# PSCI 3310

# The Quest for Justice!!

## Instructor Information

Dr. Rafael Major – Rafael.Major@unt.edu

Sage Hall 320, 940-565-3305

Office Hours: T,TH 12:45-2:00, and by appointment.

**Course Description and Objectives[[1]](#footnote-1)**

This course examines the elusive nature of justice, questioning its meaning and whether it can be pursued by any means. Justice, often equated with equality, lacks a universal definition, and interpretations of “equality” vary widely. Civilization requires limits on achieving just ends, yet confusion persists. Can we find clarity?

Western political life faces a crisis, with liberal democracy under attack and its institutions—government, media, education, capitalism—widely distrusted. Enlightenment ideals, celebrated by Steven Pinker for reducing violence and increasing prosperity, have eroded meaning, leaving society reliant on work and entertainment. Postmodernists reject modernity’s belief in universal reason and humanity, criticizing its Western, patriarchal roots and environmental impact. This skepticism fuels doubt in reason as a guide to the good life.

The decline of liberal education, now often vocational, and rising partisanship further limit dialogue and compromise. Modernity rejected classical philosophy, which this course revisits through Machiavelli, who prioritized self-interest, and Marx, who envisioned a classless society. Both reflect modernity’s break from the classics, which balanced individual and communal needs.

Returning to Socrates and Plato, the course argues their insights remain vital. Socrates addresses human challenges like ignorance, while Plato’s *Republic* redefines justice as harmony in the soul and state, tempering political expectations. Philosophy, though seen as “useless” or “vicious,” tackles fundamental questions—justice, love, duty, and the balance between self-interest and community—offering a path through our modern crisis.

**Objectives:**

* Determine whether we should act justly or in our own best interest.
* Learn how to recognize and utilize deceptive arguments for either furthering justice or our own best interest.
* Learn how to recognize NPC’s and how to avoid or defeat them.
* Enhance writing skills to achieve our own best interest.

**Required Texts**

* *Machiavelli, The Prince. Trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. (Chicago)*
* *Aristophanes and Plato, Four Texts on Socrates. Trans. Grace S. and Tom West (Cornell)*
* *Plato, Republic. Trans. Allan Bloom (Basic)*
* *Marx, Selected Writings. (Hackett)*

**No Class**

* September 1 Labor Day
* November 5-9
* November 24-28 Thanksgiving Break

 **Assignments and Grading:**

* In Class Assignments and Activities 20%
* Exam and Essay Machiavelli 16%
* Exam and Essay Marx 16%
* Exam and Essay Aristophanes 16%
* Exam and Essay Plato Republic 16%
* Exam and Essay Plato Apology 16%

**Grading**

90-100 – A

80-90 – B

70-79 – C

60-69 – D

50-0 – F

**Tentative Reading Schedule**

1. *Introduction: “The Best Human Life??” (1 class)*

***Origins of Modern Political Philosophy: Machiavelli***

1. *Prince, Dedicatory Letter, chs. 1, 3. [Focus on NM and Louis XII and their goals]*
2. *Prince, chs. 4, 6, 7 [Focus on Moses (the founder), Cesare Borgia]*
3. *Prince, chs. 8, 10 (2nd last sentence only!), 11, 13 [Focus on Agathocles, Alexander VI and King David—are they good guys or bad guys??]*
4. *Prince, chs., 14-15. [Focus on Achilles and disentangling ch. 15’s “qualities”]*
5. *Prince, chs. 16-18 [Focus on “true” liberality, cruelty and its mysterious opposite, and “faith”]*
6. *Prince, chs. 19 (on Severus), 21. [Focus on Marcus Aurelius, Severus, KingFerdinand’s “pious cruelty”]*
7. *Prince, chs. 25, 26. [Focus on Fortune/Chance, NM’s final self-presentation]*

***The ultimate “science” of political thought?--Marxism***

1. *Marx, Selected Writings: “Alienated Labor” (58-68); “Private Property and*

*Communism” (68-79); “Theses on Feuerbach” (99-101)*

1. *Marx, Selected Writings, “The German Ideology” (115-132, 140-42, 150-53);*
2. *“Communist Manifesto: I-II” (158-176) Note: Your Discussion Board #3\* Q is due by 11:59PM*
3. *Marx, Selected Writings, “Communist Manifesto: III-IV” (176-186); “Critique of the Gotha Program” (316-332)*

***Classical Political Philosophy***

*A) A Frenemy of Socrates: Aristophanes*

1. *Aristophanes' Clouds, lines 1-411. [Characters of Strepsiades, Pheidippides,*

*Socrates and his interaction with Strepsiades]*

1. *Clouds, lines 412-866. [The Clouds; Socrates’ failure to educate Strepsiades]*
2. *Clouds, lines 867-1104 [Just v. Unjust Speeches’ Debate]*
3. *Clouds; lines 1105-1511 [Results of Socrates’ education of Pheidippides;*

*Strepsiades’ Revenge]*

*B) Socrates and the Meaning of (and our Expectations for) Justice*

*Thanksgiving (no class)*

1. *Republic, bk I (327a-331d; Cephalus: Justice as Useful)*

*W. Mar. 21—Republic, bk 1 (331d-336a; Polemarchus: Justice as Noble).*

1. *Republic, bk. I (336b-344c; Thrasymachus on justice as foolishness; 344c-354c [and see Socrates’ comments at 498c-d!] Socrates’ Qualified Refutation of Thrasymachus).*
2. *Republic, bk. II (357a-362c; Glaucon’s questions on justice: how is it good or noble?)*
3. *Republic, bk. II (362d-367e; Adeimantus’s doubts about justice: What’s it for?)*
4. *Republic, bk. II (367e-383c; the healthy and “feverish” cities, Socrates’ theology);*
5. *Republic, bk. III (386a-394d; Achilles and the fear of death) and (412b-417b; the “noble lie”)*
6. *Republic, bk. IV (427e-441c, virtues and parts of soul; 443b-e, justice revisited).*
7. *Republic, Bk. VI (484a-491b; ship of State); bk. VII (514a-521b; the cave)*

*A) The Apology of Socrates: What has he been up to?*

1. *Plato's Apology of Socrates, 17a-28b. [Old and New Accusers; Delphic Oracle story; Socrates’ Quarrel with Meletus]*
2. *Apology, 28b-36d. [Socrates’ challenging Achilles; Arginusae/Leon; Conviction]*
3. *Apology, 36e-42a [Penalty Phase; Parting Speeches to Friends and Enemies]*

## How to Succeed in this Course

### **Communication:** Communication Expectations:

1. This is a face-to-class so the best way to communicate with me is face-to-face. I am usually free after class and have flexible office hours.

2. Email: I have 300 UNT students this semester. I will try to answer emails within 48 hours Monday-Friday. Your grade will not suffer if I do not respond quickly enough. If you have a question about your grades in the course, talk with me rather than sending email.

3. Do not ask about bonus points, extra assignments, or “something you can do” etc. to raise your grade. The only possible bonus points for the semester are “soup questions.” (And if you ask me what a “soup question” is, I will deduct points from your grade.)

Attendance is NOT part of the grade in this course when not engaged in class activities. In the event you are unable to attend class, you will be able to identify missing information from the exam review sheets that will be available at least one week before all exams.

 **Missing class during group assignments will be fatal to that portion of your grade.**

[**Academic Integrity Policy (PDF)**](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.049_Standard%20Syllabus%20Policy%20Statements_supplement.pdf)

## Artificial Intelligence

Prohibited Use: In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like [insert tool(s) here, e.g., Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini] is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy (https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003).

## Course Disruptions

Students will be notified by Eagle Alert if there is a campus closing that will impact a class and describe that the calendar is subject to change, citing the [Campus Closures Policy](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/15-006) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/15-006>).

## ADA accommodation statement:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it’s important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the Office of Disability Access website (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access).

1. This course is modeled on the format of Dr. Richard Ruderman at the University of North Texas. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)