

**PHILOSOPHY 335/635: Social and Political Philosophy
Fall 2022; TR, 2-3:20pm; Baker Hall 235A**

Professor: Danielle Wenner (she/her/Dr)
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:30-4:30pm, Baker 145L
Wednesdays, 3-4pm, on zoom:

<https://cmu.zoom.us/j/94856587144?pwd=V290TFQ2anFSRVJEaERXZlI5cjNOdz09>

Graders:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Broadly speaking, political philosophers are interested in whether, and to what extent, government use of coercion can be justified, and how formal social and political institutions should be structured in order to be legitimate. Topics in political philosophy include the nature of freedom, justice, equality, democracy, etc. Social philosophy encompasses these political questions, but broadens its focus to include persons and institutions beyond the state to ask how individuals and group agents should live together. Topics in social philosophy can include the structure and role of non-state institutions like the family, corporations, and private associations, as well as the informal social norms and institutions with which we all interact.

This is an advanced course in social and political philosophy, aimed at providing students with an in-depth familiarity with classic and contemporary questions both theoretical and applied. The course is topical, and course topics vary from year to year. Previous years' topics have included the nature and value of freedom; social contract theory; racial and epistemic injustice and the nature of white ignorance; sexism and the nature of misogyny; the intersecting concepts of justice and equality; structural injustice; responsibility for injustice; and immigration.

Students are expected to come away from this course with a strong understanding of some of the major debates in social and political theory as well as the theoretical tools to analyze ongoing debates about the nature of justice, including racial and gender justice, and who is responsible for ensuring a just society and why. Students are also expected to come away from the course with improved analytical reading and writing skills and the ability to apply theoretical frameworks considered in class to pressing social and political issues of our time in persuasive writing. Assignments are therefore structured to emphasize writing and analysis rather than exams. This course is primarily conducted as a seminar and is discussion- rather than lecture-based.

Masking Request: Please wear a mask during this class

While masking is not required in CMU classrooms, I politely request that you wear a mask during this class. COVID-19 is an airborne virus that has disproportionately harmful impacts on disabled, chronically ill, and immunocompromised persons. COVID infection itself is extremely unpleasant and will cause you to miss class and fall behind. The risks of long COVID are significant, and the chances of experiencing long-term symptoms increase with each new infection. One-way masking (where only one person wears a mask while others do not) is significantly less effective at preventing the transmission of airborne viruses than when everyone is masked. This means that we cannot provide an equitable and inclusive atmosphere for all members of our campus community unless we protect one another by masking while indoors. **DO NOT ATTEND CLASS IF YOU ARE FEELING UNWELL. IF YOU ARE VISIBLY SICK WHILE IN CLASS, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO LEAVE.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The learning curve for reading and writing philosophy is steep, and early feedback will be important to you in improving your work. Class assignments are structured to improve students' reading habits, analytical skills, and writing. If you are struggling with reading or writing, please make use of office hours. During regularly scheduled office hours, no appointment is needed.

Homework and Short Response Pieces – 30%

Over the course of the semester, there will be several short writing assignments. Writing assignments are designed to build your writing skills with an eye towards what you will need to do for your final paper. Assignment specifics are posted on Canvas. Students are responsible for knowing about class assignments and their deadlines.

Three papers – 15% each, 45% total

*Each student will write three longer-form essays over the course of the semester on topics that will be assigned. In some instances, a long-form essay may be a more fully developed version of a short writing assignment. Further details about the paper assignments will be provided in class. Paper deadlines are **October 1, November 12, and December 12.***

Attendance & Class Participation – 20%

*There is no attendance policy in this class. However, 20% of your grade consists in participation in in-class discussions of the readings and regular class attendance. You should attend each class having read the assigned material for the day and ready to engage in discussion and critical assessment of those materials. You will be asked regularly to assess your own attendance and participation. Frequent absenteeism, inability to participate in class discussions and activities due to not having completed the readings, and failure to contribute to class discussions will each negatively impact your participation grade. **Do not attend class if you are feeling unwell. If you are visibly sick while in class, you will be asked to leave.***

Important Dates

Oct. 1: First paper due
Oct. 9: Final drop deadline
Oct. 15-21: No class; mid-semester break
Oct. 23: Mid-semester grades turned in
Nov. 7: No class; election day
Nov. 12: Second paper due
Nov. 23: No class; Thanksgiving
Nov. 28: No class
Dec. 12: Third paper due

CLASS POLICIES

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

Do not attend class if you are feeling unwell. If you appear sick in class, you will be asked to leave.

There is no official attendance policy in this class and attendance is not taken. However, you will be asked regularly to assess your own attendance and participation, and a pattern of missed classes will be noticed and will impact your grade. Missing a significant number of class meetings is also likely to impact your grade through your performance on class assignments. If you miss a class, for any reason, it is your responsibility to determine what you missed. It is strongly recommended that you exchange contact information with a few of your peers so that you can easily obtain class notes on missed discussions. **By default, I do not respond to emails asking “what did I miss in class?”**

YOU MUST DO THE READINGS FOR THIS CLASS. Philosophical inquiry is a joint endeavor, and the quality of this course will depend crucially on your thoughtful, considerate engagement with the readings and with each other. In general, I do not devote class meetings to lectures that explain the materials. Rather, class discussion is focused on assessment of core arguments, discussions of the implications of authors’ views, and consideration of potential objections. Students should come to class having closely read and thought about all assigned materials. This requires, *at a minimum*:

- Determining the key point(s) the author is trying to establish or criticize;
- Understanding why the author considers it/them to be important;
- Identifying the reason(s) the author gives in support of their conclusion(s); and
- Considering whether those reasons are both (a) true or correct, and (b) actually in support of the author’s conclusion(s).

Students often assume that there is some settled Knowledge within a discipline. On this model, the role of a faculty member is to impart that Knowledge to students, so that students can commit the Knowledge to memory and regurgitate it back to the faculty to demonstrate competence. **This is not an accurate model of scholarly reality.** Particularly in philosophy, but also across disciplines, there are typically multiple, competing arguments. Experts can and do disagree, and mapping, understanding, and assessing the bases for those disagreements is a core part of scholarly work. This is the work we will do in this class.

We will be discussing controversial topics about which many of you will have strong feelings. However, our purpose in this class is to **move past feelings and opinions**, and to evaluate and provide **reasoned arguments** for and against various positions on these issues. **Disrespectful comments towards other students will not be tolerated.**

GRADING

Grades are assigned on the following scale:

High A	97.5	B+	87.5	C+	77.5	D+	67.5
A	95	B	85	C	75	D	65
A-	92.5	B-	82.5	C-	72.5	D-	62.5
A-/B+	90	B-/C+	80	C-/D+	70	R	60 or below

You are not defined by your grades. While I recognize that students are under intense pressure (both self-imposed and external) to achieve high grades, there is nothing inherently wrong with getting a B or a C. They are letters on a page, and their primary function is to **indicate where your work can improve.** Students also have widely varying reasons for taking a particular class, and some of those reasons are met perfectly well by doing satisfactory (C-level) work. An “A” on any assignment in this class indicates outstanding or truly exemplary work. A “B” is work that demonstrates a high level of competence. A “C” is satisfactory.

There is a steep learning curve to reading and writing philosophy effectively, which should provide you with strong incentives to work hard at the beginning of the semester and receive the kind of feedback you will need to excel in your written assignments.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Requests for reasonable extensions on writing assignments are **always granted**, provided requests are made in advance of the deadline. **You do not need to provide a reason for asking for an extension.** However, please note that I do not check email outside of regular business hours, so extensions must be requested before 5pm on Friday for assignments with weekend due dates.

COMMUNICATION

Please note that I do not read or respond to student emails outside of normal business hours (i.e. if you email me in the evening or on the weekend, you will not receive a response until the next weekday.) I endeavor to always respond to student emails within one business day, and ask that you try to respond to my emails in a similarly timely fashion.

Students are not always familiar with the norms governing professional correspondence. Please use [this resource](#) to inform your understanding of what is expected from communications in a professional environment.

OFFICE HOURS

I hold regularly scheduled office hours on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons. Office hours are times that I set aside specifically to be available to meet with students. You do not need an appointment to meet with me in office hours – simply show up. If you need to meet with me and you cannot make it to regularly scheduled office hours, you may email me to set up a time. I encourage you to watch [this video](#) to learn more about office hours.

If you are observant, you will have noticed that there is 5% missing from the total course requirements listed above. You can earn that final 5% in one of two ways: You can construct an email to me using the format demonstrated in the linked post, above. Alternatively, you can attend office hours at least once this semester.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, GENERATIVE AI, & PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism refers to the use of any ideas or words from another person or source without appropriate citation. All sources used for course assignments should be appropriately cited, including information found on the internet, in course readings, or from class discussions. If you are unsure about whether or not to cite something, err on the side of caution.

Large Language Models (LLMs, also often called “generative AI” or “AI”) like Chat GPT are trained on text stolen from the internet without authors’ permission, and as a result create plagiarized content. Submitting work produced by an LLM **with or without attribution** is a form of intellectual theft.

Practicing every step of writing, including brainstorming, research, outlining, drafting, and revision helps you to develop your understanding of course material, yourself, and how you relate to the topics you will write about. Practicing writing also helps you to develop your creativity and your original voice as a writer. For these reasons, among others, you may not outsource any step of your written assignments for this class to an AI tool. To do so will be considered plagiarism.

I have a zero-tolerance policy for cheating: **Any student found to have plagiarized on any assignment will receive a failing grade for the assignment, and at my discretion, for the entire course.** Additionally, all available institutional penalties will be sought.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

I and your classmates put a great deal of time and effort into preparing for an interesting class discussion, and you are expected to do the same. When entering the classroom, please place your phone on “silent” and put it away for the duration of our meeting. The use of laptops during class discussions is **discouraged but not forbidden**. In most cases, using a computer during discussion significantly distracts from what is going on and leads to disengagement from those around you. While some can successfully use a computer without multitasking, most cannot – it is hard not to take a down moment to check your email or look at your calendar. And studies have shown that this kind of multitasking during class not only causes the computer user’s learning to suffer, but also that of the students sitting nearby who can see their screen.¹

¹ Sana, F., T. Weston and N. J. Cepeda (2013). "Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers." *Computers & Education* 62: 24-31.

VIDEOTAPING, AUDIO RECORDING, AND COURSE MATERIALS

All course materials, including lectures, syllabi, handouts, and presentations are the intellectual property of your professor. Students are prohibited from sharing any course materials with third parties, including on social media, without the express written permission of your professor. **Videotaping and audio recording are both prohibited without the express written permission of your professor.**

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with disabilities are legally entitled to reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to education. If you have a disability and have an accommodation letter from the Disability Resources office, I encourage you to discuss your accommodations and needs with me as early in the semester as possible. I will work with you to ensure that accommodations are provided as appropriate.

The ADA defines a disability as a medical condition that substantially limits one or more life activities – including things like walking, sleeping, taking care of yourself, learning, and regulating your emotions – or major bodily functions. If you have a medical condition, *including mental health conditions*, that significantly interferes with your schoolwork, you probably qualify. **You do not need to disclose your condition to your instructors to receive accommodations.**

Some students will need accommodations in college who did not need them before. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, I encourage you to contact them at access@andrew.cmu.edu. It is important to reach out sooner than later, as most accommodations only function as forward-looking modifications to class expectations, rather than mitigating low grades you may have already received.

More generally: take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding excess substance use, getting enough sleep, and taking some time to relax. Also: make use of the resources available to you to manage the stresses and anxieties that we all experience sometimes. An important part of maturing is learning how and when to ask for help. Asking for help sooner rather than later can in many cases help to avert more serious crises. If you or anyone you know is experiencing anxiety or depression, I encourage you to seek support. You can contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) at [412-268-2922](tel:412-268-2922) or visit their website at <http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/>. Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty or family member you trust for help getting connected to the support that you need.

I am committed to providing students with equal access to this class. If you are struggling – whether because of a medical condition or **for any other reason** – please come talk to me. It is an expectation in my classroom that both students and professor see everyone as whole people. Self-care is valid and important work, and should take priority over this class. You cannot pour from an empty cup. Prioritize caring for your health, both physical and mental.

OUTLINE OF TOPICS & TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS

(All dates and readings are subject to change. I will always confirm what to read for the next class at the end of the previous meeting. **All required readings will be provided on Canvas.**)

Part I: Course Introduction and The Nature and Value of Freedom

What does it mean to be “free”? Why is freedom important? Is freedom the ultimate value in a society, or are other values sometimes more important?

Aug. 29	Course Introduction Discussion of course mechanics and getting to know each other
Aug. 31	The Role of Political Philosophy and Orientation John Rawls (2001). <i>Justice as Fairness: A Restatement</i> . Cambridge, Harvard University Press, pp. 1-5. Benjamin McKean (2020). <i>Disorienting Neoliberalism</i> . Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 9-13.
Sept. 5	Negative liberty John Stuart Mill. (1859). <i>On Liberty</i> , chs. 1 (“Introductory”) and 3 (“Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-Being”)
Sept. 7	Negative and positive liberty Isaiah Berlin. (1958). “Two Concepts of Liberty.” <i>Four Essays on Liberty</i> . I. Berlin. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Sept. 12	Freedom to do vs. freedom to be Jeremy Waldron. (1991-92). “Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom.” <i>UCLA Law Review</i> 39: 295-324.
Sept. 14	Freedom as non-domination Philip Pettit. (1997). Selections from “Republican Political Theory,” <i>Political Theory: Tradition and Diversity</i> . A. Vincent, ed. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
Sept. 19	Freedom in Black fugitive thought Barnor Hesse. (2014). “Escaping Liberty: Western Hegemony, Black Fugitivity.” <i>Political Theory</i> 42(3): 288-313.

Interlude I: First Paper

Sept. 21	Discussion of First Paper Assignment No readings.
Sept. 26	Epistemic Injustice Veronica Ivy. (2016). “Epistemic Injustice.” <i>Philosophy Compass</i> 11(8): 437-446.
Sept. 28	Writing Workshop No readings. Bring 2 printed copies of Short Writing Assignment 4 with you to class.

Part II: What is (In)Justice?

What does it mean for a society to be just? On what basis should property be distributed? How can we come to own things, and what does “ownership” mean? What is the value of equality, and what should be equalized?

Oct. 3	Entitlement theory Robert Nozick. (1974). “Distributive Justice.” <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> . New York, Basic Books, ch. 7 section 1. (skip Sen’s Argument)
Oct. 5	Self-ownership G.A. Cohen. (1995). “Self-Ownership, World Ownership, and Equality.” <i>Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality</i> . Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, ch. 3.
Oct. 10	Justice as Fairness John Rawls. (1972). <i>A Theory of Justice</i> . Cambridge, Harvard University Press, ch. 1, §§1-4; ch. 2, §§11-13, 17; ch. 3, §§24-26.
Oct. 12	Rawls, cont’d.
-- Fall Break -- Watch James Baldwin’s 1965 speech at the Cambridge University on, “Is the American Dream at the expense of the American Negro?” (transcript is posted on Canvas) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFeoS41xe7w&t=837s	
Oct. 24	Ideal vs. non-ideal theory Charles Mills. (2005). “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology.” <i>Hypatia</i> 20(3): 165-184.
Oct. 26	Luck Egalitarianism Elizabeth Anderson. (1999). “What Is the Point of Equality?” <i>Ethics</i> 109(2): 287-337. Read pp. 287-312.
Oct. 31	Democratic Equality Elizabeth Anderson. (1999). “What Is the Point of Equality?” <i>Ethics</i> 109(2): 287-337. Read pp. 312-337.
Nov. 2	Racial Inequality Christopher Lebron. (2014). “Equality from a Human Point of View.” <i>Critical Philosophy of Race</i> 2(2): 125-159.

Interlude II: Second Paper

Nov. 7	NO CLASS – ELECTION DAY Use this time to vote and to work on your draft for Thursday
Nov. 9	Writing Workshop No readings. Bring 2 printed copies of Short Writing Assignment 8 with you to class.

Part III: Structural Injustice & Responsibility for (In)Justice

How should we conceptualize justice? What is “structural injustice”? How should we understand responsibility for ensuring social structures are just? How should we understand responsibility for structural injustice?

Nov. 14	<i>The basic structure as subject</i> John Rawls. (1993). <i>Political Liberalism</i> . New York, Columbia University Press, Lecture VII §§1-5 John Rawls (2001). <i>Justice as Fairness: A Restatement</i> . Cambridge, Harvard University Press, §§15-16.
Nov. 16	<i>The basic structure and personal responsibility</i> G.A. Cohen (1997). “Where the Action is: On the Site of Distributive Justice.” <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i> 26(1): 3-30.
Nov. 21	<i>Personal vs. social responsibility</i> Iris Marion Young. (2011). “From Personal to Political Responsibility.” <i>Responsibility for Justice</i> . Oxford, Oxford University Press, ch. 1.
-- Thanksgiving Break --	
Nov. 28	NO CLASS – CATCH UP ON READING, WRITING, SLEEPING, AND SELF-CARE
Nov. 30	<i>The basic structure and structural inequality</i> REMOTE MEETING – zoom link to be provided Iris Marion Young. (2011). “Structure as the Subject of Justice.” <i>Responsibility for Justice</i> . Oxford, Oxford University Press, ch. 2.

Part IV: Choose Your Own Adventure

The class will decide prior to Thanksgiving break what topic we will cover during the last week of class. Possible topics include: climate change; disability; feminism/black feminism; hate speech; anger & love; misogyny; neoliberalism; white ignorance

Dec. 5	<i>Topic & Readings TBD</i> REMOTE MEETING – zoom link to be provided
Dec. 7	<i>Topic & Readings TBD</i> REMOTE MEETING – zoom link to be provided