

**PLS 170: Introduction to Political Philosophy**  
**Summer I 2018**  
**Michigan State University**

**Instructor:** Emma Slonina

**Email:** [sloninae@msu.edu](mailto:sloninae@msu.edu)

**Office Hours:** online by appointment (via email or D2L chat)

## **General Information**

### *Description*

This is an introductory-level online political philosophy course aimed at undergraduates who have varying levels of exposure to political theory. This introduction will rest on a few key texts to present the foundations of Western political philosophy, rather than survey a large number of philosophical texts. This approach will focus on *the* question political philosophers ask: how should I live my life?

While we cannot hope to answer this question definitively in a 7-week summer course, or perhaps even a lifetime, we will look at the different approaches and potential answers to this question with the goal of building a foundation for our own philosophical inquiries.

### *Learning Goals*

- To read philosophical texts closely and critically
- To clearly articulate arguments through writing in different forms (short analyses and formal essays)
- To understand the foundations of political philosophy in the West
- To uncover the assumptions about human life that obscure our philosophical ignorance
- To understand the importance of philosophical inquiry and begin to ask the fundamental questions of human life

### *Expectations*

Students are expected to listen to the weekly lectures, complete course readings, and submit all assignments throughout the duration of the course. The course is structured so that the workload is evenly distributed throughout the semester, giving you time to complete your work and me time to complete my evaluation of it.

“Computer problems” as an excuse for incomplete or missing work will be considered highly suspect, and only verifiable emergencies will be taken seriously. If you are having *any* problems, I expect you to let me know as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements. If you’re having problems with D2L, please contact them directly – they are available 24/7 and the only ones who can help you fix technical problems. I’m (unfortunately) not that powerful.

As your instructor, I will reply to all emails within 24 hours during the work week (within 48 hours on the weekend), and provide detailed feedback on all assignments within one week of submission.

### Course Materials

Since critical reading is a core learning objective for this class, we will be working on annotating our readings throughout the semester. This means you need to start with **clean, unmarked** copies of the required course texts. We will only be using one book in this class, but will be reading two pieces out of it:

*Four Texts on Socrates* by Plato and Aristophanes. Eds. Thomas and Grace Starry West. ISBN: 0801485746.

I will also post these two readings as PDFs on D2L so you can read/mark them online for free. I highly recommend purchasing the book for your own personal development, but the PDFs will work for the purposes of this course.

### Course Schedule

Week	Topic/Question(s)	Exercises	Due
Week 1 5/14 – 5/18	<b>Setup</b> What is political philosophy? What is political science? How do we read, write, and think about political philosophy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introductions</li><li>• Read selection from Adler's <i>How to Read a Book</i> (on D2L)</li><li>• Practice Annotation Exercise</li><li>• Plagiarism quiz</li><li>• Read Aristophanes' <i>Clouds</i> 115-48 [33 pgs]</li></ul>	W 5/16  F 5/18 F 5/18 9pm
Week 2 5/21 – 5/26	<b>Philosophy vs. Science</b> What's Aristophanes' problem with Socrates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read Aristophanes' <i>Clouds</i> 149-76 [focus on lines 860-1130] [27 pgs]</li><li>• Annotation Exercise 1</li></ul>	F 5/25 9pm
Week 3 5/28 – 6/2	<b>Oracle Speech</b> What is Socrates up to nowadays?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plato's <i>Apology of Socrates</i> 17a-22e [~9 pgs]</li><li>• Short Paper</li></ul>	F 6/1 9pm
Week 4 6/4 – 6/8	<b>Cross-examination of Meletus</b> How strong is the case against Socrates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plato's <i>Apology</i> 23a-28b [~7 pgs]</li><li>• Annotation Exercise 2</li></ul>	Sun 6/10 9pm
Week 5 6/11 – 6/15	<b>Achilles/Gadfly Speech</b> Socrates: great good or <i>greatest good</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plato's <i>Apology</i> 28b-35e [~10.5 pgs]</li><li>• Annotation Exercise 3</li></ul>	Sun 6/17 9pm
Week 6 6/18 – 6/22	<b>Conviction and Sentencing</b> Is Socrates innocent or guilty?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plato's <i>Apology</i> 35e-42a [~10 pgs]</li><li>• Annotation Exercise 4</li></ul>	Sun 6/24 9pm
Week 7 6/25 – 6/29	<b>Conclusion</b> Where do we go from here?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Final paper</li></ul>	F 6/29 11:59pm

## Assignments

### *Introductions*

In the first week, you should introduce yourself in the designated D2L discussion board. You should answer all of the posed questions, but also include anything about yourself that you think I should know. I use these introductions to get a sense of where you're at in your academic career, and to find/include examples in lectures that are pertinent to your experiences and interests.

### *Plagiarism Quiz*

As noted below, plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. However, many students, even at the college level, do not always understand what constitutes plagiarism. To remedy this, and to ensure that you understand that plagiarism will result in a zero on the assignment, you must complete an online quiz, found here: <https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/test.html>

To complete the assignment, you must submit a copy of the completion certificate to the designated Dropbox (do **not** email me) or, if you cannot pass the quiz, you must instead submit evidence (using screenshots, for instance) that you have correctly answered 10 practice test questions. Passing the quiz is highly preferable.

### *Annotation Exercises*

To do political philosophy, we must *read* political philosophy. But this is not as easy as it first appears to be. Reading political philosophy requires close, analytical reading that takes time and effort. These exercises will ask you to "mark up" a small portion of the assigned texts and submit these annotations (as a picture or scan) along with a 2 page analysis of what this portion of text is saying/arguing.

### *Short Paper*

After closely reading the texts and thinking about how they answer humans' fundamental questions about life, we want to be able to clearly articulate and evaluate these answers. Your short paper will respond to an essay prompt and should be about 4 pages long.

### *Final Paper*

By the end of this course, we will have seen Socrates defend a certain way of life to a community that has its own ideas about the best way of life. For the final paper, you will respond to an essay prompt that follows from the other exercises you've done in class so far. This paper will be about 7 pages long and will address a larger, more general philosophical question.

## Assessment

### Rubrics

All assignments will have specific guidelines and grading rubrics to indicate expectations and explain the breakdown of grades earned based on skill/learning goal achievement. Please see D2L for these documents.

### Final Grade Breakdown

Introductions & Plagiarism Quiz	10% (must complete both)
Annotation Exercises	45% (Practice 5%, rest 10% each)
Short Paper	20%
Long Paper	25%

### Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage	Grade Point
A/A+	90-100	4.0
B+/A-	86-90	3.5
B-/B	80-86	3.0
C+	77-79	2.5
C-/C	70-76	2.0
D+	67-69	1.5
D-/D	60-66	1.0
F	59 and under	0.0

## Additional Information and Resources

### Changes to the Syllabus

I retain the right to make adjustments to the course, syllabus, and assignments as needed throughout the semester. If I make any changes, I will update the syllabus or related documents, and announce these changes on D2L. It is your responsibility to read these announcements and contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism is lying, cheating, and stealing, and it is in no way acceptable. Assignments that are plagiarized will receive a 0. All work is expected to be original, and not previously or simultaneously turned in for credit in another course (unless you get explicit permission from me beforehand). All students at Michigan State University are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (failing the assignment or this class) and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). For more information, please see the following:

<https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/index.html>

### *Disabilities Accommodation*

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities must arrange for such accommodation. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services **within the first week of class** so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities.