

**PHI 175**  
**Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy**  
**Fall 2025**

**Instructor: Professor Neelam Sethi**  
**580 Hall of Languages**  
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**Course Description:**

Social and political philosophy is concerned with issues such as the justification of the state, the limits of the coercive power of the state, the relationship between justice and equality, what rights individuals should have, and concerns regarding exploitation. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to several major theoretical issues in social and political philosophy through an examination of the relationships among individuals, groups, and institutions in civil societies.

While our main focus will be on the question “What is justice?”, we will also engage with issues regarding rights and their distribution, the notion of power, and the value of equality and freedom. Specifically, we will examine competing political theories (libertarianism, utilitarianism, egalitarianism, and feminism) to discuss public policy and law, including measures dealing with surrogacy, immigration, climate change, gender and racial equality, income inequality, and poverty.

**Goals of the course:**

To help you develop your ability to understand, evaluate and formulate philosophical arguments.  
To help you develop and defend a philosophical viewpoint.  
To help you engage with political and social issues that emerge from our everyday interactions with others, different social groups, and the environment.  
To help you acquire tools for making decisions more carefully and clearly.

**Required Readings:**

Readings will be available on the class Blackboard site.

**Course Requirements:**

1. **Prelim #1 (in class) and prelim # 2 (in class)** Details TBA
2. **Two short in-class writing assignments** Details TBA
3. **A Final Paper** Details TBA
4. **Quizzes** Details TBA

**5. Class participation, attendance, and class activities**

Class participation is only possible if you attend all class lectures. In philosophy, learning requires your engagement in dialogue with the instructor and your peers, which means that you cannot simply sit through lectures. Meaningful participation in class discussions requires that you raise questions that emerge from the assigned texts and offer comments as well as respond to issues raised in class by others. Note that our aim is to learn from one another, which involves engaging productively and respectfully with peers and allowing everyone to have a chance to contribute.

You may miss three classes over the course of the semester without having to provide any explanation. Additional absences will be excused only in cases of sickness (you must provide a doctor's note), death in the family, religious observation, or an athletic meeting (you must provide an official note). Unexcused absences will have a negative impact on your grade.

6. Students must complete ALL assignments. Any missing assignment will result in failing the class.

7. **All work submitted must be your own.** Failure to cite sources used will count as plagiarism and will result in disciplinary action. When in doubt, provide references. The Syracuse Code of Academic Integrity can be reviewed online at

<https://policies.syr.edu/policies/academic-rules-student-responsibilities-and-services/academic-integrity-policy/>

<https://class.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/What-Students-Need-to-Know-About-Academic-Integrity-7.9.20.pdf>

**Please note that use of Chatgpt for any assignment will result in a failing grade.**

“All generative-AI tools are prohibited in this course because their use inhibits achievement of the course learning objectives. This policy applies to all stages of project and writing processes including researching, brainstorming, outlining, organizing, and polishing. Do not use Generative-AI tools to create any content (i.e., images and video, audio, text, code, etc.). If you have any questions about a feature and whether it is considered Generative-AI, ask your instructor.”

Make sure to talk or write to me if you have any questions regarding this matter.

8. **Contacting me:** I am available to meet with you during my office hours. If that time slot does not work for you, please email me to make an appointment. If you need to contact me regarding any class related matter, email me; if you do not hear back from me within 24 hours, write again to remind me.

9. **Accommodations:** If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities that require accommodations, please let me know by the end of this Thursday so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Services Office that can be reached at 315-443-4498

10. **Laptop/cell phone policy:** I will follow a very strict policy regarding the use of laptops, cell phones, iPads, kindles, iPods, and the like. Please switch off your cell phone for the duration of the class. Laptop or iPad use will NOT be allowed with the exception of students registered with the office of disability services.

11. All information regarding class assignments, readings (or any changes made thereof) and any other related topic will be made available on the class blackboard site available to all enrolled students. It is your responsibility to check class Blackboard regularly for such information. Please contact me if you have any questions about assignments or readings. **Original class materials (handouts, assignments, tests, etc.) are the intellectual property of the course instructor. You may download these materials for your use in this class. However, you may not provide these materials to other parties (e.g., web sites, social media, other students) without permission. Doing so is a violation of intellectual property law and of the student code of conduct.**