

COURSE SYLLABUS



Philosophy and Society

Course code: PHI 385/585

Term and year: Spring 2026

Day and time: Thursday 15:00-17:45

Instructor: Jiří Kašný

Instructor contact: jiri.kasny@aauni.edu

Consultation hours: Wednesday 10:45-11:45 (in Faculty Lounge)

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Advanced
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	TOEFL iBT 71
Contact hours	42 hours	Grading	Letter grade

1. Course Description

Philosophy and Society concerns a central feature of human life that we are social being which means that we associate with one another under the governance of rules that are determined by the inter-relationship of tradition, custom, ethics, law, and choice. The course is dedicated to the questions that are related to the meaning and nature of human society. It especially questions the relation of the individuals and a community and the social structures that allows for mutual coexistence.

The class presentations, research-reading and discussions include historical and systematic chapters. We will study the nature of society as it was understood by Plato and Aristotle, the medieval Christian understanding of society by Augustin Aurelius and Thomas Aquinas. We will examine modern notion of society and especially contemporary concepts and discussions of society. In the systematic part, we will identify various particular systems in society. We will examine the concepts of individual and person, the role of the family, the role of ethics and law from the point of view of social philosophy.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Critically discuss the nature of ancient, medieval and modern societies from the point of view of social philosophy
- Critically discuss how philosophers reflected the societies that they were part of
- Critically discuss the main arguments of the contemporary philosophers on social philosophy issues
- Critically think through the historical development of the concept of individual as person in the various social contexts
- Critically think through a variety of questions of the relation of the individuals and a society and the social structures that allows for mutual coexistence from the point of view of particular systems (ethics, law, family, state and world-views)

3. Reading Material

Required Materials

Selected chapters (Available in the Library or on NEO or on the Web)

- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa* – selected questions on NEO.
- Aristotle, *The Politics*. (any available edition)
- Beck, Ulrich, *The Reinvention of Politics: For a Theory of Reflexive Modernization*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996.
- Hayek, August F. *The Road to Serfdom*. (on NEO)
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital*. (any available edition)
- Plato, *The Republic*. (any available edition)
- Popper, Karl R., *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (2 Volumes), London: Routledge, 1945.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*. (any available edition)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online
- Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

Recommended Materials

selected chapters (Available in the Library or via Interlibrary Loan or on the Web)

- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <https://iep.utm.edu/>
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <https://plato.stanford.edu/>
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Treatise on Law*. (on NEO)
- Arendt, Hannah. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Edited and with an Interpretive Essay by Ronald Beiner (The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- Brake, Elizabeth, "Marriage and Domestic Partnership", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2012 Edition).
- Clark, Timothy. *Martin Heidegger*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Franssen, Maarten, Lokhorst, Gert-Jan and van de Poel, Ibo, "Philosophy of Technology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2013 Edition)
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. I-II.
- Hayek, A. F. Law, *Legislation, and Liberty*, in 3 volumes, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973-1979.
- Scruton, Roger. *Dictionary of Political Thought*. New York: The Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. London: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Strauss, Leo. *The City and Man*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Wenar, Leif, "John Rawls", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2013 Edition).

4. Teaching methodology

The format of this seminar is primarily lecture – research – reading – discussion. Students are invited to participate in class, to read and study the required and suggested materials and to do their own research-reading.

The module will be taught over the period of one semester. The module runs for three hours a week for 15 weeks in a semester. Of these 15 weeks, 14 are teaching, discussion, and feedback, and one is mid-term break.

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
1. 5/2 2026	<p>Topic: Freedom and Destiny and Pursuit of Truth</p> <p>Description: We will discuss the key concepts of social philosophy: freedom, responsibility, rights, community, government, history, virtues.</p> <p>Reading: Sophocles. <i>Oedipus the King</i>. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: none</p>
2. 12/2	<p>Topic: The Constitution of the City and the Virtues of the Citizens</p> <p>Description: We will discuss the concepts of republic, politics, constitutions and virtues according to Plato and Aristotle.</p> <p>Reading: Plato, <i>The Republic</i> and Aristotle, <i>The Politics</i> – selected chapters; individual research, Strauss, Leo, <i>The City and Man</i>. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: none</p>
3. 19/2	<p>Topic: A Perfect Society in the Middle Ages</p> <p>Description: We will examine the substantial elements of a medieval perfect society: How religion, ethics and law kept the society together.</p> <p>Reading: Thomas Aquinas. <i>Summa</i> – selected questions. Treatise on Law.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 1 – instructions</p>
4. 26/2	<p>Topic: Modern World in Ongoing Progress</p> <p>Description: We will study modern society paradigm according to René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, turn to the subject and the social contract theory.</p> <p>Reading: Hobbes, Thomas. <i>Leviathan</i>. Rousseau, Jean Jacques. <i>Emil or On Education</i>.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 1 – discussion of the draft</p>
5. 5/3	<p>Topic: The Subject in the Enlightenment Society</p> <p>Description: We will study Enlightenment society, transcendental difference, categorical imperative, social contract theory and their application in modern society according to Immanuel Kant.</p> <p>Reading: Kant, Immanuel. <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Recommended Reading: Hannah Arendt, <i>Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy</i>. Edited and with an Interpretive Essay by Ronald Beiner (The University of Chicago Press, 1992) – selected chapters.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 1 due</p>
6. 12/3	<p>Topic: Modern Autonomy and Freedom</p> <p>Description: We will examine the autonomy and freedom of the individual in modern society.</p>

	<p>Reading: Hannah Arendt, <i>Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy</i>. Edited and with an Interpretive Essay by Ronald Beiner (The University of Chicago Press, 1992) – selected chapters.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 1 – feedback and evaluation</p>
7. 19/3	<p>Topic: Karl Marx: social theory and ideology</p> <p>Description: We will study Marx's dialectic materialism; Marxism in politics and economy; Marxism as ideology and theory today.</p> <p>Reading: Marx, Karl, <i>Capital</i>. Recommended Reading: Wolff, Jonathan, "Karl Marx", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition).</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 2 – instructions</p>
8. 26/3	<p>Topic: Planned and spontaneous order</p> <p>Description: We will discuss the ideas of the order in society as cosmos and taxis in the context of twentieth century society.</p> <p>Reading: Hayek, August F., <i>The Road to Serfdom</i>. Recommended Reading: Schmidtz, David, "Friedrich Hayek", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2012 Edition). Popper, Karl R., <i>The Open Society and Its Enemies</i> (2 Volumes), London: Routledge, 1945. Hayek, A. F. <i>Law, Legislation, and Liberty</i>, in 3 volumes, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973-1979 – selected chapters.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 2 – discussion of the draft</p>
2/4	Mid-term break
9. 9/4	<p>Topic: Philosophical issues in contemporary society 1 – person</p> <p>Description: What does "person" say about us – humans and members of society?</p> <p>Reading: Individual research and Beck, Ulrich. <i>The Reinvention of Politics: For a Theory of Reflexive Modernization</i>, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 2 – due</p>
10. 16/4	<p>Topic: Philosophical issues in contemporary society 2 – family</p> <p>Description: How the pluralistic views of the family keep society together.</p> <p>Reading: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – selected articles. Recommended Reading: Brake, Elizabeth, "Marriage and Domestic Partnership", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2012 Edition).</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 2 – evaluation and feedback</p>
11. 23/4	<p>Topic: Philosophical issues in contemporary society 4 – ethics</p> <p>Description: The role of ethics and the plurality of ethics in contemporary society</p> <p>Reading: Taylor, Charles. <i>The Ethics of Authenticity</i>. Harvard University Press, 1992. Research reading: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – selected articles.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 3 – instructions</p>
12. 30/4	<p>Topic: Philosophical issues in contemporary society 3 – law</p> <p>Description: We will study the role of law in society in democratic societies and totalitarian regimes.</p>

	<p>Reading: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – selected articles. Recommended Reading: Beck, Ulrich. <i>The Reinvention of Politics: For a Theory of Reflexive Modernization</i>, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993. Assignments/deadlines: Home Essay 3 – discussion of the draft</p>
13. 7/5	<p>Topic: Instrumental and communicative action Description: We will discuss the instrumental and communicative action according to Habermas in the context of post-modern society. Reading: Jürgen Habermas, <i>Between Facts and Norms</i>; Recommended Reading: Bohman, James and Rehg, William, "Jürgen Habermas", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2014 Edition). Habermas, Jürgen. <i>The Theory of Communicative Action</i>. Vol. I-II. Assignments/deadlines: Home essay 3 due</p>
14. 14/5 2025	<p>Topic: Final exam Description: Presentation, evaluation and feedback of Home Essay 3 Reading: Reflection and comments on individual research and reading Assignments/deadlines: Home essay 3 – evaluation and feedback</p>

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assessment in this course will be based upon class participation, two class presentation and discussion (5% each), and home essays 1, 2 and 3 (30% each). Preparation and writing of the essays (workload) include participation in classes, reading and individual research reading.

Assignment	Workload (average)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class participation and presentations	42	10 %	Students will present and discuss meaningfully the topics of the course that have been already covered in accordance with the learning outcomes (see above).	1, 2, 3
Home essay 1	36	30%	Students will discuss critically and meaningfully the nature of ancient and medieval societies from the point of view of social philosophy.	1, 2
Home essay 2	36	30%	Students will think and discuss critically and meaningfully the main arguments of the early	1, 2

			modern and modern philosophers on the individual and society.	
Home essay 3	36	30%	Students will think critically through a variety of questions of the relation of the individuals and a society and the social structures that allow for mutual coexistence from the point of view of particular social systems (ethics, law, family, state).	1, 2
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Class participation and presentations:

Each student will prepare and present two short (5 minutes) presentations in class, first presentation before the midterm break, second presentation after the midterm break. The topics and the schedule of the presentations will be distributed and discussed in the first and the following classes. Each presentation is 5%.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Content	40%
Presentation	40%
Discussion	20%

Home essay 1:

Home essay 1 should be about 6 pages long. The detailed instructions incl. the topics of the home essay will be distributed in class on February 19, 2026. The essay is due on March 5, 2026 via Turnitin. Assessed areas include content, resources, structure and argument, and style and form of the essay; the result makes 30% of the final grade.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Content	30%
Resources	20%
Structure and argument	30%
Style and form	20%

Home essay 2:

Home essay 2 should be about 6 pages long. The detailed instructions incl. the topics of the home essay will be distributed in class on March 19, 2026. The essay is due on April 9, 2026

via Turnitin. Assessed areas include content, resources, structure and argument, and style and form of the essay; the result makes 30% of the final grade.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Content	30%
Resources	20%
Structure and argument	30%
Style and form	20%

Home essay 3:

Home essay 3 should be about 6 pages long. The detailed instructions incl. the topics of the home essay will be distributed in class on April 23, 2026. The essay is due on May 7, 2026, via Turnitin. Assessed areas include content, resources, structure and argument, and style and form of the essay; the result makes 30% of the final grade.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Content	30%
Resources	20%
Structure and argument	30%
Style and form	20%

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU’s academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU intranet for a [summary of key policies](#) regarding coursework.

Course specific requirements

There are no special requirements or deviations from AAU policies for this course.