy the editions listed here. All other readings will be made available on Blackboard. You will also need to rent a couple of movies over the course of the semester.

Tips for Reading Philosophical Texts

You should *carefully* complete all assigned readings *before class*. Reading philosophical texts can be challenging. I have two suggestions. First, you may want to skim the readings to familiarize yourself with the main topics and ideas covered. This initial reading helps you obtain a sense of the big picture. Once you have a sense of the overall argument, reread the text slowly and carefully, paying attention to how the individual pieces fit into that bigger picture.

Second, I encourage you to make notes that reconstruct the author's argument in your own words and include your reactions to it. These are just suggestions based on my experience. Feel free to experiment with ways of reading and note-taking that work best for you.

Paper Format

There will be three essays over the course of the semester (schedule below). These will require you to interpret, analyze, and apply the texts you read. Therefore, it will be essential to develop a deep understanding of the material we cover. I encourage you to start on the papers as early as possible to allow time for revision.

Writing assignments must be word-processed. Make sure to use Times New Roman 12 (or its close equivalent), double-space your essay, set your margins to 1 inch, and include page numbers. Cite your sources either with Chicago-style footnotes or with MLA parenthetical notations. You should also include a single-spaced header at the top of the paper that features: your name, the course title, and the date.

Extensions and Late Assignments

All deadlines in this course are firm. If you have an unavoidable extenuating circumstance (i.e., an illness, a family emergency, etc.) and you cannot meet a deadline, please contact me as soon as possible so that we may work out an alternative due date. Otherwise, there are severe consequences to missing deadlines. Specifically, the grade for a late essay will be reduced by a third of a letter (i.e., B+ becomes a B) for every day it is late. Please note: it is ***always*** better to submit a late paper than a plagiarized one. Plagiarism constitutes a serious violation of Syracuse's Academic Integrity Policy and, therefore, will not be tolerated. Plagiarism cases will be referred to Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS).

Office Hours

I am happy to meet with you during my office hours in Bird 426 on Tuesday from 11:00-12:30 and Thursday from 3:30-5:00 or by appointment to discuss writing assignments, readings, or any other issues pertaining to this course. Just drop by or send me an email, and we can arrange a time to meet.
Philosophical texts are often complex and demanding, particularly on the first encounter. Therefore, I'm here to help make that learning curve a little less steep by answering any questions you may

have. The Writing Center

All writers (including your professors!) benefit from constructive feedback on their essays. At the Writing Center, a service available to students, consultants can help you with a draft's focus, organization, grammar, style, and citations, among other aspects. You may visit it at any stage of your writing process, from clarifying your initial ideas to reviewing a final draft. See https://thecollege.syr.edu/writing-center/ for more information or to reserve an appointment.

Electronics in the Classroom

For the most part, laptops and smartphones act as distractions that prevent you from fully engaging with in-class activities and with your fellow students. Moreover, multiple studies have

confirmed that hand-written notes enable students to comprehend material better than typed ones. For these reasons, I ask that you ***refrain from laptop or smartphone use*** during class time. There are some exceptions to this rule. If you learn better with the assistance of a laptop, then chat with me about it. I can offer exceptions. Occasionally, you will be asked to participate in short in-class research activities that require a computer. I will always inform you *in advance* if you need a laptop in class.

Disability-Related Academic Adjustments

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit their website at https://disabilityresources.syr.edu. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

Health

I expect you to abide by the public health guidelines specified by the university. For the current COVID Alert Level and associated guidelines see https://www.syracuse.edu/staysafe/.

Mental health and overall well-being have a significant impact on academic success. It is important to develop skills and resources to effectively navigate stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days a year, at 315.443.8000, and I encourage you to explore the resources available through the Wellness Leadership Institute.

Assignment Sequence

This class focuses primarily on developing your writing skills. Therefore, most of your grade comes from essay assignments, as follows:

Essay 1	15%
Essay 2	25%
Essay 3	30%
Reading Responses	20%
Class Participation	10%

Essay 1 (3-4 pages)**:** Even the most famous philosophers are susceptible to counterarguments. Your task is first to identify your own counterargument to challenge Plato's views about democracy and then imagine how Plato would respond to it. Would he be able to overcome your challenge or not?
Due Feb. 8

Essay 2 (5-6 pages)**:** Political philosophy can often help us think through contemporary dilemmas. Drawing from *On Liberty*, make an argument about how Mill would view Germany's free speech laws and then evaluate that view. You might want to defend Mill's position, refine it, or refute it. You should draw on at least one of the materials we discussed in class on March 1.
Due Mar. 10

Essay 3 (7-8 pages)**:** Select one of the philosophical views from the list below, and make a step-by-step argument that expands, refines, or refutes it. In other words, your essay should perform a "Gaipa move." Remember that most Gaipa moves (e.g., playing peacemaker and riding a scholar's coattails) involve more than one scholar. Therefore, many strong essays will draw on one other philosopher whom we encountered after spring break.

- Okin's Liberalism
- Marx's Account of Alienation
- Nozick's Entitlement Theory
- Anderson's Limits on Markets

You are also welcome to choose another topic from the post-spring break readings, but you must get my permission to work on it by April 26.

Due May 10

Reading Responses: At certain times during the semester, you will be asked to compose a brief written response about the session's major themes and concepts. Sometimes, these will occur at the start of class and thus ask you to reflect on the readings due that day; at other times, they will fall towards the end of the class session and therefore ask you to consider a question or primary source that we discussed during that period. I might also ask you to complete a reading response outside of class. You can think of these as quizzes if you like, but rather than merely asking you to demonstrate knowledge of the material, they will ask you to

analyze our texts and reflect on why they matter. They will also be open book and open note. There will be ***approximately 10*** reading responses throughout the semester. I will drop your reading response with the lowest grade. *Note: Because these are short responses, they will not be assigned a letter grade but will instead be evaluated according to a ✔+(A-range), ✔ (B-range), or ✔- (C-range) scale.*

Course Schedule

UNIT I: READING PLATO'S REPUBLIC

Date	Reading	Topic
Tue, Jan 25	No Reading	Introduction to Social & Political Philosophy
Thu, Jan 27	Read the Entire Syllabus, Plato's *Republic* - Pages: 1-35	Why be Just?
Tue, Feb 01	Plato's *Republic* - Pages: 36-45 & 270-296	Plato Defends Justice
Thu, Feb 03	Plato's *Republic* - Pages: 176-182 & 251-269	Plato On Democracy
Tue, Feb 08	None! But Essay 1 is Due	Introduction to the Modern Period

UNIT II: DEBATING LIBERTY

Date	Reading	Topic
Thu, Feb 10	Mill's *On Liberty* – Pages: 1-14 (Chapter 1)	Harm Principle & the Public vs. Private Distinction
Tue, Feb 15	Mill's *On Liberty* – Pages 15-52 (Chapter 2)	Freedom of Expression
Thu, Feb 17	Mill's *On Liberty* – Pages 53-72 (Chapter 3)	Individuality & Experiments in Living
Tue, Feb 22	Mill's *On Liberty* – Pages 73-92 (Chapter 4)	Education & Conformism
Thu, Feb 24	Baker's *Human Liberty and Freedom of Speech* – Pages: 6-24 (Chapter 1)	Challenging Mill on Free Speech

Tue, Mar 01	Watch *Denial* (available on Amazon), Case Packet on Hate Speech	Is Hate Speech Permissible?
Thu, Mar 03	Case Packet on Covid-related Mandates	Are Vaccine and/or Mask Mandates Justified?
Tue, Mar 08	No Class - Extended Office Hours	Essay 2 Prep
Thu, Mar 10	None! But Essay 2 is Due	Campus Speech
Tue, Mar 15	Spring Break	Spring Break
Thu, Mar 17	Spring Break	Spring Break
Tue, Mar 22	Parekh "Liberalism and Colonialism" - Pages: 81-98	Liberalism & Colonialism I
Thu, Mar 24	Okin "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" - Pages: 9-24; Responses by Parekh and Al-Hibri	Liberalism & Colonialism II

UNIT III: EQUALITY & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Date	Reading	Topic
Tue, Mar 29	Wolff "The Distribution of Property" - Pages: 134-153; Watch "Capital in the Twenty-First Century" (available on Amazon)	Distribution of Property
Thu, Mar 31	Engels "The Great Towns" - Pages: 44-49 & 56-61; Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* - Pages: 58-68	Critique of Industrialization, Alienation
Tue, Apr 05	Marx's *Communist Manifesto* – Pages: 157- 169 (Part 1)	Critique of Rights, History of Class Struggle

Thu, Apr 07	Marx's *Communist Manifesto* – Pages: 169- 186 (Parts 2-4)	Argument for Socialism
Tue, Apr 12	Wolff "The Distribution of Property" - Pages: 153-178; Rawls - Excerpts	Distributive Justice
Thu, Apr 14	Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* - Pages: 149-164	Libertarianism & Entitlements
Tue, Apr 19	Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* - Pages: 183-231	Libertarian Response to Egalitarians
Thu, Apr 21	Anderson's *Value in Ethics and Economics* – Pages: 141-167	Limits of Markets
Tue, Apr 26	Anderson's *Value in Ethics and Economics* – Pages: 168-216	Reproductive & Environmental Rights
Thu, Apr 28	Complete the Essay 3 Worksheet	Writing Workshop
Tue, May 03	No Reading	Concluding Discussion