

Syllabus  
PHIL 3700 (3 Cr.)  
Political Philosophy  
Spring 2022

Instructor: Dr. Kristopher G. Phillips  
Office: 108F General Classrooms  
Student Hours: MW 10:00a-12:00p, T 11:00a-12:00p or by appointment.

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Class Meets:  
MWF: 1:00-1:50p in GC 311

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Why should a person be good? On the face of it, this seems to be a relatively straight forward question, but it is in fact quite difficult to offer a satisfactory answer. One concern is that it is not clear what exactly it means to be “good” in the first place. Undoubtedly, however, one component of being good concerns the ways we interact with those around us—after all, we live in a society. Philosophers offer different kinds of answers to this question, but we will attend specifically to those answers that address what it means for both an individual and a society to be good. In evaluating these answers, we will consider whether our obligations to one another exist in a state without governmental intervention or whether they are a result of a political enforcement. In each case we will examine: the nature, origin, and legitimacy of governmental authority, the problem of punishment (on what grounds does a governing body have the *moral right* to punish?), and the scope and limits of individual and collective liberty. We will also consider questions such as: what is the ideal form of government? What is the nature of justice? What role does equity play in establishing a just society?

While contemporary politics will likely provide us with plenty of examples to consider, this course is first and foremost a *philosophy* class. As such, we will be primarily concerned with the theoretical underpinnings of political goings-on. We will not necessarily worry about how things *are*, but how they *could* and *should* be.

**Course Learning Outcomes:**

- Critical Thinking: The successful student will begin to be able to differentiate between good and bad reasons for holding philosophical beliefs and will be able to seek out and identify the assumptions that lie at the basis of philosophical positions.
- Inquiry and Analysis: The successful student will begin to be able to break complex philosophical problems into their components, and will be able to identify the consequences and implications of philosophical positions.
- Writing: The successful student will be able to express some abstract and complex philosophical ideas in clear, precise, and logical prose.
- Reading Comprehension: The successful student will be able to analyze and interpret abstract and difficult philosophical writing.

**TEXTS:** *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts* (Third Edition), ed. Cahn. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-020108

And

*The Racial Contract* by Charles. W. Mills. Cornell University Press. ISBN: 978-0-8014-8463-6

These can be found at the College Bookstore, and are *required*.

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**SCHEDULE OF READINGS:**

This list of readings is tentative. Specific reading assignments will be given on a day-to-day basis.

**Week 1: Introduction to (Political) Philosophy**

Hoskins: "[Legal Punishment](#)" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

[No class Friday; Self-Reflection due Sunday; [please sign up for a meeting](#)]

**Weeks 2-7: Plato on the Just Person and Just State**

Plato: *The Republic* Book I (Cahn: 31-51)

Plato: *The Republic* Book II (Cahn: 51-66)

Plato: *The Republic* Book III (Cahn: 66-70)

Plato: *The Republic* Book IV (Cahn: 70-79)

Plato: *The Republic* Book V (Cahn: 79-90)

Plato: *The Republic* Book VI (Cahn: 90-105)

Plato: *The Republic* Book VII (Cahn: 105-110)

Plato: *The Republic* Book VIII (Cahn: 110-129)

Plato: *The Republic* Book IX (Cahn: 129-136)

Plato: *The Republic* Book X (Canvas)

**[Mid-Term Exam due Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>; Mid-point reflection due March 6<sup>th</sup>; please sign up for a meeting]**

**Spring Break February 28-March 4**

**Weeks 8 and 9: What if Everyone has a Warped Soul?**

Thomas Hobbes: from the *Leviathan* (Cahn: 312- 343)

Pay special attention to Part I: ch. 1, 6, 10, 13, 14, 15; Part II: all

**Weeks 9 and 10: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of [Property]**

John Locke: *Second Treatise of Government* (Cahn: 365-392)

**[Term paper proposal due March 16th]**

**Weeks 11-13: Critiques of the Social Contract and Liberalism**

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Estranged Labor (Cahn: 701-708)

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Value, Price and Profit (Cahn: 728-737)

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Manifesto of the Communist Party (Cahn: 714-727)

Charles Mills: *The Racial Contract* Introduction (1-8)

Charles Mills: *The Racial Contract* Chapter 1 (9-40)

Charles Mills: *The Racial Contract* Chapter 2 (41-90)

Charles Mills: *The Racial Contract* Chapter 3 (91-135)

Martha Nussbaum: "Feminist Critique of Liberalism" (Cahn: 1028-1053)

**[Term paper due April 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Final exam due April 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**Please sign up for a final meeting April 27, or 28]**

**ASSIGNMENTS, EVALUATION:**

"Extrinsic motivation, which includes a desire to get better grades, is not only different from, but often undermines, intrinsic motivation, a desire to learn for its own sake" – Alfie Kohn (1999), *Punished by rewards: The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes*. Rev. ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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**Let's Talk Motivation:** In recent years I have become increasingly unhappy with grades as a measure of anything at all. I often tell my students that it's probably easy to get an A in my class – you can relatively easily “hack” my grading system and figure out the “formula” for writing a paper for me. Once you figure it out, getting As on papers in my classes is easy. But I don't want you to get an A by “hacking the system.” I want you to push yourself to learn new things because you found something you're excited about and wanted to try to go beyond what's comfortable and familiar. I've long thought that an A- or a B+ that was the result of taking risks was worth more than a safe, but well-written A paper.

In short, grading is not a good measure of learning, and the focus on grades distracts from the real goal of education. If you're aiming for a specific grade, you're not aiming to get the most out of your educational opportunities.

**Evaluation:** Here's what we will do. You and I will meet one-on-one at the start of the semester to determine:

- (a) What are your reasons for taking this class?
- (b) What do you hope to get out of this class?
- (c) Where and how do you think you can improve on your academic work?
- (d) What do you think I hope you'll take away from the class?

Then we will meet just before mid-terms, and again at the end of the semester to discuss:

- (e) What progress have you made with regard to our goals?

The idea is that we will **collaboratively** come to a determination about what sort of progress you've made, where you think you can continue to improve (and how to best do so). As such, I will not provide you with numerical or letter grades on individual assignments. I will provide my standard level of *qualitative* feedback on your work (discursive comments regarding clarity, precision, critical engagement, etc.), but the gradebook will only note whether you turned the assignment in.

You are responsible for working with me to determine your final grade in this class. We will come to an agreement based on a formal self-assessment, the collected feedback you received from me over the course of the semester, and an final discussion. *I reserve the right to adjust the final grade, but I will not do so without telling you first.*

**Assignments:**

- **Introductory Self-Reflection Paper** (Due: Jan. 16<sup>th</sup>). Please carefully and thoroughly address (a) - (d) above.
- **Introductory Goal-Setting Meeting** (Week of Jan 17<sup>th</sup>). [Sign up for a 15 minute zoom meeting here where we will discuss your goals, motivations, etc.](#)
- **Midterm exam** (Due Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>). This take-home exam will focus on Plato's *Republic*.
- **Mid-point Reflection Paper** (Due March 6<sup>th</sup>). Consider our goals. How are you progressing? What changes would you like to make to your goals? How can I help you progress?
- **Mid-point Meetings** (week of March 7<sup>th</sup>). Sign up for a 15 minute zoom meeting. I will post the Calendly link as we get closer.
- **Term Paper Proposal** (Due March 16<sup>th</sup>). I would like to see a proposal of between ½ page and 1 page of your term paper. It can be rough, but I'd like to see an approximate thesis, and a direction for research – you don't need to have done the research yet, but find some contemporary work on

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your topic and give me a few pieces you intend to use for your paper. If you feel uncomfortable trying to find sources, or don't know where to look, I'm more than happy to help. We can address this in our introductory meeting, during our mid-semester meeting, and/or during student hours.

- **Term Paper** (Due April 11<sup>th</sup>). Your term paper will be roughly 3000 words, and can discuss any topic in political philosophy.
- **Final Exam** (Due April 22<sup>nd</sup>). This take-home exam will address the Social Contract and its critics.
- **Final Meeting** (Wed and Thursday of finals week). We will meet to discuss your progress toward your goals over the semester, and determine your final grade. I will post the Calendly link as we get closer.
- **Participation.** Philosophy is best done in open, careful dialogue with one another. I know not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of their peers, but I want to encourage you to genuinely engage one another regarding the ideas in the class. There are a number of ways one can be an active participant in the course. Whether that is asking questions in class, organizing discussion boards, setting up study groups, visiting during student hours, or something else you come up with, I'd like to see you really engage with both the material and one another.

**REQUIRED POLICY STATEMENTS:**

**Plagiarism or academic fraud.** Academic dishonesty is a serious matter. Please familiarize yourself with Southern Utah University's *Student Handbook*, which you can find online at <https://www.suu.edu/pub/policies/pdf/PP633Academic.pdf>. I will follow the regulations described in this document for dealing with cheating, plagiarism, etc. If you have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism or academic fraud after reading through the student handbook, please do not hesitate to ask me for further clarification. That said, **I trust you.**

**Disabilities:** I warmly welcome any of you who have disabilities. Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids must contact the Office for Students with Disabilities. The Office for Students with Disabilities determines eligibility for and authorizes the provision of these services and aids. Reasonable and effective accommodations and services will be provided to students if requests are made in a timely manner, with appropriate documentation, in accordance with federal, state, and University guidelines. For Southern Utah University's full policy, see: <http://suu.edu/pub/policies/pdf/PP119Disability.pdf>.

**SUU Care and Support Team:** The SUU Care and Support Team (CAST) is comprised of trained faculty and staff who are committed to creating an environment at SUU that supports students who may be struggling with emotional distress and mental health issues. As a member of CAST, please know that I am here to help. I am not a professional counselor, but I do care, know how and where to find help if you need it, and want to see you succeed. Please do not be afraid to visit me if you're struggling. <http://www.suu.edu/cast/>

**SUU Pride Alliance:** Pride Alliance is a network comprised of students, staff, and faculty dedicated to creating safe spaces for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer individuals and Allies (LGBTQA) on the campus of Southern Utah University (SUU). As an ally, please know that I am committed to seeing that everyone is afforded the dignity and respect they deserve regardless of their identity. <http://www.suu.edu/allies/>

**Emergency Management:** In case of emergency, the University's Emergency Notification System (ENS) will be activated. Students are encouraged to maintain updated contact information using the link on the homepage of the

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mySUU portal. In addition, students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Emergency Response Protocols posted in each classroom. Detailed information about the University's emergency management plan can be found at <http://suu.edu/emergency>.

**HEOA Compliance:** The sharing of copyrighted material through peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing, except as provided under U.S. copyright law, is prohibited by law.

**Disclaimer:** Information contained in this syllabus, other than the grading, late assignments, makeup work, and attendance policies are subject to change with advance notice, as I deem appropriate.