“Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains.”

-Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

“Of a commonwealth, whose subjects are but hindered by terror from taking arms, it should rather be said, that it is free from war, than that it has peace. For peace is not mere absence of war, but is a virtue that springs from force of character: for obedience . . . is the constant will to execute what, by the general decree of the commonwealth, ought to be done. Besides that commonwealth, whose peace depends on the sluggishness of its subjects, that are led about like sheep, to learn but slavery, may more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth.”

-Benedict Spinoza, *Political Treatise*

“The truth is always in the minority; and the minority is always stronger than the majority, because the minority is ordinarily composed of those who do actually have an opinion, whereas the strength of the majority is illusory, composed of the crowd which has no opinion—and which therefore the next minute (when it becomes apparent that the minority was stronger) embraces the opinion of the minority, which now becomes the majority, that is, the opinion becomes rubbish by having statistics and the whole crowd on its side, while truth is again a new minority.”

-Soren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*

“How the mighty are deflated before our eyes—and again and again how the lowly, the victims, are exalted! The names of two midwives, on whom depends all the future, are carefully recorded; shortly they will confound Pharaoh Anonymous I and his edicts.”

-Daniel Berrigan, *Exodus: Let My People Go*

“Not only the rationality of millennia—also their madness, breaks out in us. It is dangerous to be an heir.”

-Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

“All human behavior is scheduled and programmed through rationality. There is a logic in institutions and in behavior and in political relations. In even the most violent ones there is a rationality. What is most dangerous in violence is its rationality. Of course violence itself is terrible. But the deepest root of violence and its permanence come out of the form of the rationality we use. The idea has been that if we live in the world of reason, we can get rid of violence. This is quite wrong. Between violence and rationality there is no incompatibility. My problem is not to put reason on trial, but to know what is this rationality so compatible with violence.”

-Michel Foucault, *Truth is in the Future*
**Course Description:**
This course will explore the relations between philosophy, religion, and politics, with an emphasis on the role and responsibility of the individual in society. In it we shall study various types of works, including fiction, poetry, philosophy, cultural criticism, and scripture, with an eye to exploring these issues. Some of our guiding questions will be: How can we genuinely care for others in the vast social and political context of the contemporary nation state? How might this care best be translated into action? In what ways might the reading of philosophical, theological, and religious texts nourish and fortify our attempts to do so? And what sorts of relationships might we hope to establish between our private interests (love, friendship, everyday associations) and the public good (law, justice, social programs). Or, on the contrary, what sorts of tensions will inevitably remain between these two groups? This is a highly unique course, since it includes a practical, service-oriented component. You will be expected both to use the readings as a guide in your service assignments and to bring your experiences in these assignments back to the readings as material for reflection. Our purpose will therefore not simply be to study these texts, but rather to reflect upon (and perhaps transform) the various ways in which we engage ourselves, the world around us, and the people in it.

**Required Texts:**


**Course Objectives:**

1. To become acquainted through primary sources with major figures in the history of philosophy, theology, religion, and politics.
2. To learn to converse with texts, first to listen actively and allow ourselves to be addressed by voices other than our own, and then (but only then) to respond with critical questions and observations of our own.
3. To learn to think and articulate oneself (both vocally and in writing) with critical reflection.
4. To integrate care for service toward others and concern for social justice into our academic experience.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Regular class attendance. After three absences, any unexcused absences will have a negative effect on one’s grade.
2. Acceptance of responsibility for what occurs in classes missed.
3. On time arrival at class. This is a matter of courtesy to others. It is also a matter of self-interest, since those not present when the roll is taken will be counted absent.
4. Attention and participation in class and discussion groups. As a matter of respect toward the classroom environment we are trying to create, do not use cell phones or computers during class.
5. On time completion of all reading and writing assignments. This is a matter of responsibility to yourself. Each student is expected to read in advance those passages that form the basis of the respective class meetings.
6. A minimum of two hours out of class preparation for each hour in class.
7. Owning your own copies of the required texts and bringing the appropriate one to class regularly.
8. Acceptance of the moral and intellectual responsibility involved in documenting your written work properly. Plagiarizing on essays or cheating on examinations will not be tolerated. The minimum penalty is an F for the assignment.

**Writing and Grading Scheme:**

1. The completion of short journal entries throughout the semester, relating the week’s reading to your service experience (roughly 1-2 pages each). You will be expected to write 10 journal entries by the end of the semester, each of which will be worth 2% of your final grade. These journal entries will be submitted on the BBV website. (20% of overall grade)
2. Participation in class discussion and active preparation for discussion groups. This component of the course requires that you prepare all reading assignments and study question prior to the class or discussion group, regularly attend, and engage actively both in class and in discussion group. The grade will be
composed of three parts: in-class participation (5%), discussion group participation (10%), and blog posts on the BBV website (10%). A midterm progress report will be distributed. (25% of overall grade).

3. Institutional analysis of your placement. This will include an in-depth analysis of how your placement functions, its components, and how it relates to other social institutions in the area. (20% of overall grade)

4. Essay assignment (6-8 pages) (25% of overall grade). Part of the emphasis of these assignments will include the process of writing and revising your essays. You will be given the opportunity to present a rough draft for revision, and come for consultation in revising your essay. You will be graded on form as well as content. Form presumes proper spelling and grammar, as well as stylistic felicity. A useful resource is William Strunk & E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York, Macmillan).

5. Final oral exam (10% of overall grade)

6. Extra credit assignments may be given at my discretion.