This course will explore some of the central questions that have compelled Western thinkers from the time of the ancient Greeks to today. In the context of discussions about the nature of knowledge and reality, we will focus on **social and political philosophy**. We will consider questions like: What is the nature of justice? What is tyranny? What is the nature of political sovereignty? Is democracy the best model for a just society? If so, how do we construct the best democracy? How might a democracy devolve into tyranny? What is the nature and role of citizens within a state? What about other human beings who do not have the legal status of citizenship? What is the conceptual context within which the US Constitution was written? What is the relation between economy and the state? Is capitalism the best model for political economy? Is Marxism the best model for political economy? What is the nature of power and oppression? How is political oppression manifested in terms of race, gender, religion (or absence of religion), sexual orientation, legal status, etc.? What is the nature of *systemic* oppression? How can we best combat political oppression in any of its manifestations?

To address these and other questions, we will read primary source texts from the history of metaphysics, epistemology, and social and political philosophy. To do this in a rigorous manner not based on mere opinions, but on demonstrable evidence and reasoning, we will begin the semester by examining the self-critical model of philosophical thought presented by the 17th century philosopher, René Descartes. Together with this, we will build a methodology through lessons on the fundamentals of argument structure and analysis, informal logical fallacies, and critical thinking. We will then turn to several works from the history of philosophy, including works by authors such as Plato, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Benjamin Franklin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Benito Mussolini, Hannah Arendt, Martin Luther King Jr., Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, and Michel Foucault.

**Grades:** calculated on the basis of having carefully read each day’s material, in-class participation, short presentations, daily note card questions, homework assignments, exams, quizzes, and essays.