

**Course Syllabus**  
**Person and Social Responsibility I**  
**Fall 2009, MWF 9:00-9:50**  
**Discussion Groups M 10:00-10:50 and W 12:00-12:50**  
**Mr. Michael Smith, 21 Campanella Way 380 W**  
**Office Hours: W 10:00-12:00 & by appointment**  
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“The unexamined life is not worth living . . . .”  
-Plato, *Apology*, 38A

“I have nothing but contempt for the kind of governor who is afraid, for whatever reason, to follow the course that he knows is best for the state; and as for the man who sets private friendship above public welfare—I have no use for him either.”  
-Sophocles, *Antigone*

“I have gained this by philosophy: that I do without being commanded what others do only from fear of law.”  
-Aristotle, from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*

“He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god.”  
-Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 253a27

“If oxen and horses and lions had hands  
and were able to draw with their hands and do the same things as men,  
horses would draw the shapes of gods to look like horses  
and oxen to look like oxen, and each would make the  
gods’ bodies have the same shape as they themselves had.”  
-Xenophanes

“The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading.”  
-Lamentations 2:14

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves’.”  
-Matthew 7:15

“For we now see through a glass, darkly.”  
-I Corinthians 13:12

**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 plays, poems, 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 be not simply 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:**

Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, translated by Carl Phillips, Oxford University Press, 2003.  
ISBN-10: 0195136578

Kozol, *Amazing Grace*, Harper Perennial, 1996.  
ISBN-10: 0060976977

Plato and Xenophon. *Apologies*, translated by Mark Kremer. Newburyport, MA: Focus Philosophical Library, 2006.

Plato. *Symposium*, translated by Avi Sharon. Newburyport, MA: Focus Philosophical Library, 1998.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Second Edition, translated by Terence Irwin. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Oxford University Press, 2007.  
ISBN-10: 0195288807

Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, Orbis Books, 2001.  
ISBN-10: 1570754047

Forché (ed.), *Against Forgetting*, W. W. Norton & Co., 1993.  
ISBN-10: 0393309762

### **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. 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.
5. A minimum of two hours out of class preparation for each hour in class.
6. Owning your own copies of the required texts and bringing the appropriate one to class regularly.
7. 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. You will be given the prompts for these journal assignments at least one class before they are due. (10% of overall grade)
2. Participation in class discussion and active preparation for discussion groups (30% of overall grade).
3. Essay assignments (one 2-3 pages, one 3-4 pages, and one 5-7 pages) (60% of overall grade; 10%, 20%, and 30% respectively). 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).
4. Extra credit assignments may be given at my discretion.

## Course Purview:

1. The political context: becoming sensitive to those who are left behind, left out, or invisibilized
    - Sophocles, *Philoctetes*
    - Kozol, *Amazing Grace*
    - Plato, *Apology*
  
  2. Philosophical reflection: uncovering the nature of desire and its implications concerning the relationship of oneself to society
    - Plato, *Symposium*
    - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
  
  3. Religious conviction: exploring the prophetic tradition of social criticism and considering the meaning of social responsibility
    - The Bible
    - Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*
- At or near the end of each text you will be given a prompt for a journal entry.
  - At the end of each section of the course you will be given one of the three paper assignments.
  - We will read selected poems from *Against Forgetting* throughout the semester during our discussion groups to facilitate our conversations.