**PHIL 3120 Social and Political Philosophy**

UNT, Fall 2025

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| Adam Briggle | Class Location: WH 217 |
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**Course Description**

Humans are creatures with an elaborate “second nature” that is our social and political life. History is richly illustrated with a diversity of such ways of life. Each one is guided by beliefs about what constitutes a just order of things. Are some ways of life better than others? By what standards could we measure human societies and political regimes? This course surveys historical and contemporary thinkers in a quest for answers to these questions. It is a journey into the ideals that direct and bind communities and sometimes cause them to clash. These ideals pertain to excellence, justice, freedom, piety, community, rights, and happiness. We will be asking what these values mean and which kind of society best balances and promotes them.

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**Course Objectives**

1. To lead a more examined life by subjecting our assumptions and traditions to critical reflection from multiple perspectives.
2. To improve our character and our political reasoning skills.
3. To understand important philosophical concepts and theories, how they have developed through history, and how they shape current social and political discourse.

**Texts and Resources**

All required and optional texts and resources are available on the course Canvas site. Students are also required to have a spiral-bound notebook or similar journal.

**Evaluation**

35% Attendance

35% Journal Reflections

30% Journal Outlines

**Assignments**

1. Attendance: Showing up prepared, listening, and playing an active role in class is the best way to get the most out of this course.
2. Journal Reflections: Most days, you will submit a ca. one paragraph reflection (written in your notebook or journal) on a prompt provided from the class before. If students are unable to do handwritten reflections, they can submit them via the Discussion set up for this on Canvas.
3. Journal Outlines: For each assignment, write a ca. one-page outline in your journal. Each outline should have these parts, each clearly included: a) date of discussion b) title of piece being outlined; and c) an outline of 5-10 bullet points to capture the flow of the argument. You will turn in your journal/notebook once at the midterm for a check and then again at the end of the semester. If students cannot do a handwritten journal, we can arrange an alternative electronic or oral format.

**Course Schedule**

**Unit 1: Introductions and Foundations**

8/21: Martin Luther King, Jr. 1963. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

8/26: Plato, “Apology”

8/28: Disagreements and framings activities as we map the space of appearance

**Unit 2: Locke and the History of Western Political Thought**

Locke, John. 1689. “Essay Two” from *Two Treatises of Government*

9/2: Chapter 1 “Of Political Power” and Chapter 2 “Of the State of Nature”

9/4: Chapter 3 “Of the State of War” and Chapter 4 “Of Slavery”

9/9: Chapter 5 “Of Property”

9/11: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

9/16: Chapter 6 “Of Paternal Power”

9/18: Chapter 7 “Of Political or Civil Society”

9/23: Chapter 8 “Of the Beginning of Political Societies”

9/25: Chapter 9 “Of the Ends of Political Society and Government”

9/30: Chapter 10 “Of the Forms of a Commonwealth” and Chapter 11 “Of the Extent of the Legislative Power”

10/2: Chapter 12 “The Legislative, Executive and Federative Power of the Commonwealth” and Chapter 13 “Of the Subordination of the Powers of the Commonwealth”

10/7: Chapter 14 “Of Prerogative” and Chapter 15 “Of Paternal, Political, and Despotical Power, Considered Together”

10/9: Wrapping up Locke – summarize last chapters, big picture, and looking ahead

**Unit 3: The Battle for the Soul of America**

TBD but likely some from Patrick Deneen and Anne Applebaum

**Mission:** This course is offered in service of the noble goal of higher education to develop the intellectual and moral virtues. As stated by the UNT College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences: “Our mission is to kindle the thirst for truth, justice, and beauty; to foster cultural literacy and scientific investigation; and to cultivate thinking, speaking, and writing abilities characterized by clear expression and logically coherent, evidence-based arguments. We see these as the values, forms of knowledge, and skills most needed by citizens of a democracy...”

**Class Norms:** Let’s be friends and think about important and difficult things together. My job is not to tell anyone *what* to think or believe. My job is to help students think with greater clarity, care, and depth. This will involve making arguments from many perspectives (some unpopular), posing difficult ideas, examining assumptions, and challenging convictions. Also, no cell phones or internet usage in class. Let’s put down the devices and practice the art of focused attention.

**Disability Accommodation:**UNT Policy 16.001 Disability Accommodation for Students and Academic Units.

“The University of North Texas (UNT or University) does not discriminate on the basis of disability in admission, treatment, or access to its programs or activities, nor in employment in its programs or activities. The University is committed to providing equal educational access for qualified students with disabilities in accordance with state and federal laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as Amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In addition, the University is committed to making all programs and activities sponsored by UNT accessible, as required by the Texas Accessibility Standards and the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. To this end, all academic units are willing to make reasonable and appropriate adjustments to the classroom environment and the teaching, testing, or learning methodologies in order to facilitate equality of educational access for persons with disabilities.”

**Student Academic Integrity** UNT Policy 06.003 Student Academic Integrity Faculty Affairs.

“The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University’s actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence.”

**Generative AI** We are in a novel and rapidly changing situation with AI tools. To be candid, I really don’t know the best approach or the right answers here. I hope that we can discuss and learn together about this. In this course, you are allowed to use Generative AI (GenAI) tools such as Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini to support your learning and develop skills for a GenAI-oriented workforce. However, GenAI should complement, not replace, your own critical thinking or creative efforts (this is the part that is fuzzy to me!). If something seems unclear, please seek clarification (as if I will know?!). I have started using GenAI in my own research as an assistant to help me track down information, relate ideas to one another, and set thoughts into wider contexts. I am not planning to use GenAI for this course, but I will always disclose if, when, and how I do so, and I expect the same from you. In line with the UNT Honor Code, all work you submit must be your own. Using GenAI tools without attribution or relying on them to do the thinking/writing for you violates academic integrity and will be addressed according to university policy.