

PHI 175 Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy

Instructor: Christopher Bousquet, crbousqu@syr.edu

Time: Mo/We: 2:15-3:35 pm, SOM 004

Office Hours: T/Th 12-1pm on Zoom and by appointment

Course Goals:

- Arguments about social and political life are regular features of our everyday experience. Whether it's deciding who to vote for, which policies to support, what job to take, whether and where to donate, how to spend one's free time, and how to treat those around you, we constantly confront the challenge of deciding how best to act. This course applies the philosophical method to these issues, focusing on how to develop, deploy, and critically analyze arguments about pressing social and political topics. The goals of this course are therefore twofold: a) gaining an understanding some of the most urgent social and political problems we face today and the most prominent philosophical approaches to those issues and b) learning to apply to philosophical method to analyze and evaluate arguments on these issues.

Grading:

Discussion Board: 10%

- Throughout the course of the semester, I will ask you to submit **three** short responses about the week's reading. I will assign you dates for each of your responses. I'll post a question each Thursday, and when it's your week, you should respond in 200-250 words by the following Tuesday **before 11:59 pm**. Your response should seek to answer the question, but might also ask questions about the reading or challenge the author's argument. I'll use your responses to orient conversation on Wednesday and on weeks that we have symposia, I may ask you to pose your question during the Q&A.

Participation: 10%

- We'll do a lot of small group discussion over the course of the semester. Your participation grade will be based on your level of engagement in these conversations as well as your attendance and contributions to full-class discussions.

Symposia: 20%

- Throughout the semester, we will host debate-style symposiums on a number of key issues in social and political philosophy. You will be split into two groups of three, one on each side of the issue. During the symposium, each side will argue their case and respond to the arguments of the other side. I will send around a sign-up sheet during the first couple weeks for people to pick their symposium topic.

Short Writing Assignments

- **Paper 1: 1-page argument reconstruction:** 10% (due by Friday of Week 4, September 22)
 - o For the argument reconstruction, I'll ask you to summarize an argument from an article we've read as clearly and concisely as possible.

- **Paper 2: 2-page objection assignment:** 15% (due by Friday of Week 8, October 20)
 - o This asks you to challenge at least one premise in one of the arguments in our readings, offering your own argument as to why the premise is wrong.
- **Paper 3: 2-page Symposium Response Paper:** 15% (due by Monday of Week 14, December 4)
 - o I'll ask you to sign up to respond to one of the other symposiums (i.e. any one other than your own). In this response, you will take a side on the issue under debate, offering your own argument for your position by providing additional evidence and/or challenging the arguments of the other side. These are due one week after the symposium you're writing on.

Final Paper (4-5 pages): 20% due Monday, December 18

- Your essay will reflect your considered opinion on some issue we've covered in class, arguing in favor or against some view. You will offer a clear thesis statement and justify it with arguments that draw upon evidence we've encountered in class or that you've found on your own. You will also consider and respond to at least one argument against your view. The idea is to engage with what you have read and develop your own take. You may build on papers you've written previously in the class.

Late Assignments:

I will accept late work, but I will take off 5 points for each day an assignment is late. If you need an extension for an assignment, please let me know 72 hours before the assignment is due and we can try to work something out.

Academic Integrity:

Work for this class must be just *your own*, produced by you, not another student, an AI, a parent, a dog, a cat, a deity, or anything else. You can find SU's academic integrity policy [here](#) and I will take it very seriously. I'll employ plagiarism and AI detection tools for out-of-class assignments. If you violate this policy, I will have to contact the Office of Academic Integrity. Depending on the severity of the offense, consequences can range from a zero on an assignment to removal from and failure in the course. If you're stressing for time or confused about an assignment, reach out to me instead!

AI Statement:

Using artificial intelligence to complete any assignments is prohibited because developing your own understanding of the material is a key goal of this course. AI detection tools including Turnitin's built-in AI writing indicator, may be used as one factor in evaluating potential inappropriate use of AI in this course.

Student Resources:

Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS)

Free, small-group and one-on-one tutoring and workshops.

Address: 014 Bird Library
Phone: 315.443.2005

Writing Center

Face-to-face appointments as well as online sessions to help students with writing projects.

Address: 101 H.B. Crouse Hall

Phone: 315.443.5289

Online Appointments: <https://syr.mywconline.com/>

Counseling Center

Variety of services to help with mental health, substance abuse, sexual assault/relationship violence and more.

Address: Barnes Center at The Arch, 150 Sims Drive

Phone: 315.443.8000

Course Schedule:

Justifying Government

Week 1: Intro

Monday, August 28

- Watch Michael Lynch, "How to see past your own perspective and find truth"

Wednesday, August 30

- Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority*, Ch 1

Week 2: Traditional Social Contract Theory

Monday, September 4

- Labor Day, NO CLASS

Wednesday, September 6

- Chris at conference, NO CLASS, read Huemer Ch 2

Week 3: Intrinsic Defenses of Democracy

Monday, September 11

- Buchanan, 703-709

Wednesday, September 13

- Buchanan, 710-719

Week 4: Instrumental Defenses of Democracy

Monday, September 18

- Mill, "That The Ideally Best Form Of Government Is Representative Government"
(excerpts)

Wednesday, September 20

- Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Ch 6 (excerpts)

****Friday, September 22, Argument Reconstruction due****

Week 5: Opponents of Democracy

Monday, September 25

- Huemer, Ch 4

Wednesday, September 27

- Brennan, "The Right to a Competent Electorate" (excerpts)
- ****Symposium 1, Democracy****

Distributive Justice

Week 6: Rawls

Monday, October 2

- Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Sections 1-4)

Wednesday, October 4

- Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Sections 11, 20, 26)

Week 7: Nozick

Monday, October 9

- NO CLASS, Fall Break

Wednesday, October 11

- Nozick, Anarchy, the State, and Utopia
- ****Symposium 2, Distributive Justice****

Week 8: Luck Egalitarianism

Monday, October 16

- Tan, "A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism" (665-675)

Wednesday, October 18

- Tan, "A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism" (675-690)

****Friday, October 20, Objection Assignment due****

Free Expression

Week 9: The Right to Free Expression

Monday, October 23

- Meiklejohn, *Free Speech and Its Relation to Self-Government* (2-16)

Wednesday, October 25

- Meiklejohn (16-end)

Week 10: Against the Right to Free Expression

Monday, October 30

- Leiter, "The Case Against Free Speech" (407-429)

Wednesday, November 1

- Leiter (430- end)
- ****Symposium 3, Free Speech****

Week 11: Hate Speech

Monday, November 6

- Lawrence III, "If He Hollers Let Him Go" (selections)

Wednesday, November 8

- Gates, "War of Words: Critical Race Theory and the First Amendment"

Applied Issues in Political Philosophy

Week 12: Reparations

Monday, November 13

- Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

Wednesday, November 15

- Johnson, "An Open Letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Liberals Who Love Him"
- Green, "The Case Against Reparations"
- ****Symposium 4, Reparations****

No class November 20, 22 for Thanksgiving Break

Week 13: Immigration

Monday, November 27

- Kukathas, "The Case for Open Immigration"

Wednesday, November 29

- Miller "Immigration: The Case for Limits"
- ****Symposium 5, Immigration****

Week 14: Climate Change

Monday, December 4

- David Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth" (pt. 1)
- **** Symposium Response due ****

Wednesday, December 6

- Wells, pt. 2
- Podcast: The Argument, "Got Climate Doom? Here's What You Can Do To Actually Make a Difference"

Week 15: Work

Monday, December 11

- Elster, "Self-Realization in Work and Politics: The Marxist Conception of the Good Life" (pp.1-19)

Wednesday, December 13

- Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable"

****Final Paper due Monday, December 18****

N.B. Readings and assignments are subject to change at the instructors' discretion.
