PHI 317 / PSC 373: The Social Contract Tradition and Its Critics

Course description

This course explores the idea of the social contract, which proposes that the legitimacy of political authority, as well as the rights and obligations of members of a political community, result from voluntary agreement between free, rational, and equal individuals. Individuals consent to give up some of their natural freedom, rights, and power in exchange for political freedom and security. A just society is a society that is based on the free consent of all its members.

This semester, we will examine some early examples of the idea of a social contract in ancient Chinese, Indian, and Greek thought, before exploring important representatives of modern social contract theory. We will then look at the social contract in practice and consider whether polities like the United States that are built on a social contract are just.

Access

My goal is to make this course adaptive and flexible to ensure the course meets your needs. We will follow principles of Universal Design in Learning (UDL). This means that all required readings are available electronically and in accessible format; all videos are captioned; audio files include transcripts; alternative text is provided for all graphics.

The use of technology is encouraged for the purpose of learning and building community in the classroom.

If you need accommodations beyond those covered under UDL, or beyond what is covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please let me know. **You do not need to disclose any personal information to receive accommodations.**

Syllabus Statement Regarding 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.

Course objectives

The objectives for student learning in this course fall into two categories: knowledge and skills. Because the skills concern your ability to process knowledge, they can only be met if the knowledge goals have been met. Therefore, at the end of the semester, you should:

1. Be able to demonstrate understanding of the texts we have read during the course.
2. Be able to explain the arguments you have encountered during the semester.
3. Be able to identify, read, and understand other similar texts and analyze other political arguments—i.e., engage in inquiry into political theory.
4. Be able to express your views on these matters in speech and writing.

Course materials

All readings are available electronically on Blackboard. Please bring a printed or electronic copy of the reading to class.

Course requirements and assignments

1. Participation (20 pts.)
2. In-class reading responses (20 pts.)
3. Portfolio (60 pts.)

Assignment descriptions will be provided.

Grading rubric

Work in the A range demonstrates thorough and critical understanding of the issues. Work in this category subtly summarizes the major issues while also offering insightful interpretations of the positions examined. Written assignments feature outstanding argumentation, organization, and writing (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) and only minor mistakes. Work at this level is clearly above and beyond expectations.

Work in the B range indicates above average understanding. Work at this level is not as creative or exegetical as A work, nor does it capture all the complexities of an issue. Written work features thorough recapitulation of the text and/or discussion, adequate argumentation, organization, and writing, with few mistakes. Overall, work at this level is good and meets expectations.

Work in the C range shows basic understanding, marked by one or more significant errors or misreadings. Written work at this level may be confused and/or disorganized and may address lots of information without interpreting it. Work at this level is adequate.

Work in the D range shows a very basic grasp of the course material, presented in a highly confused manner. Work at this level is inadequate and does not meet basic expectations.

The grade F is reserved for work that shows no comprehension of the material, work that is wholly incomprehensible, or for failure to complete work (including failure to attend more than 60% of classes and/or failure to submit assignments).

Grading scale

> 94	A	80–83	B-	60–70	D
90–93	A-	77–79	C+	< 60	F
87–89	B+	74–76	C		
84–86	B	70–73	C-		

Syracuse University Policies

For copies of SU's policies, please refer to the Religious Observances Policy, Academic Integrity Expectations and Policy, Email Policy, and Compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).