

## PHI 331: Social and Political Philosophy

UNC- Greensboro  
Spring 2020



Detail from *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (1388) by Ambrogio Lorenzetti  
[Alt text: a close-up of a fresco painting, depicting people moving about a city, with many buildings in the background]

**Course Number:** PHI 331

**Course Title:** Social and Political Philosophy

**Location:** WEB

**Credits:** 3

**Prerequisites:** None

### **For Whom Planned:**

This course is designed for anyone interested in ethical/normative questions surrounding political life. This online version is intended to satisfy requirements for Philosophy online degree completion students.

### **Instructor Information:**

Elliot Goodine, PhD, MA

Office Hours: Via Skype and in person, by appointment. I will also make announcements about occasional non-appointment drop-in office hours, either at Curry Hall or at Tate Street Coffee House.

email: [ejgoodin@uncg.edu](mailto:ejgoodin@uncg.edu)

Telephone: 512-507-3968 (I am glad to take a phone call or a text if there's something you urgently need to work out with me, but email is recommended for most cases).

### **Textbook:**

*Political Philosophy: Essential Texts* 3rd Edition, Ed. by Stephen Cahn

Additional readings to be distributed via Canvas

### **Catalog Description:**

Theories of the origin and justification of legal systems, our obligation to obey the law, justice, punishment, and related issues. Readings from classical and contemporary sources. Course available via a WEB D-section for PHI Online Degree Completion Program students only.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Philosophical, Religious and Ethical Perspectives

Student Learning Outcomes (GPR SLOs)

- (1) demonstrate an understanding of at least two significant philosophical, religious, and/or ethical theories or traditions by describing and analyzing them;
- (2) demonstrate the ability to compare and contrast assumptions, arguments, modes of thought, attendant beliefs or practices of two or more theories or traditions or of diverse voices among those who accept a given theory or tradition;
- (3) demonstrate the ability to apply abstract ideas to specific instances; and
- (4) evaluate the credibility of sources of information.

### **Course-Specific Student Learning Outcomes:**

This course is designed to familiarize students with foundational issues and texts in political philosophy. We will focus on three main topics:

- 1) **The Point of Government and the Limits of Government** - We will consider the rationale for the existence of government, and will also consider what limits there should be on government coercion.
- 2) **Property and Inequality** - We will consider philosophical accounts of property rights, along with arguments about the normative implications of inequality (including income distribution and reparations).
- 3) **Democracy and its Discontents** - We will consider criticisms and defenses of democracy, along with contemporary debates about how present-day democracies should be administered.

Students will learn to carefully read philosophical texts from various traditions, and will learn to offer cogent defenses of their own views in discussion and in papers.

### **Evaluation and Grading**

Grades will be based on the following elements:

- a) **Quizzes** - 20%
- b) **Discussion board participation** - 20%
- c) **Midterm exam** - 14%
- d) **Term Paper Proposal** - 5%
- e) **Term Paper** - 20%
- f) **Final Exam** - 21%

**Quizzes** will be given to make sure that you're keeping up with the assigned readings and keeping up with the online course content. Some quiz questions will be multiple choice, and some questions will be short-answer (1-2 sentences).

I recommend that you do all of the required reading before watching the online video lecture; quiz questions for readings are sometimes moderately technical, but after doing your reading, you should be able to answer these sorts of general questions: What was the main point of the reading? What were the author's main reasons in favor of their main point? How does the reading connect to other readings from earlier in the semester? What was the most surprising or notable claim that the author made in the reading? I recommend that you jot down your answers to these questions as you do your reading, and have them ready as you log on to view the lecture. Making good notes and annotations as you do your reading is an important philosophical skill.

I'll drop your lowest two quiz scores when calculating your final grade for the quiz.

Because this is an online course, **Discussion board participation** is an essential part of the ongoing dialogue we will have about the course materials. Here's what I expect from you in terms of discussion board participation: you should make at least 2 posts on the forum each week, and on some weeks, you aim to should post more than that (especially if you are asked a question by me or one of your colleagues).

I grade your discussions mainly for showing up and making an effort. You can skip discussions during two weeks of the semester without penalty, but additional absences from the forum will be penalized.

In some cases, a poorly constructed post will be deleted by me, and will not count as a participation. When this happens, I'll send you a private message to let you know where I saw the post falling short. Some of the activities that will cause me to delete your post will include:

- *Mere agreement*: these are the sorts of posts that don't add anything to the discussion. Merely writing "I enjoyed reading your post, and I really like the part where you talked about X. I look forward to reading more of your posts in the coming weeks." These posts usually read more like filler than a substantive post. It's great to tell your classmates that you liked what they wrote, but try to add something to the discussion when you do.
- *Disrespectful posts*: these are the sorts of posts where you say something that's needlessly insulting or unfair to your colleagues.
- *Superficial posts*: if you don't make an effort to engage with the philosophical questions at hand.

In that spirit, I encourage you to engage in discussion in a professional, thorough, and open-minded manner. Here are the sorts of things you can do to make a worthwhile contribution to the discussion:

- *Ask questions* about parts of the reading that don't make sense to you. It's especially good if you can explain why something is ambiguous or confusing to you. If something doesn't make sense to you, don't be embarrassed to speak up
- *Offer explanations* of how you see an argument working. It's great if you can lay out part of a philosopher's argument in a premise-conclusion format. Once we all have a valid argument to look at, you can go into a bit of detail about why you think certain premises are true or false, or into how you see the premises fitting together.
- *Respectfully disagree* with your colleagues: tell them exactly where you disagree, and offer reasons for your opposing point of view. Make sure to be fair to your interlocutor's views.
- *Offer suggestions* to your colleagues about how they might add something to their arguments to make them stronger.
- *Draw connections* between the current reading and other philosophical material. Are the two readings mutually reinforcing, or are they incompatible with one another?

- *Integrate outside information:* you might offer information that goes beyond our reading. This material might further reinforce a point that's relevant to an argument. Or, your outside sources it might complicate (or serve as a counterexample) to a point that's under discussion. You can use news articles, movies, television, science, or whatever other sources you think are helpful for moving the discussion forward.

The podcast interview with Myisha Cherry (which is required listening and in week 1) helpfully discusses the sorts of skills and virtues you should work to bring to philosophical conversations.

The **Midterm exam** will require you to answer two questions, from a list of four. Your answer to each question should be between 200 and 300 words in length. The exam will be released on Wed. Feb. 19 by 6pm, and will be due on Tue, Feb. 25 at 11:59pm. Each question will be worth 7 points, for a total of 14 toward your final grade.

You will be required to submit a **Term paper proposal** by Friday, April 10 (by 11:59pm). I'll distribute a list of questions that you'll answer about about your term paper. This will give you an opportunity to get started on formulating a thesis (or a question to research), and to gather some sources that you want to work with. It will also give me an opportunity to give you advice about the upcoming project.

The **Term paper** (due on Friday, April 24 by 11:59 pm) will require you to make a philosophical argument that engages substantively with at least one of our readings from throughout the semester. Papers should be between 2500 and 3000 words long (about 7.5-10 double-spaced pages). Your paper should follow MLA citation standards, and should cite at least three scholarly sources. I encourage you to send me an abstract or outline of your paper ahead of the deadline so I can offer feedback.

The **Final exam** will follow the same format as the midterm, but you will have to answer three questions off a list of six. Each answer will be worth 8 points, for a total of 21 points toward your final grade.

I do not offer any assignments for extra credit, nor do I allow resubmissions of work that's already been graded. However, at the end of the semester, I will add up to three points to your final score for excellent participation (this might be a matter of asking good questions via email, making a serious improvement throughout the semester, or exemplary participation on discussion boards, among other things). So, for instance, if you're sitting at a 92, but your participation has been consistently strong, I would bump you to a 95, so you would get an A rather than an A-minus.

### Grading Scale

|               |               |               |                  |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| 94 – 100% = A | 88 – 90% = B+ | 78 – 80% = C+ | 68 – 70% = D+    |
| 91 – 93% = A- | 84 – 87% = B  | 74 – 77% = C  | 64 – 67% = D     |
|               | 81 – 83% = B- | 71 – 73% = C- | 61 – 63% = D-    |
|               |               |               | 60% or below = F |

## **Extensions**

I know how busy and complicated life can be sometimes, and all the ways that other commitments and problems can get in the way of handing in work on time. I am happy to work with you on shifting a deadline, just as long as you communicate with me about your plan to get the work done. If you know that a particular deadline is one you cannot feasibly meet, please get in touch with me before the deadline passes (if possible, contact me via email with more than 24 hours notice, and please propose a new deadline in that email) and I'll let you know whether I'll grant the extension.

I never give extensions on discussion board participation, because it's important for your colleagues to be able interact with you. But keep in mind that because your lowest two weekly discussion scores will be dropped, there is a little bit of forgiveness built into the system on that end.

I will give each student only one extension for a quiz during the semester, and only if the extension is requested before the quiz's deadline. Note that because your lowest two quiz scores will be dropped, there is a little bit of forgiveness built into the system if you miss a quiz.

## **Academic Integrity**

I take academic integrity violations seriously.

Plagiarism, having others do your work, and other academic integrity violations will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

I consider plagiarism to be using someone else's words or ideas without properly attributing them to the original source. Some cases of plagiarism might be unintentional: if you fail to cite your sources correctly, I sometimes consider this a case of minor plagiarism: In these cases, your work might get a zero or I might require you to resubmit your work with a proper citation (and your final work will be penalized for not getting it right the first time). Other cases of plagiarism are more serious and non-accidental, especially in cases where your work's text contains exact phrases taken from another source with no attempt to cite the original source of the words. If I catch you copy-pasting someone else's words into your tests or papers as your own words, you'll automatically fail the course, and I'll report the case.

## **Important Resources at UNC-G**

Counseling Center

<https://shs.uncg.edu/cc>

Office of Disability Services

<https://ods.uncg.edu/>

Title IX Office

<http://titleix.wp.uncg.edu/>

Writing Center

<https://writingcenter.uncg.edu/>

## Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Readings from Cahn’s *Political Philosophy: Essential Texts* will be marked “PPET” followed by page numbers.

Additional readings (marked with an asterisk (\*)) will be posted in the Files section on Canvas.

Video Lectures and course modules will be posted for each reading on the days listed by 6pm.

With a couple of exceptions, quizzes and discussion forum posts corresponding to modules posted on Mondays are due by Thursday nights at 11:59pm; Quizzes and discussion forum posts corresponding to modules posted on Wednesday nights are due on Sunday nights at 11:59pm.

| WEEK                              | TOPIC, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS  | DUE DATES |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| WEEK 1:<br>Jan. 13 &<br>Jan. 15   | <p><b>Introduction: Why Study Political Philosophy?</b></p> <p><b>Mon:</b> Course introduction, syllabus review</p> <p>*Sandel, <i>Justice: What’s the Right thing to Do?</i> (Ch. 1)</p> <p><b>Wed:</b>*Required listening: Interview with Myisha Cherry on the <i>Elucidations</i> podcast.</p> <p>*Pryor: “How to Read a Philosophy Paper”</p> <p>*Optional reading: “Moral Reasoning” by Russ Shafer-Landau</p> |           |
| WEEK 2:<br>Jan. 22 and<br>Jan. 24 | <p><b>Topic 1: The Point of Government and the Limits of Government</b></p> <p><b>(No new module on Monday Jan. 21- Martin Luther King Jr. Day)</b></p> <p><b>Wed:</b> Plato, <i>Republic</i> (Book 2; PPET 51-66)</p> <p><b>Fri:</b> Aristotle Politics (Book I, Ch. 1-5; PPET, 165-170)</p> <p>*Fred Miller “Aristotle’s Politics” in <i>The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i></p>                          |           |
| WEEK 3:<br>Jan. 27 and<br>Jan. 29 | <p><b>Mon:</b> Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> (Ch. 13,14 and 15; PPET 319-330)</p> <p><b>Wed:</b> Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> (Finish up chapters 13-15 if necessary; Ch. 18, 19; PPET 333-338)</p>  |           |

| WEEK                              | TOPIC, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS   | DUE DATES  |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| WEEK 4:<br>Feb. 3 and<br>Feb. 5   | <b>Mon:</b> *Simmons “Rights-Based Justifications for the State”<br><b>Wed:</b> Hume - “Of the Original Contract” (PPET 477-485)   |  |
| WEEK 5:<br>Feb. 10 and<br>Feb. 12 | <b>Mon:</b> Mill <i>On Liberty</i> (Ch. 3; PPET 775-785)<br><b>Wed:</b> Mill <i>On Liberty</i> (Ch. 4; PPET 785-795)   |  |
| WEEK 6:<br>Feb. 17 and<br>Feb. 19 | <b>Mon:</b> *Thaler & Sunstein “Libertarian Paternalism” and *Hausman & Welch - “To Nudge or Not to Nudge”<br><b>Wed: Midterm Exam Released</b>  |  |
| WEEK 7:<br>Feb. 24 and<br>Feb. 26 | <b>Topic 2: Property and Inequality</b><br><b>Mon:</b> Locke - <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> (Ch. 4, 5, and 9; PPET 369-74 and 378-9)<br><b>Wed:</b> Marx - “Value, Price, Profit” (PPET 728-737) | <b>Midterm Exam due Tuesday Feb. 25 at 11:59pm</b> |
|                                   | <b>Spring Break: No new modules on March 3 and March 5</b>   |  |
| WEEK 8:<br>Mar. 9 and<br>Mar. 11  | <b>Mon:</b> Nozick - Anarchy State and Utopia (PPET 957-969)<br><b>Wed:</b> Rawls- A Theory of Justice (PPET 917-931)  |  |
| WEEK 9:<br>Mar. 16 &<br>Mar. 18   | <b>Mon:</b> *Anderson - “What’s the Point of Equality?” (pp. 287-312)<br><b>Wed:</b> *Anderson cont’d (pp. 312-337)  |  |
| WEEK 10:<br>Mar 23 &<br>Mar 25    | <b>Mon:</b> *Corlett - Reparations to Native Americans?<br><b>Wed:</b> *Waldron - “Superseding Historical Injustice”   |  |
| WEEK 11:<br>Mar. 30 and<br>Apr. 1 | <b>Mon:</b> *Boxill - “A Lockean Argument for Black Reparations”<br><b>Wed:</b> *Darby - “Reparations and Racial Inequality”   |  |

| WEEK                               | TOPIC, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS   | DUE DATES   |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| WEEK 12:<br>Apr. 6 and<br>Apr. 8   | <p><b>Topic 3: Democracy and its Discontents</b></p> <p><b>Mon:</b> Plato, <i>Republic</i> (Book 8; PPET 110-129)</p> <p><b>Wed:</b> *Kraut, “Plato against democracy”</p>                 | <p><b>Term paper proposal due Friday, April 10; 11:59pm</b></p> |
| WEEK 13:<br>Apr. 13 and<br>Apr. 15 | <p><b>*Mon:</b> *Brennan, The Right to a Competent Electorate</p> <p><b>Wed:</b> Dewey, Democracy (PPET 1109-1113).<br/>*CLR James - “Every Cook Can Govern”</p>                           |   |
| WEEK 14:<br>Apr. 20 and<br>Apr. 22 | <p><b>Mon:</b> *Birch - The Case for Compulsory Voting</p> <p><b>Wed:</b> *Lever - Is Compulsory Voting Justified?</p>   | <p><b>Term paper due April 24; 11:59pm</b></p>                  |
| Week 15:<br>Apr. 27 and<br>Apr. 29 | <p><b>Mon:</b> *Peto - Why the voting age should be lowered to 16</p> <p><b>Wed:</b> Film: <i>What is Democracy?</i> Dir. Astra Taylor (available via Kanopy; in-person screening TBD)</p> |   |
| Week 16:<br>Exam Week              | <p>Final exam questions to be released by 6pm on Friday May 1</p>  | <p><b>Final Exam Due by 11:59pm on Tuesday, May 5</b></p>       |