THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Department of Philosophy

PHIL3233 Social and Political Philosophy

Course Outline, 2026-27 Semester 2

Class time	Thursdays, 12:30–15:15
Location	WMY 404
Course instructor	Franz Mang, flmang@cuhk.edu.hk
Tutor	James Yu, yuchhei@hotmail.com

This course outline is subject to minor changes.

A separate document, **Guidelines on Presentation and Individual Essays**, will be made available during or before the first lecture on Thursday 14 January 2027. It explains the tutorials, the presentation and the two essays in detail, including how the essays are assessed and the policy on the use of AI tools.

Course description

This course examines six key topics in contemporary social and political philosophy: global poverty and moral responsibility; social and economic justice and personal responsibility; liberalism and communitarianism; liberal neutrality and liberal perfectionism; self-determination; and freedom of expression and its limits. Each topic is studied over two lectures and is built around a philosophical disagreement, such as that between Peter Singer and David Miller on global poverty, or between John Rawls and Robert Nozick on justice. Reading opposing positions side by side, students will learn to reconstruct a philosopher's argument accurately, to identify its assumptions, and to assess its strengths and weaknesses. They will also practise setting out and defending their own reasoning, both in discussion and in writing. By the end of the course, students will develop their own comprehensive view of these ethical issues, one that they can explain, defend and continue to revise after the course has ended.

Expected learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students should:

1. have a solid and basic understanding of what social and political philosophy is about;
2. be able to read closely, and engage critically with, classic works by contemporary political philosophers, including John Rawls and Robert Nozick, and research further the issues they raise;
3. be able to draw upon a philosophical perspective and develop clear and independent arguments when engaging in social and political debates.

Assessment

Component	Details	Weight
1. Class discussion and listening	Both speaking and listening count; even listening patiently counts.	**10%**
2. Tutorial	Comprises the four components below.	**50%**
(a) Individual essay prepared for your presentation	2000–3000 words in English or 3000–5000 Chinese characters, excluding notes and references. Submitted before your presentation. See the Guidelines.	15%
(b) Presentation performance	Includes presenters' responses to questions raised in the Q&A.	10%
(c) Individual response essay	Your own written response to a presentation by another group, which will be shared with the whole presentation group in due course. 1000–1500 words in English or 1500–2500 Chinese characters, excluding notes and references. Due on April 29, 23:59.	10%
(d) Tutorial participation	Both speaking and listening count; even listening patiently counts.	15%
3. Final exam	Multiple-choice questions and short essays. The questions are closely related to the lecture content.	**40%**
Total		**100%**

Details of the tutorials, the presentation and the two essays, including how the essays are assessed, are given in the **Guidelines on Presentation and Individual Essays**. More details about the final exam will be announced in due course.

Use of AI tools

For both essays, appropriate use of AI is permitted, within limits. The full policy, including the AI-use statement required with each essay, is set out in the **Guidelines on Presentation and Individual Essays**.

Introductory works (highly recommended)

Kymlicka, Will (2002) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miller, David (2003) *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolff, Jonathan (2016) *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Topics and readings

Topic 1: Global poverty and moral responsibility

Lectures 1–2

> **Study questions:** Should we help the world's poor? How much do we owe them, and why? Who is responsible for global poverty?

Required reading

Singer, Peter (1972) 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1(3): 229–243. Online.

Miller, David (2007) *National Responsibility and Global Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 9 'Responsibilities to the World's Poor', pp. 240–261.

Recommended reading

Miller, David (2003) *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 7 'Nations, States, and Global Justice'.

Wolff, Jonathan (2016) *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chap. 6 'Justice for Everyone, Everywhere?'.

葉家威、曾瑞明 (2019) 《全球正義與普世價值》，香港：中文大學出版社。第三章：全球貧窮與不平等。

Topic 2: Social and economic justice and personal responsibility

Lectures 3–4

> **Study questions:** What should a just society be like? If no one deserves their native talents, what is left of personal responsibility?

Required reading

Rawls, John (2001) *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. §§13–15 (pp. 42–55), §18 (pp. 61–66), §§20–22 (pp. 72–79) and the remark on surfers in §53 (p. 179).

Nozick, Robert (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Oxford: Blackwell. Chap. 7 'Distributive Justice', pp. 149–164, 167–174 and 213–216.

Recommended reading

Kymlicka, Will (2002) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chaps. 3 and 4.

Rawls, John (1999) *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. §17 'The Tendency to Equality', pp. 86–93.

Locke, John (1690) *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Second Treatise, Chap. 5 'Of Property', pp. 285–302. Online.

Cohen, G. A. (1977) 'Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain: How Patterns Preserve Liberty', *Erkenntnis* 11: 5–23. Also in his (1995) *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chap. 1, pp. 19–37.

Topic 3: Liberalism and communitarianism

Lectures 5–6

> **Study questions:** Do liberal principles of justice rest on a mistaken picture of the self? Can Rawls's distinction between public and moral identity answer Sandel?

Required reading

Mulhall, Stephen and Swift, Adam (1996) *Liberals and Communitarians*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell. Chap. 1 'Sandel: The Limits of Liberalism', pp. 40–69, and Chap. 6 'Political Liberalism and the Communitarian Critique', pp. 191–222.

Sandel, Michael (1984) 'The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self', *Political Theory* 12(1): 81–96.

Rawls, John (2001) *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. §7 'The Idea of Free and Equal Persons', pp. 18–24.

Recommended reading

Mulhall, Stephen and Swift, Adam (1996) *Liberals and Communitarians*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell. The other chapters of this excellent book.

Topic 4: Liberal neutrality and liberal perfectionism

Lectures 7–8

> **Study questions:** Should the state remain neutral between different ideas of the good life? Or may it promote some ways of life as better than others?

Required reading

Chan, Joseph (2000) 'Legitimacy, Unanimity, and Perfectionism', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 29(1): 5–42.

Gaus, Gerald (2003) 'Liberal Neutrality: A Compelling and Radical Principle', in George Klosko and Steven Wall (eds) *Perfectionism and Neutrality: Essays in Liberal Theory*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 137–165.

Recommended reading

Mang, Franz and Chan, Joseph (2022) 'Perfectionism', in William R. Thompson (ed.) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Online.

Quong, Jonathan (2011) *Liberalism without Perfection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tahzib, Collis (2022) *A Perfectionist Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wall, Steven (1998) *Liberalism, Perfectionism and Restraint*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Topic 5: David Miller on self-determination

Lectures 9–10

> **Study questions:** Why does self-determination matter? Can a people be self-determining without a shared national identity?

Required reading

Miller, David (2019) *Is Self-Determination a Dangerous Illusion?* Cambridge: Polity.

Recommended reading

Stilz, Anna (2022) 'On Self-Determination', in Daniel Butt, Sarah Fine and Zofia Stemplowska (eds) *Political Philosophy, Here and Now: Essays in Honour of David Miller*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 8–29. Online.

Topic 6: Freedom of expression and its limits

Lectures 11–12

> **Study questions:** Is moral distress a harm that the law should prevent, or something of value? Where, if anywhere, should freedom of expression stop?

Required reading

Waldron, Jeremy (1987) 'Mill and the Value of Moral Distress', *Political Studies* 35(3): 410–423. Also in his (1993) *Liberal Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chap. 5. Online.

Dworkin, Gerald (1999) 'Devlin Was Right: Law and the Enforcement of Morality', *William and Mary Law Review* 40(3): 927–946. Online.

Recommended reading

Clor, Harry M. (1985) 'Mill and Millians on Liberty and Moral Character', *The Review of Politics* 47(1): 3–26. Online.

Waldron, Jeremy (2012) *The Harm in Hate Speech*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chap. 5 'Protecting Dignity or Protection from Offense?'.

Brink, David O. (2001) 'Millian Principles, Freedom of Expression, and Hate Speech', *Legal Theory* 7(2): 119–157. Online.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/.

With each assignment, students are required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via **VeriGuide**, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

Grade descriptors

The grade descriptors are available at http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf.

Schedule

Lecture	Topic	Date
1	Introduction to the course; Topic 1 (I): Global poverty and moral responsibility	14 Jan 2027
2	Topic 1 (II): Global poverty and moral responsibility	21 Jan 2027
3	Topic 2 (I): Social and economic justice and personal responsibility	28 Jan 2027
4	Topic 2 (II): Social and economic justice and personal responsibility	4 Feb 2027
	No lecture: Lunar New Year vacation	11 Feb 2027
5	Topic 3 (I): Liberalism and communitarianism	18 Feb 2027
6	Topic 3 (II): Liberalism and communitarianism	25 Feb 2027
7	Topic 4 (I): Liberal neutrality and liberal perfectionism	4 Mar 2027
	No lecture: Reading week	11 Mar 2027
8	Topic 4 (II): Liberal neutrality and liberal perfectionism	18 Mar 2027
9	Topic 5 (I): David Miller on self-determination	25 Mar 2027
10	Topic 5 (II): David Miller on self-determination	1 Apr 2027
11	Topic 6 (I): Freedom of expression and its limits	8 Apr 2027
12	Topic 6 (II): Freedom of expression and its limits	15 Apr 2027
	Final exam: the date will be decided by the University (examination period: 28 Apr to 15 May 2027).	To be announced