

PHIL-170 Liberty, Rights, and Responsibilities:
Introduction to Social Ethics and Political Thought
Spring 2025

Course Instructor: Meredith Sheeks

Course Description:

Most of us hold it to be self-evident that all people are created equal and endowed with the right to liberty. At the same time, none of us live up to this guiding ideal of justice. For if we did, the world would be a lot more just than it currently is. No doubt, living up to our ideals is easier said than done. But perhaps it's still worth asking what it would take for us to reach this self-evident truth. This course provides an opportunity to dare to consider what it would take.

In this course, we will build upon the principle that *all people are created equal and endowed with the right to liberty* in an ambitious attempt to answer the general question of *what justice is*. To guide our attempt, we will raise and respond to three core questions in *ideal* political theory.

First, we will ask what, if anything, *justifies* the state. We will then question what, if anything, *makes* a society just. Finally, in the third stage of the course, we will consider what, if anything, *the role* of the state ought to be. Within each phase of the course, we will take time to engage in *non-ideal* political theory. That is to say, we will consider how to thoughtfully apply our lofty political ideals in response to the injustice that persists and pervades in our contemporary world.