

College of Arts – Online Course Outline Template

Course Code: PHIL*1010	Section: 01	Semester: F' 12
Course Title: Introduction to Social and Political Issues		
Instructor: Dr. Karen Houle		
<p>This course serves as a general introduction to social & political philosophy. It will be divided into three main sections: 1) Human Nature, 2) Freedom & Unfreedom 3) Justice and Goodness.</p> <p>Every week we will read excerpts of philosophical or literary texts. These readings will be from theorists such as Irigaray, Plato, Marx, Epicurus, Foucault, Hobbes, Lao Tzu, Rawls, Freud, Sartre, Mill, Kant, Levinas, Aristotle, Fanon and Beauvoir, or fiction writers such as Tolstoy, Austen, Marias, Melville, & Coetzee. Whether literary or philosophical texts, they are written in order to work out and try to offer a plausible answer to the big questions: What makes a life worth living? What makes anything someone's private property? Is progress possible? Is pleasure different than or the same as happiness, and is either of these more valuable than knowledge? On what basis is power ever legitimate? Are we by nature individuals or social beings? Are we basically all the same or are we basically different? Are class gender and other social inequalities simply inevitable?</p> <p>In order to think through these questions systematically and well, philosophers rely on two main tools: concepts and argumentation. Each week of the course will be organized around a particular concept central to social and political issues: justice, freedom, selfhood, death, property & ownership, identity, love, happiness, duty, evil, knowledge, pleasure, force, liberty, otherness. The readings chosen will focus on that concept, unpacking its meaning either by argument or demonstration. For each of these readings as well, we will look at how it is that they construct their responses: the strength of their argument, or the power of their expression. Then, in turn, in your end-of-week discussion groups, you will be able to apply those concepts and use those approaches or argumentation skills to think through more concrete, topical and local issues such as internet privacy, electoral integrity, legalization of marijuana. The goals of the course are: to expose you to many different, even contradictory ways of answering the same questions, to help you read more patiently, carefully and to understand what you are reading more fully, to help you yourself think more deeply & systematically about complex philosophical issues, to enable you to make good connections between abstract ideas and instances in your own daily life which call for those ideas, to support you in building good arguments for your positions, to give you tools for constructively & critically assessing other people's approaches & arguments, and to communicate your philosophical ideas more clearly orally and in writing.</p> <p>Texts: Short excerpts will be made available to students in class or on-line</p>		
<i>Evaluation</i>	<i>% Value</i>	<i>Dates</i>
Tutorial Participation	10%	all weeks
10 short writing assignments (12 possible; best of 10)	50%	one a week; 2 exemptions
Final 2-hour written exam	40%	end of term