We would like every student who completes this course to understand better what philosophy is and to believe more fully that philosophy is a worthwhile human pursuit, even if we do not all pursue it to the same degree. (We’d be tickled if a few of you decided that you wanted to pursue it more yourselves. But you don’t have to love something for yourself in order to value the activity, and our primary goal is that you value philosophical activity.)

In some ways, philosophy is like dance or poetry: we can enrich our lives by appreciating these activities and by participating in them. Not that these are merely pastimes. Just as dance might change the way you move all the time or poetry might change the way you hear and use language all the time, so too might philosophy change the way you think all the time.

We would also like every student who completes this course to be better at thinking critically, at reading difficult material, at presenting thoughts orally, and at writing effectively and efficiently. These skills are central to philosophy, but of course not merely to philosophy. There are reasons why philosophy majors regularly rank at or near the top in the main graduate admissions exams such as the GRE, MCAT, and LSAT (see, e.g., https://bit.ly/2wgrvf1) and why philosophy majors out-earn so many other (non-engineering) majors, especially at mid-career (see the links at https://unc.live/2Mtd5mI). Philosophy focuses effectively on some very useful skills.

Because these goals concern the activity of philosophy and because we are not so foolish as to think that we could in one semester offer anything more than a small taste of philosophy, we are not determined to convey information, or to provide any full appreciation of this or that philosophical question, or even of this or that philosophical approach to a philosophical question. Instead, we will look to develop our philosophical abilities, by trying to think more carefully about a few philosophical questions.

Our primary themes this semester are set by Plato’s Republic. We will spend the first half of the term studying one of the greatest and most influential works of philosophy there is. In the second half, we will study a range of works that take up themes from the Republic in various ways.
One of the main questions of the course will be, how should human beings organize their lives together? Or, how would human beings organize their lives together \textit{if} they did that in the best possible way? This will involve many questions about what human beings are, and of the relations between individual human beings and their societies. It will involve reflection on ways in which human lives and human societies can go badly.

\textit{PREREQUISITES}

Curiosity. Willingness to treat others’ views seriously, respectfully, and sympathetically. Commitment to work hard reading puzzling texts, thinking about difficult questions, and writing up to very high standards. Courage to think through difficult matters and volunteer thoughts that one might later come to reject.

We will be happy to accommodate those with disabilities, in accordance with the university’s established procedures. Please contact us confidentially.

\textit{PROCEDURES}

There is \textbf{no final exam} in this course, as we are not emphasizing recall of information or quick thinking. The procedures we are using instead reward thoughtful reading (and re-reading), cooperative discussion, and careful writing. The procedures, in other words, match the goals.

\textbf{Participation} (100 points)

Everyone is expected to attend class, having carefully studied the reading required for that day, and to contribute to the class by raising questions (about the issues, about the reading, about what someone else in the class said), offering possible answers to any such questions, and pointing to the required readings both in asking and answering questions. We especially want to encourage you to engage orally in the classroom, as this involves a set of skills and habits that are worth developing. Crucial to doing this well is to speak loudly and clearly, so that everyone in the room can hear you, and to speak formally.

To encourage preparation and engagement, this course will use the following instruments.

(1) \textbf{Daily reading reactions} (45 points). Not including the first day, there are twenty-seven meetings of the course. Each day, reading reactions are due one hour before class begins. The reading reaction should raise at least one serious question about something in the reading, and it should use between 100 and 300 words. Any submission that fulfills the letter of the assignment will earn two points; submissions that fulfill the spirit of the assignment, and show thoughtful engagement with the required reading, will earn three points. All others will receive zero. But only the top fifteen of the twenty-seven possible submissions over the course of the semester will count toward the final grade.

(2) \textbf{Pop quizzes} (50 points). There will be eight pop quizzes during the semester, at the beginning of class. Each will comprise five multiple-choice or true/false questions about the day’s required reading. Each question is worth two points, and only the top five quiz scores count.
(3) Extension assignments (5 points). There are several of these, already posted on Canvas, and they invite you to think about the themes of the course beyond the syllabus and the classroom, to see how philosophical ideas are expressed in visual art and in fiction. (For details, see the assignments themselves on Canvas.) These will be graded as the reading reactions are: fulfillment of the letter of the assignment will earn three points, fulfillment of the spirit will earn five. Only one best extension assignment for each student will count toward the final grade.

(4) Discretionary bonus and penalty points. The instructors will consider in-class participation when assessing final grades. On the one hand, students with borderline averages will receive the higher grade if they have made helpful contributions regularly in class. On the other, students who disrupt the learning environment will lose points. Causes of disruption include arriving late or departing early (without an approved excuse), leaving the room during class without a medical emergency, talking without being recognized during class, having a computer or other electronic device on during the class, having a cellular phone or other electronic device beep or ring during class, or otherwise engaging in activities other than attending to class during class.

(The evidence is overwhelming that students typically learn less when they use electronic devices, and we’ve posted in Canvas a brief set of slides that another professor has devised to summarize some of this research. But of course not everyone is typical, and you might have a compelling reason to take notes on a computer instead of by hand, a reason such as chronic pain, injury, or other disability that makes the disadvantages of handwriting greater than the distractions of the computer. If so, please let us know, and we will make an exception, with the understanding that you will try to minimize the distraction that the device introduces to others and will be subject to penalty if any computer window other than a simple note-taking window is opened during class.)

We understand that students sometimes have very good reasons to miss class: religious obligations, illness, a commitment to family or teammates. We will not excuse some absences and not others, and we have designed our procedures to make it possible to score a strong ‘A’ for participation even if one falls ill or has multiple religious obligations. We simply ask that you make your decisions as you think wise, and live with the consequences. For any session you miss, check with a classmate or two for notes, and meet with us to discuss your questions about the reading.

Occasionally, a student suffers a significant misfortune and misses multiple weeks. We are committed to supporting these students, and when contacted by a dean, the student health service (see especially shs.wustl.edu/MentalHealth), or the Director of the RSVP Center (kim_webb@wustl.edu), we will be happy to devise an appropriate independent study for part of the course, to substitute for the class-time missed, and we will be happy to give extra time, if necessary, for the completion of that independent study.

Two Essays (100 points each)

Each student must submit two essays over the course of the semester, Essay A and Essay B. There are seven options for each. For each option, some suggested topics will be posted on Canvas on a Thursday, and the essay will be due the following Monday, at noon. But the suggested topics are both predictable and flexible, so you can begin thinking about your potential essay long before any given Thursday.

Essay A will concern a claim in Plato’s Republic. You may choose any claim from that week’s required reading, or select one of the claims in the suggested topics posted Thursday. Your task is to explain what reason or argument Socrates offers for that claim, and to critically evaluate that reason or argument. But
of course this task provides the material for your essay, but not its form. The form of your essay is determined by your ultimate goal of arguing well for your own contestable thesis. (See the guidelines for writing appended to this syllabus.)

Essay B will concern at least one of the texts from the second half of the course, and it offers a choice. You may write another essay of the same kind as Essay A: find a claim in that week’s required reading, explain the reasoning or argument offered for that claim, and critically evaluate that reason or argument. Alternatively, you may compare two works on the syllabus with respect to some particular claim, so long as one of the works you are discussing was part of that week’s required reading. Here your task might be to find a disagreement between two works and adjudicate, arguing in favor of one or the other of the conflicting claims or contrasting reasons for a similar claim. Or your task might be to find an apparent disagreement that masks a significant similarity. Again, whatever matter you choose for your essay, your ultimate goal is to argue well for your own contestable thesis.

The essays will be assessed in accordance with the writing guidelines appended to this syllabus. Although the suggested topics we post might help you, you are responsible for choosing a thesis and arguing for it. We will not read or comment on drafts; the assignment is fully yours. But we will happily meet with you to talk about what question you want to answer, what answer you want to argue for, what case you want to build for that answer, and how a reasonable person might disagree with you. Do not be shy about taking advantage of this offer.

Some other procedural details:

Your essay should have your student number but not your name on it. Mr. Colacchia, the primary grader of the essays, will grade them anonymously, to minimize the effect of the implicit bias that infects all of us, according to an impressive body of social-scientific research. We take bias seriously, and are committed to combatting it. (You should know, too, that the university has a process for reporting incidents of bias, prejudice, or discrimination. See brss.wustl.edu.) But we don’t want your commitment to submitting anonymously to get in the way of seeking help on your essays. Please ask for help, even if that might render your submission less securely anonymous.

Each essay should be between 1000 and 1300 words in length.

You have seven possible due dates for each essay. So there are no excuses for tardy submissions. (If you decide to write for the last possible option and if you catch a virus forty-eight hours before that last option is due, you are responsible.) Any essay that is late will be penalized by 10 points for every 24 hours or fraction thereof. (That is, if the essay is due at noon on September 2, it will be penalized by ten points if it is uploaded at 12:01 pm on September 2, by ten points if it is uploaded at noon on September 3, and by twenty points if it is uploaded at 12:01 pm on September 3.)

Revised essay (100 points)

Anyone whose Essay A earned fewer than 80 points is required to submit a revised version of that essay. Anyone whose Essay A earned at least 80 but fewer than 90 points has the option of submitting a revised version of the essay.
The revised essay is due exactly three weeks after the original was due, and about two weeks after the marked-up original is uploaded on Canvas. The other procedures are exactly the same: the essay should be anonymous, the essay should be between 1000 and 1300 words, and it will be penalized for tardiness.

Revised essays will be assessed exactly as the other three essays are, in accordance with the appended guidelines, but for one difference: revised essays will be penalized for failing to try to correct a problem noted in the original.

The final grade for the course will be determined by a straight average of the three or four 100-point grades described above, though the instructors reserve the right to award bonus points to students who show strong improvement during the course of the semester, so that the final grades show some bias toward the work done at the end of the semester over the work done earlier in the semester. Conversion to a quality grade will depend upon a scale at least as generous as this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94-96</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>84-86</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>etc.</td>
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**Pass/fail students must average at least 77 to pass.**

Any student who submits any work that does not conform to the University policy on academic integrity, printed in the Course Listings, will automatically fail the course, and will be subject to University disciplinary action. Each assignment you turn in must be your own work, and it must have been written specifically for this class. This should not be difficult, as you should not be doing extra research on any of these assignments. If you feel you must read other sources, be sure to cite them for any point you borrow (even when you have thoroughly paraphrased the point). Failing to cite sources for their points is one way of plagiarizing.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

We have ordered the following six required texts at the bookstore in Mallinckrodt:


Every required reading is in one of those six required texts or will be available on Canvas, under the files for our class. For the latter, you will need to download and print the required reading. (Since electronic devices are not permitted in the classroom, you need to print these readings out to be able to refer to them in class. If you want
to save paper by printing out just one copy that you will share with your neighbor in class, you may arrange to do this. If you want to study the essay on the screen and then print out the paper in small format, two or more pages to each sheet of paper, you may do that. But you need access to these texts in the classroom.)

**SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 27</td>
<td>Introduction to the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study this syllabus <em>before</em> class, and study the pages at <a href="http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html">http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 29</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 327a-336a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 2</td>
<td><strong>Essay A1 due</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 3</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 336b-354c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 5</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 357a-372c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 9</td>
<td><strong>Essay A2 due</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 10</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 372c-412a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 12</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 412a-434d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 16</td>
<td><strong>Essay A3 due</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 17</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 434d-444e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 19</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 449a-471d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 23</td>
<td><strong>Essay A4 due</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 24</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 471e-497a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 26</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 497a-517c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 30</td>
<td><strong>Essay A5 due</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 517c-541b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 3</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Republic</em> 543a-580c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 7</td>
<td><strong>Essay A6 due</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Oct 8  Plato, *Republic* 580c-592b
Oct 10  Plato, *Republic* 595a-621d

**Oct 14**  Essay A7 due

Oct 15  NO CLASS — Fall Break

Oct 17  Plato, *Timaeus* 17a-27b
         Plato, *Critias*

Oct 22  More, *Utopia*, Book I


**Oct 28**  Essay B1 due

Oct 29  Montaigne, “Of custom...” and “Of cannibals”

Oct 31  Montaigne, “Of repentance”

**Nov 4**  Essay B2 due

Nov 5   Bacon, *New Atlantis*

Nov 7   Cavendish, *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World*

**Nov 11**  Essay B3 due

Nov 12  Marx, *Early Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 67-105

Nov 14  Marx, *The German Ideology*, Part One, pp. 147-200
         Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, pp. 594-597

**Nov 18**  Essay B4 due

Nov 19  Marx, "Wage Labor and Capital," pp. 203-218
         Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chp. 14, section 14, excerpt at pp. 392-399

         Goldman, "Anarchism: What it really stands for" (pdf)

**Nov 25**  Essay B5 due

Nov 26  Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 1-62
GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

1. There is no excuse for typographical errors, orthographical errors, or grammatical errors. Nor is there any excuse for those errors of diction that are not easily ensnared in the nets of grammar and orthography. You can avoid most of these errors by sticking to words that you know very well in their written form, remaining on friendly terms with a good dictionary, and editing carefully. When you edit, you should look for the common errors of grammar and style that William Safire summarizes as follows:

   No sentence fragments. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read. A writer must not shift your point of view. Reserve the apostrophe for it’s proper use and omit it when its not needed. Write all adverbial forms correct. In their writing, everyone should make sure that their pronouns agree with its antecedent. Use the semicolon properly, use it between complete but related thoughts; and not between an independent clause and a mere phrase. Don’t use no double negatives. Also, avoid awkward or affected alliteration. If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times: Resist hyperbole. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is. Avoid commas, that are not necessary. Verbs has to agree with their subjects. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky. And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction. The passive voice should never be used. Writing carefully, dangling participles should be avoided. Unless you are quoting other people’s exclamations, kill all exclamation points!!! Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out. Use parallel structure when you write and in speaking. You should just avoid confusing readers with misplaced modifiers. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences—such as those of ten or more words—to their antecedents. Eschew dialect, irregardless. Remember to never split an infinitive. Take the bull by the hand and don’t mix metaphors. Don’t verb nouns. Always pick on the correct idiom. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies. “Avoid overuse of ‘quotation marks.’” Never use prepositions to end a sentence with. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.

   Editing is tricky business, and you cannot trust computer software to do it right. Seek out a friend for a fresh perspective on your writing or the Writing Center in Olin Library (935-4981) for help in learning how to learn to edit.

2. Writing that is free from error is not yet good writing. Prose style is difficult to cultivate except by practice, but there are some general guidelines worth learning. Great prose is concise (it wastes no words), precise (it says exactly what it means), and concrete (it does not use hazy concepts whose meanings are contested). Several guidebooks provide helpful advice about how to achieve concise, precise, and concrete prose; in particular,
Joseph Williams’ **Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace** is worth reviewing periodically. Among the most broadly helpful pieces of advice are these:

- organize your sentences from old information (at the start) to new information (at the end);
- don’t forget that verbs convey information, often more concisely than constructions built around a simple linking verb;
- be wary of abstract (Latinate) nouns and prefer concrete (Anglo-Saxon) words;
- shun jargon and technical vocabulary except where nothing less wieldy will do (and in these cases explain each term that you introduce);
- vary your sentence constructions, preferring the simple to the more ornate; and
- use similes, metaphors, and intensifying adjectives and adverbs (e.g., ‘very’) sparingly.

In addition to collecting and reviewing advice, one who aspires to write great prose should cultivate taste for great prose. Make a habit of reading in *The New Yorker*, *Harper’s*, or *The Atlantic Monthly*, and seek out the essays of past masters of English prose such as Orwell and E.B. White.

So much for prose style in general. Keep in mind that there are multiple successful prose styles. Good writing varies in its register or tone, its wit, its elegance, and its vigor. Careful writers will vary their style of prose to suit its function, from piece to piece and sometimes from section to section. So what is the point of your essay, and who is it for? In this class, you are not writing informative essays but argumentative essays, and you are writing for a formal occasion. So here are some upshots of that.

(a) Unless you hate your readers, your essay shouldn’t sound pretentious and obscure, but because you are writing for a formal occasion, your essay shouldn’t sound chatty, either. But it should definitely sound: prose style is best checked by being read aloud.

(b) Your prose will be rewarded for wit, elegance, and vigor, but not as strongly as it will be penalized for lacking concision, precision, or concreteness.

(c) Your audience is captive, so you do not need to draw us in with an anecdote or an arresting claim. Given that your words are limited, you shouldn’t waste them on what you do not need.

(d) You might think that your audience is well-informed, but you should not take anything for granted. What we take to be obvious is not necessarily what you take to be obvious. These texts and the topics they involve are complicated, and language is frequently ambiguous in ways that can confound successful communication. There are many potential obstacles here. To make your case as clear and unlikely to mislead as possible, assume that we are ignorant and hostile.

(e) Your essays are short, so they shouldn’t need elaborate directions to chart your course, or a summing up at the end.

(f) You are writing as an advocate for a position and not as a faceless journalist, so it is not at all inappropriate for you to use the first-person singular pronoun.

3. Since you are writing argumentative essays, the most important feature of your essay is its **thesis**. Your essay must advance a clearly formulated contestable claim, and it must be organized in the service of building a case for that claim. To arrive at a good thesis, try to find the question you mean to answer. You can sharpen the formulation of your thesis by considering alternative ways of formulating the question. (What exact question do you want to answer, and what questions do you want to set aside?) You can test the contestability of your thesis by asking whether a reasonable person could make a decent case for a different answer to your question. (If they couldn’t, your thesis is not contestable.) Be especially sure that the scope of your question and thesis is explicit. Make your thesis as narrow as it needs to be so that you can make a strong case for it in a short essay. (It sometimes helps to say what you are not arguing for.) There will be time enough later to fashion a broader
thesis, with a larger supporting case. You need to master the skill of writing an argumentative essay before you write an enormous argumentative essay.

4. For all the importance of the prose as prose, and of the thesis itself, your essay will be primarily evaluated on the basis of the argument it offers for its thesis. *(This is why your thesis is so important: if it is unclear, your argument cannot succeed. We do not care whether we find your thesis especially plausible or not. Make a good case for a clearly stated, contestable claim, and you’ve written a good argumentative essay.) Are the reasons you offer clear? How good are they? In particular, where your reasons depend on evidence, how well do you marshal that evidence?

5. The best case for a contestable claim must be better than the best case for rejecting that claim, and it must be strong enough to overcome the best objections it faces. A strong argumentative essay will not leave these matters to the reader’s imagination, but will engage with how a reasonable person might resist the case being made or might argue against the thesis. To assess your essay, ask yourself, Do you confront potential objections to your reasons or potential alternatives to your interpretation of the evidence? Have you answered such objections? Do you consider counter-evidence to your reasoning, and do you show why such evidence does not undermine your case? Have you confirmed your case by comparing it to the best case for the most plausible alternative to your thesis?

If the prose is at least unproblematic; the thesis is explicit, precise, and contestable; there are well-organized reasons in favor of the thesis, with well-handled evidence; and there is some clear engagement with another perspective (some objection, some counter-evidence, some counter-interpretation), then the essay meets expectations. That’s a very good achievement, especially if you’ve never been asked to write an essay like this before. But because our sights are set high here, the essay that meets expectations earns a B+ (87-89).

Especially good prose earns a bonus point or two, as does an especially interesting thesis. But the bulk of the difference between a good essay that meets expectations and a very good one (A-, 90-93) or a great one (A, 94+) depends on the quality of the argumentation. How good are the reasons? How much evidence is marshaled, and how deftly? How deeply and sympathetically are objections considered?

Conversely, problems with the prose, the thesis, the organization, the handling of evidence, or engagement with alternative possibilities will be noted, and points subtracted accordingly.

If there are problems, you will have the chance to revise once. Keep in mind that to revise an essay requires far more than cutting and pasting to correct its most obvious flaws. Because of the way the pieces of an essay are supposed to fit together, revision requires rethinking the entire essay from ground up. What exactly is the thesis? Do I have at least one good argument to support exactly this thesis? How would someone argue against my thesis, or object to my argument(s), and how can I answer them? With distance from one’s essay, and with criticisms from another reader, one should recognize ways in which one can improve one’s thesis, argument(s), or response to objections. The goal is not to minimize or maximize the number of changes one makes. The goal is, as it ever was, to craft a good argumentative essay.