

PHI 335: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, 4 CR.  
FALL 2020, ONLINE

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION .....	1
COURSE DESCRIPTION .....	1
LEARNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES .....	1
TEXTBOOK AND MATERIALS .....	2
MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY MISSION .....	2
MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY VISION STATEMENT .....	2
DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT .....	2
BASIC NEEDS STATEMENT .....	3
NETIQUETTE & ENGAGEMENT EXPECTATIONS .....	3
TIME COMMITMENTS .....	4
LATE OR MISSING WORK .....	4
ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT .....	5
1. CLASS ENGAGEMENT .....	5
2. ARRS (ACTIVE READING RESPONSES) .....	5
3. WEEKLY SELF-ASSESSMENTS .....	6
4. CLASS FACILITATOR .....	6
5. PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING PROJECT .....	6
6. FINAL PROJECT .....	6
GRADING STANDARDS .....	7
COMMUNICATION .....	7
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY .....	8
COURSE CALENDAR .....	9
UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA, AND POLITICS .....	9
UTOPIA, NATURE, AND TECHNOLOGY .....	10
UTOPIA, IDENTITY, AND IMAGINATION .....	11

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

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Office hours: Mon, Wed. 1-3, and by appointment via Zoom.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Is there such a thing as the perfect world? How should we organize society? Is human history one of progress? Philosophers, sociologists, poets, and artists have taken up these questions for centuries. And, indeed, these questions confront us now with great urgency. We find ourselves in a unique situation where traditions and foundations have been toppled. Should we face the future with optimism or pessimism? The goal of this course is to investigate social and political philosophy through the lens of utopian thought. We will study utopias and dystopias as political ideals or warnings as well as ways to understand our current political situations and the shared endeavor of politics more broadly.

**LEARNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

We will build on the following primary learning goals and objectives throughout the term. At the end of the course, students, you will be able to:

- identify and pose thoughtful questions of several philosophical theories,
- compare and distinguish substantively among at least two theories,
- analyze contemporary issues through the lens of a particular philosophical theory,
- facilitate course discussion and demonstrate nuanced understanding of course material,
- articulate and argue well for your own position in class and in written assignments,
- cultivate the intellectual virtues of epistemic humility, intellectual curiosity, and open-mindedness

#### TEXTBOOK AND MATERIALS

All texts will be posted on Canvas.

#### MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY MISSION

Mount Mary University, an urban Catholic university for women sponsored by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, provides an environment for the development of the whole person. The University encourages leadership, integrity, and a deep sense of social justice arising from a sensitivity to moral values and Christian principles.

Mount Mary commits itself to excellence in teaching and learning with an emphasis on thinking critically and creatively. The baccalaureate curriculum integrates the liberal arts with career preparation for women of diverse ages and personal circumstances; the programs at the graduate level provide opportunities for both men and women to enhance their professional excellence.

#### MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY VISION STATEMENT

Mount Mary University is recognized as a diverse learning community that works in partnership with local, national and global organizations to educate women to transform the world.

#### DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Mount Mary University and the Department of Philosophy are committed to an educational environment that affirms the uniqueness, diversity, and integrity of all students. Similarly, the well-being and success of each student in this course are important to me. I will do my best to ensure that students from all backgrounds and perspectives will be served equitably. The diversity that students bring to this class will be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful and inclusive of the many identities of students in terms of gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, perspective, and other background characteristics. Thus, I encourage students registered in the course to discuss their learning styles and comprehension requirements with me.

Mount Mary University complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which stipulates that the University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations; please see me or

- Sara Sharpe, Student Success Center, Haggerty Library, Room 124.
- Phone: 414-930-3368
- Fax: 414-930-3700
- Email: [sharpes@mtmary.edu](mailto:sharpes@mtmary.edu)

I recognize that “accessibility,” as defined by the University, does not encompass all elements of “access,” up to and including language barriers, cultural barriers, economic barriers, or other “invisible” barriers to student learning. If you have trouble with any element of the course, the course materials, or my instruction, please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss ways in which I can make my class more accessible or more inclusive to your learning. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence.

#### BASIC NEEDS STATEMENT

Doing philosophy is challenging, and can be especially challenging if we have difficulty meeting basic needs, too. Any student who faces challenges securing their food, transportation, or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact Nicole Gahagan, Interim Vice-President for Student Affairs and Title IX Coordinator for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable her to provide any resources that she may possess.

#### NETIQUETTE & ENGAGEMENT EXPECTATIONS

Netiquette, or net etiquette, is important because it allows us to create a shared set of expectations and values for our interactions with one another. Whereas in face to face conversations, we might be able to tell specifically what someone means by her intonation, gesture, posture, or immediate chance to clarify, online courses pose some challenges and advantages. One advantage is that we have greater opportunities to deliberate on what we say before we share it; one challenge is that we don’t always have the immediate context surrounding a claim. So, netiquette helps to establish a space for discussion that helps to mitigate misunderstandings and cultivate respect. To that end,

- ***Strive for open communication.***
  - We have a joint responsibility to make the class the best it can be. If you’re having difficulties or have other concerns or recommendations, please come to my office hours or make an appointment with me as soon as possible. If something is working well, let me know that, too!
  - Remember to keep your tone neutral. It can be hard to decipher sarcasm or “joking” in written work. Err on the side of being formal in your online manners.
  - Be careful sharing personal information online (both yours and other’s).

- Don't assume that people will know what you are getting at in your writing. Add more explanation than you might normally include.
- Ask questions before assuming anything. Again, because tone online can be difficult to determine, ask a clarifying question before getting upset or making assumptions.
- If you feel that anything inappropriate is going on, contact the professor right away so that it can be addressed.
- **Practice intellectual virtues**
  - Epistemic humility: Question your own certainty in ways that enable you to revise your views, even regarding convictions central to your worldview
  - Intellectual curiosity: See out diverse experiences and perspectives to test, complicate, and enrich existing knowledge.
  - Make an effort to hear and respect others' testimonies, try to inhabit their perspectives, and consider multiple perspectives at once
- **Practice self-care**
  - Some of the themes we will cover this term will be challenging, including issues of death, illness, race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, national origin, colonialism, or violence. Readings and discussions might trigger strong feelings—anger, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, humor, and even boredom. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers' understanding of the readings; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Above all, be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in this course.

I expect everyone to be prepared to discuss the readings in a mature and respectful way. If you are struggling with the course materials, here are some tips: read the syllabus so that you are prepared in advance. Approach me ahead of time if you'd like more information about a topic or reading. If you are struggling to keep up with the work because of the course content, you should speak with me and/or seek help from the counseling center.

#### TIME COMMITMENTS

This course is 4 credits. Students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week on our course. The success of the course depends on self-motivated work and allowing enough time to engage with the material and one another in a deep, sustained way.

#### LATE OR MISSING WORK

All submitted work, including discussion forum posts, have specific due dates so that you and we as a class can stay on track. Students may submit work early. For written assignments, you have a one-day free extension, no questions asked, and it is up to you when you use it. After two days, if I have still not received your work, you must meet with me to discuss your ideas and put a plan for completion in place. I am generous with extensions, so it is better to contact me and work something else than to submit nothing

or to submit someone else's work out of desperation. The due dates also mark attendance. Thus, if a student does not submit a complete assignment by the due date and time, she will be considered absent for that class. Mount Mary expects students to attend all classes, including those taught online. This policy is based on the belief that the student and the instructor have something to contribute to every class, and that an absence is detrimental to a student's academic achievement. Therefore, absences will make it difficult for you to do your best in the class and we will certainly miss your presence.

**All work must be submitted via Canvas, not by e-mail.** Students are responsible for keeping track of assignment due dates, submissions, and your grade. I aim to return students' graded work to them as quickly as possible. As soon as an assignment is graded, it will be available. So, if an assignment does not yet have a grade, it is not yet graded.

#### ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

1. Class Engagement	15%
2. ARRs	20%
3. Weekly Self-Assessments	10%
4. Class Facilitator	10%
5. Philosophical Writing Project	25%
6. Final Project	20%

##### 1. CLASS ENGAGEMENT

Philosophy is rooted in dialogue, meaning that it is not done well alone or in isolation. Our aim is to cultivate a learning community that fosters deep philosophical inquiry. In each module, there will be a series of activities for you to collaborate with your classmates to enhance and deepen your learning. Possible activities include online forum discussions, small group discussions, group note taking, and other types of work. Information on specific assignments are on Canvas. I will announce on Sundays what the following week's activity will be. While the activity as a whole will be due on the following Saturday, other pieces, such as initial posts, may be due earlier in the week. In addition to the assigned activity, you will have the option in engaging with the class in at least two other ways. The guidelines for class engagement are on Canvas.

##### 2. ARRs (ACTIVE READING RESPONSES)

It is important that you develop the habit of "active" reading. This assignment is designed to help you do that. As you read, I urge you to highlight significant passages and even include in the margins of the text questions and ideas you have about what you are reading. These texts will be challenging, but will also be rewarding through active reading and discussion. This assignment enables you to prepare better for class by working through the text ahead of class to determine both what you understand and where you have questions. Thus, the responses are a *shared responsibility* between the students and me.

Instructions for the responses are on Canvas. Responses should be 350-500 words. The class will be divided in half. One group's papers will be due Tuesdays, the second group's on Thursdays. No papers will be due the first week. The lowest ARR will be dropped.

### 3. WEEKLY SELF-ASSESSMENTS

Once everyone has submitted their ARRs, I post the anonymized ARRs for the class as a whole to view. This is your opportunity to reengage with the text, consider what points of interpretation you got right, what points you may have overlooked; what points are now clearer and what points more obscure. By examining your peers' interpretations of the texts, you can also become a stronger philosophical reader and thinker. Self-assessments are due Saturdays at 11:59 pm.

### 4. CLASS FACILITATOR

Part of the aim of this course is to shed light on issues we face in everyday life. Each student will choose a reading to present an example that demonstrates or challenges the main issue in the reading for the day. The example can be a news story, journal article, event, film, etc., and must be from within the past ten years. There will be a "Contemporary Connections" board in the discussion forum. For your post, you will give

- a weblink to the example
- a paragraph-length overview of the example, including a bit of background information and discussion of whether the source is reliable
- a paragraph-length explanation of how the example does or does not reflect the reading and why.
- a question to frame our discussion.

The other students in the course will also respond to that post and the question posed. I will announce on Sundays which replies must be made as part of that week's collaborative learning activity.

### 5. PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING PROJECT

Writing in philosophy is challenging, especially for folks new to philosophy. Even professional philosophers (like me!) find it challenging, but ultimately very rewarding. This project will help you develop your skills as a writer and philosopher by engaging in a series of assignments that allow you lots of practice with feedback, multiple attempts, and the ability to move at your own pace. There will be seven (7) attempts to complete four (4) writing assignments.

Instructions for the writing project will be on Canvas.

### 6. FINAL PROJECT

The final project is your opportunity to present your version of a utopia or dystopia by drawing on the theoretical content we have discussed this semester. You may either

1. create a work (an artwork, piece of music, podcast, dialogue, short story, video, etc.) and provide a 1800-2200 word written analysis and explanation of the work

- that, drawing on the theories we discussed this semester, demonstrates how the work articulates your position. Or,
- write a 2800-3200 word research paper that provides an argument for your account of a utopia or dystopia. This paper should deal directly with texts discussed in class, but must also incorporate scholarly secondary sources.

Both project formats require a proposal for the project (paragraph length is sufficient), which must be submitted via Canvas. The proposal should articulate the contours of your project, some suggestions of how you will provide an account of it, and which project format you have chosen.

**Project Breakdown for Option 1:**

Proposal	10%
Creative work	25%
Paper	65%

**Project Breakdown for Option 2:**

Proposal	10%
Paper	90%

Final projects are due Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>. More specific guidelines will be provided on Canvas.

#### GRADING STANDARDS

- A, Excelling: The work primarily demonstrates especially skillful and in-depth understanding, analysis, synthesis, and insight
- B-A/B, Achieving: The work primarily demonstrates competent understanding, analysis, synthesis, and insight with some depth
- C-B/C, Improving: The work primarily demonstrates basic understanding, analysis, synthesis, and insight, but requires further development
- D. Developing: The work primarily demonstrates incomplete or inaccurate understanding, analysis, synthesis, and insight;

Please also see the detailed rubrics on our course site to see how the essays and final paper assignments will be assessed.

Your grades will be recorded on Canvas. I am happy to discuss outcomes and strategies for maintaining or improving your development in the course in person. If you have a question about a particular grade, I ask that you first read through my comments and criteria and then schedule an appointment with me to discuss it.

#### COMMUNICATION

Students are expected to check their Mount Mary email accounts regularly. The best way to contact me is via email. I will generally respond to all emails within twenty-four hours, except possibly on weekends. I will respond to emails before 8pm, so do not wait until the last minute to contact me.

Emails between us, as well as among your classmates, are professional correspondences and should reflect that degree of formality. Please be sure to include a subject line, greeting, and signature. Remember, too, that a “thank you” goes a long way. I am more than happy to answer questions or bounce around ideas, but try first to verify whether your questions have already been answered in the syllabus or other course materials. As you prepare your email, ask yourself, 1) Did I already check the syllabus?, 2) Did I check Canvas?, 3) Have I asked a classmate, or can I ask at the beginning of the next class meeting? If your question is more substantive, please send it along.

In online courses it is normal to have many questions about things that relate to the course, such as clarification about assignments, course materials, or assessments. Please post these in the “Question Forum” which you can access under “Discussion Forum” on Canvas. This is an open forum, and you are encouraged to give answers and help each other. If you have a concern and send me a message, you can expect a response within two days.

Grades may not be discussed via email, so please set up an appointment instead. I will be available for office hours via Zoom twice weekly. You can make an appointment via the calendar on Canvas or just pop into the room.

#### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Mount Mary University is an academic community dedicated to the intellectual and social and ethical development of each of its members. As members of this community we all are responsible for maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect and honesty.

Standards for academic integrity provide a structure for the creation of an academic environment consistent with the values of the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the mission of the University. In keeping with these goals, all students are expected to strive for integrity, in academic and non-academic pursuits. Acts that involve any attempt to deceive, to present another’s ideas as one’s own, or to enhance one’s grade through dishonest means violate the integrity of both the student and University.

Academic dishonesty in any form has a negative impact on the essential principles of the Mount Mary University Community. Therefore, such acts are treated as a serious breach of trust.

A faculty member has the right and authority to deal with academic dishonesty in his or her classroom; however, a student who commits multiple violations against academic integrity shall be subject to administrative disciplinary action as described in the Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy and Procedures.

*Copies of the full Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy and Procedures are available in the Mount Mary Student Handbook, the Undergraduate Bulletin and online at [mtmary.edu/handbook.htm](http://mtmary.edu/handbook.htm) and [my.mtmary.edu](http://my.mtmary.edu)*

## COURSE CALENDAR

Each week will follow this general pattern:

Sunday: Introductory materials are posted (usually a brief biographical video from the web, along with a set of guiding questions for the reading).

Tuesday, 11:59pm: ARRs Groups 1 & 2 due

Thursday, 11:59 pm: ARRs Groups 3 & 4 due

Thursday, 11:59 pm: Slack initial posts (if assigned) due

Saturday, 11:59 pm: Collaborative learning activity closes

Saturday, 11:59 pm Self-Assessment due

All readings are on Canvas.

## UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA, AND POLITICS

WEEK 1, AUG. 25, 27

## 1. Tuesday

- a. Read: Esper Hammer, "A Utopia for a Dystopian Age"  
Kelly Happe, "Utopia and Crisis"  
Edward Rothstein, "Paradise Lost: Can Mankind Live Without Its Utopias?"

## 2. Thursday

- a. Read: Plato, selection from *Republic*

WEEK 2, SEPT. 1, 3

## 1. Tuesday

- a. Read: Al- Fārābī "The Virtuous City"  
Peter Adamson, "State of Mind: Al- Fārābī on Religion and Politics"

## 2. Thursday

- a. Read: Sir Thomas More, "Utopia"

WEEK 3, SEPT. 8, 10

## 1. Tuesday

- a. Read: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto", 2-22

## 2. Thursday

- a. Read: "The Communist Manifesto", 22-33
- b. Submit: **Writing Project Attempt One due**

WEEK 4, SEPT. 15, 17

## 1. Tuesday

- a. Read: John Rawls, selection from *The Laws of Peoples*

## 2. Thursday

- a. Read: Robert Nozick, selection from *Anarchy, State, Utopia*

WEEK 5, SEPT. 22, 24

## 1. Tuesday

- a. Read: Karl Popper, "Utopia and Violence"

2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Herbert Marcuse, "The End of Utopia"  
Angela Davis, "Marcuse's Legacies"
  - b. Submit: **Writing Project Attempt Two due**

WEEK 6, SEPT. 29, OCT. 1

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Hannah Arendt, "Home to Roost: A Bicentennial Address"  
Yves Chars Zarka, "The Meaning of Utopia"
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walked Away From Omelas"

UTOPIA, NATURE, AND TECHNOLOGY

WEEK 7, OCT. 6, 8

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Margaret Cavendish, "The Blazing-World" 1-35  
Anne M. Thell, "Cavendish's Blazing-World"
  - b. Attend: Eleanor Clift, Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow, Zoom session with class
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Cavendish, 35-70
  - b. Submit: **Writing Project Attempt Three due**

WEEK 8, OCT. 13, 15

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Francis Bacon, "New Atlantis"
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: William Morris "News from Nowhere"

WEEK 9, OCT. 20, 22

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: "Communal Societies as Utopias"  
Annalee Newitz, "Want to Flee the City for Suburbia? Think Again"  
Jo Yurcaba, "From Alpaca Farms in Colorado to Tiny Homes in Arkansas,  
Queer Folks Are Fleeing US Cities to Create Their Own Refuge"
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Kyle Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and  
the Anthropocene"  
Julian Brave NoiseCat "How to Survive an Apocalypse and Keep Dreaming"  
Roy Scranton, "Raising My Child in a Doomed World"
  - b. Submit: **Writing Project Attempt Four due**

## UTOPIA, IDENTITY, AND IMAGINATION

WEEK 10, OCT. 27, 29

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Kyle Whyte, "Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises"  
John Kaag and Clancy Martin "At Walden, Thoreau Wasn't Really Alone With Nature"
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Paul Celan, "The Meridian"

WEEK 11, NOV. 3, 5

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: "Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing"
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Alex Zamalin, "Utopia and Black American Thought", "Sun Ra and Cosmic Blackness"
  - b. Submit: **Writing Project Attempt Five due**

WEEK 12, NOV. 10, 12

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Derrick Bell "The Space Traders"  
Tracy E. Higgins, "Derrick Bell's Radical Realism"  
Interview with Octavia E. Butler
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Sultana's Dream"  
Ayisha Kahn, "Muslim women are building new worlds in science fiction and changing the confines of the genre"

WEEK 13, NOV. 17, 19

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Donna Haraway, "The Cyborg Manifesto"
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Alison Kafer, "Debating Feminist Futures: Slippery Slopes, Cultural Anxiety, and the Case of the Deaf Lesbians"
  - b. Submit: **Writing Project Attempt Six due**

WEEK 14, NOV. 24

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Alexis Shotwell, selection from *Against Purity*
2. Thursday
  - a. Thanksgiving, no class

WEEK 15, DEC. 1, 3

1. Tuesday
  - a. Watch: *Crip Camp* documentary
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Adam Etinson, "Is a Life Without Struggle Worth Living"
  - b. Submit: **Writing Project Attempt Seven due**

WEEK 16, DEC. 10

- a. Final paper and presentations