

**Syllabus**  
**Social and Political Philosophy (PHIL 3330-001)**  
**The University of Texas at Arlington**  
**21 August 2014**

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**Faculty Profile:** <https://www.uta.edu/mentis/public/#profile/profile/view/id/1305/>

**Course Blog:** <http://kbjcourseblog.blogspot.com/>

**Office Hours:** 11:00 to 12:00, TTh

**Meetings:** 9:30 to 10:50, TTh, 20 Trimble Hall

**Prelude:** "[T]he most valuable thing a student can learn in college is how to think, how to study, how to learn, how to acquire and process new information" ([Irving M. Copi](#), *Introduction to Logic*, 7th ed. [New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986], viii).

**Description of Course Content:** Social and political philosophy (the name by which the field is known)<sup>1</sup> is a specialty within the discipline of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> One of the main topics within the field is justice, which is commonly divided into two types. **Retributive** justice concerns reward and punishment for good and bad behavior, respectively.<sup>3</sup> **Distributive** justice, which is the focus of this course, concerns the distribution of (1) goods that social life makes possible (such as income, wealth, health, and security) and (2) bads (evils) that social life makes necessary or inevitable (such as taxation, military service, and onerous, dirty, or hazardous work).<sup>4</sup> We will examine five theories of distributive justice in this course: **libertarianism** (which views justice as entitlement); **radical egalitarianism** (which views justice as equality); **liberal egalitarianism** (which views justice as fairness); **conservatism** (which views justice as desert); and **utilitarianism** (which views justice as utility). The aim of the course is not to indoctrinate<sup>5</sup> you but to educate<sup>6</sup> you about the various theories that shape our social and political discourse, both in academia and in society generally. There are no prerequisites, but the course will be difficult for anyone who has not had a previous philosophy course.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** Students who (1) read the course material assiduously, (2) attend all classes, (3) listen to the lectures attentively, (4) make good notes, (5) participate in classroom discussions, and (6) study properly (preferably with one or more other students) will be able to (1) state the various theories of distributive justice; (2) analyze and reconstruct the arguments of the authors of

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<sup>1</sup> See the entry of that name by Robert L. Simon in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2d ed., ed. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1599-607. Simon says (sorry) that it is "useful to conceive of the field broadly as the clarification and justification of principles underlying social and political practices" (ibid., 1600).

<sup>2</sup> Analytic philosophy (as opposed to Continental philosophy) emphasizes "clarity, careful analysis, rigorous argumentation, and detailed attention to language" (Harvey Siegel, "Philosophy of Education, Epistemological Issues In," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2d ed., ed. Donald M. Borchert [Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006], 7:355-60, at 355).

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971), "retribution" means "Repayment, recompense, return, for some service, merit, etc." Etymologically, "retributive" derives from the Latin words *re-* (back) and *tribuĕre* (to give, assign, grant, or deliver).

<sup>4</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971), "distribution" means "The action of dividing or dealing out or bestowing in portions among a number of recipients; apportionment, allotment." Etymologically, "distributive" derives from the Latin words *dis-* (in various directions) and *tribuĕre* (to give, assign, grant, or deliver).

<sup>5</sup> According to the *Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide* (1999), to indoctrinate is to "teach (a person or group) systematically or for a long period to accept (esp. partisan or tendentious) ideas uncritically."

<sup>6</sup> According to the *Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide* (1999), to educate is to "give intellectual, moral, and social instruction to (a pupil, esp. a child), esp. as a formal and prolonged process."

the essays we read; and (3) state and discuss the main criticisms of (objections to) these arguments.

**Required Textbooks and Other Course Materials:** There are no books for you to purchase. All course materials are available free of charge (except for the paper on which to print them) from the UTA library (online) or from the course blog, which is accessible from any computer that is connected to the Internet. Each student is responsible for locating and printing these materials. (See the handout entitled “Reading List” for details; it is incorporated herein by reference.) From time to time, I will post additional materials (in the form of handouts) on the course blog. You are responsible for all such postings, so print and study them as they appear.

**Interlude:** “When you come to any passage you don’t understand, *read it again*: if you *still* don’t understand it, *read it again*: if you fail, even after *three* readings, very likely your brain is getting a little tired. In that case, just put the book away, and take to other occupations, and next day, when you come to it fresh, you will very likely find that it is *quite easy*” ([Charles Lutwidge Dodgson](#), quoted in Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, *An Introduction to Logic* [New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962], 121 [italics in original] [first published in 1934]).

**Descriptions of Major Assignments and Examinations:** There are four graded items: (1) A take-home examination, which constitutes 30% of your grade. This examination will be distributed at the end of class on Tuesday, 23 September, and will be due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, 30 September. (2) A take-home examination, which constitutes 30% of your grade. This examination will be distributed at the end of class on Thursday, 23 October, and will be due at the beginning of class on Thursday, 30 October. (3) A take-home examination, which constitutes 30% of your grade. This examination will be distributed at the end of class on Tuesday, 2 December, which is our final day of class for the semester, and will be due—in the classroom, to me personally—on Tuesday, 9 December, between 9:15 and 10:15 AM. (See the handout entitled “Requirements for Take-Home Examinations” for details; it is incorporated herein by reference.) (4) Classroom attendance, which constitutes 10% of your grade. (See below for details.) The aim of the examinations is to test the breadth and depth of your knowledge and skill. You are responsible for *all* the readings, handouts (if any), blog posts, lectures, and discussions (yes, discussions). I do not duplicate lectures in my office or provide notes to students; nor do I allow audio or video recording of my lectures (unless required by law under the Americans with Disabilities Act). If you miss a class, your only recourse is to ask another student for assistance. I *strongly* recommend that you find a study partner the first week of class and meet regularly with this partner during the semester to go over the course material. I do not give quizzes, assign homework, or permit extra credit. Five points will be deducted for each *day* (not each *class period*) an examination is late.

**Attendance:** At the University of Texas at Arlington, the taking of attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students’ academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this course, I have established the following attendance policy: Each student is allowed to miss two of the 28 classes (I do not count the first day of class on 21 August) before it begins to cut into your grade. Here is a chart:

Classes Attended (of 28)	Attendance Score
26 through 28	100
25	96

24	92
23	88
22	85
21	81
20	77
19	73
18	69
17	65
16	62
15	58
14	54
0 through 13	50

Do not attempt to explain, excuse, or justify an absence. My policy is not that you are allowed two *unexcused* absences; it is that you are allowed two *absences*. If you expect attendance to be a problem, do not take the course. If attendance *becomes* a problem, you may wish to drop the course rather than receive a poor or failing grade. The last drop day of the semester is Wednesday, 29 October. Please do not ask me to add up your days of attendance (or, conversely, your absences). I will perform this task only once, at the end of the semester, immediately prior to calculating grades.

**Grading:** The maximum score on each of the three examinations is 100. The maximum attendance score is 100. I will assign grades on the basis of a 10% scale, which means that a final score of 90 or higher is an A, 80 to 89.9 a B, and so forth.<sup>7</sup> Here is an example. Suppose a given student receives scores of 82, 75, and 83 on the three examinations and a score of 73 for attendance. Here is the calculation:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 82 \times .3 = 24.6 \\
 75 \times .3 = 22.5 \\
 83 \times .3 = 24.9 \\
 73 \times .1 = 07.3 \\
 \hline
 79.3
 \end{array}$$

This student would receive a C in the course. Note that the student's poor attendance cost him or her a grade, for the three examination scores average 80.

**Postlude:** "[E]veryone needs to be taught some philosophy (or, better, what philosophy is and how to do it) in school and in higher education. [P]hilosophy is not an option which some people may take up for their own interest or amusement, but a vital piece of equipment for every person—as vital as a mastery of their native language, or elementary mathematics, or anything else. There is no reason to disbelieve, and plenty of reasons to believe, that even quite young children can do philosophy; certainly all should have adequate experience of it before their education is over. Philosophers must fight for their share of the curriculum" (John Wilson, *What Philosophy Can Do* [Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1986], 152).

What follows is university boilerplate.

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<sup>7</sup> The University of Texas at Arlington describes a grade of A as "Excellent," a grade of B as "Good," a grade of C as "Fair," a grade of D as "Passing, Below Average," and a grade of F as "Failure." See the section entitled "Grades and Grading Policies" in the University Catalog.

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they [sic] do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Title IX:** The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to upholding U.S. Federal Law "Title IX" such that no member of the UT Arlington community shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. For more information, visit [www.uta.edu/titleIX](http://www.uta.edu/titleIX).

**Academic Integrity:** Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

**Electronic Communication:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as "lecture," "seminar," or "laboratory" shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**Final Review Week:** A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

**Emergency Exit Procedures:** Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

**Student Support Services:** UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at [www.uta.edu/resources](http://www.uta.edu/resources).