

PHIL 170: SOCIAL ETHICS AND POLITICAL THOUGHT (SPRING 2017)
G311 VENABLE, MONDAY/WEDNESDAY 1:25-2:40

Professor Amy Berg
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OFFICE: 10 Caldwell Hall
OFFICE HOURS: Fridays 12:30-2:30 (or by appointment)

COURSE OVERVIEW

Winston Churchill famously remarked, "Democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried." With acrimony on all sides of the recent election, now is the time to ask whether Churchill was right. What is democracy good for? What are our obligations as citizens of a democracy? What challenges does democracy face, now and in the future? During this semester, we will investigate each of these questions:

- **What is democracy good for?** We begin by defining democracy and considering major arguments in favor and against it.
- **What are our obligations?** The main issue we will consider in the second section of the course is voting. Do we all have an obligation to vote, or could it ever be morally wrong to vote? What voting system should our society use? We will also briefly think about whether we should ever engage in civil disobedience.
- **What challenges does democracy face?** We end with a look forward to the challenges democracy faces, now and in the future. Do past and present racism and inequality affect the kind of democracy America should have?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

You will need:

- The readings. We will be using one book and a number of articles:
 - Most readings can be found in the course reader, which is available at the UNC Bookstore.
 - There are a few articles not in the reader, which I will post to Sakai.Complete all assigned readings before coming to class.
- Access to Sakai, where I will post the syllabus, readings, assignments, and other information.
- **You are required to bring the reading for the day to class.** Because of this course's technology policy (see below), that means that you **must print** the readings whenever they are not in the reader. If you have difficulty accessing a printer, please speak to me early in the semester.

Assignments: There are seven assignments due in this course:

- Two take-home exams (3 pages and 4 pages), due by the start of class on February 13 and March 6.
- A 4-5 page final paper, due on May 4.
- A short in-class debate, held on April 3/5.
- Three short reading responses, due throughout the semester. In each of these assignments, you must reflect on some aspect of the reading—something you didn't understand, a question or objection you had, etc. Each response should be between 75 and 200 words long. When you turn these reading responses in is largely up to you; however, the first **must** be turned in **by January 31**, and the second **must** be turned in **by March 7**. These

assignments are due by 5:00 pm on the day **before** our course meets (that is, by 5:00 on Sundays and Tuesdays). Submit them via Sakai.

All assignments will be graded anonymously; you should put your PID, *not* your name, on them. **You must turn in all assignments (including all reading responses) in order to pass the course.**

Attendance and participation:

- Participation is part of your final grade in this course; to participate, you need to attend. You are allowed **two unexcused absences** over the course of the semester; if you must be absent more than that, please speak to me (and bring documentation from a doctor or dean). I will deduct half a percent from your participation grade for each additional unexcused absence.
- But participation is more than just attendance! In order to receive full participation points, come ready to make active, serious, charitable contributions to class discussion. **I reserve the right to call on students at random if you are not participating actively.** If you are not comfortable participating in class, I will count active, serious, charitable visits to my office hours toward your participation grade.

The grade breakdown is:

- **Take-home exam 1:** 15%
- **Take-home exam 2:** 25%
- **Final paper:** 35%
- **Debate:** 9%
- **Reading responses:** 6%
- **Participation:** 10%

The grade scale is:

	A: 93-100%	A-: 90-92%
B+: 87-89%	B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%
C+: 77-79%	C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%
D+: 67-69%	D: 60-66%	
F: below 60%		

Lateness policy: Assignments must be turned in at the start of class on the day they are due. **There are no exceptions unless you make prior arrangements with me.** I will deduct three percent of your final grade if the paper is turned in the day it's due any time after the start of class and one-third of a grade for each day after that that the paper is late (so, for example, a paper that would have gotten 100% if it were turned in on time on Tuesday would get 91% if turned in on Thursday).

On writing: Your success in this class depends on the ability to express yourself clearly. Here are some writing resources I recommend:

- **The Writing Center** (SASB North; writingcenter.unc.edu/) will talk through ideas, work through a draft with you, and generally give advice at all stages of the writing process.
- **The Learning Center** (SASB North; <http://learningcenter.unc.edu/>) has a variety of resources, including workshops and peer tutoring, that can help you succeed in this and your other courses.
- **Style**, by Joseph M. Williams (University of Chicago Press, 1990) is an excellent guide to clear and forceful writing. It's widely and cheaply available at bookstores and through Amazon.

Other policies

- **Electronic devices (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) are not allowed in class**, except by permission. If you need to use an electronic device in order to be successful in this course, please speak with me.
- **You must observe UNC's Honor Code.** All work you turn in must be written by you, without anyone else's assistance, and not self-plagiarized (that is, you may not turn in work you have written for a previous class). I am happy to talk to you if you have any questions about the Honor Code, or you can consult <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/>. If I suspect that you may be in violation of the Honor Code, I will not hesitate to report you to the Office of Student Conduct.
- If you need an accommodation for a disability or for religious, athletic, or any other reasons, please let me know during the first week of the course. If you have concerns about accessibility, I encourage you to visit UNC's Accessibility Resources and Service website (<https://accessibility.unc.edu/about-ars>) and speak with me about your concerns.
- You are welcome and encouraged to come to my office hours or make an appointment with me whenever you want to talk about the course material, your assignments, or any other philosophy-related concerns you have.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS (* = NOT IN READER; PLEASE PRINT AND BRING TO CLASS)

Wednesday, January 11: Course introduction

Reading: None

Monday, January 16: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY – NO CLASS

Reading: None

Wednesday, January 18: Defining democracy

Reading: *Gilens and Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics"

Monday, January 23: Arguments for democracy

Reading: None

Wednesday, January 25: Arguments for democracy

Reading: Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (ch. 3)

Monday, January 30: Arguments for democracy

Reading: Cumming-Bruce and Erlanger, "Swiss Ban Building of Minarets on Mosques"; Dearden, "Anger over 'Bregret' as Leave Voters Say They Thought UK Would Stay in EU"

Take-home exam 1 assigned Monday

Tuesday at 5pm is your last chance to turn in your first reading response on time

Wednesday, February 1: Arguments for democracy

Reading: Dewey, *Creative Democracy*

Monday, February 6: Arguments for democracy

Reading: Brettschneider, *Democratic Rights*

Wednesday, February 8: Arguments against democracy

Reading: None

Monday, February 13: Arguments against democracy

Reading: Plato, *The Republic*

Take-home exam 1 due Monday

Wednesday, February 15: Arguments against democracy

Reading: Jagger, "Traditional Marxism and Human Nature"

Monday, February 20: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: None

Take-home exam 2 assigned Monday

Wednesday, February 22: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: Lomasky and Brennan, "Is There a Duty to Vote?"

Monday, February 27: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: Brennan and Sayre-McCord, "Voting and Causal Responsibility"

Wednesday, March 1: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: *Lacroix, "A Liberal Defense of Compulsory Voting"

Monday, March 6: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: Brennan, "Polluting the Polls"

Take-home exam 2 due Monday

Tuesday at 5pm is your last chance to turn in your second reading response on time

Wednesday, March 8: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: *Guerrero, "Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative" (beginning-p. 154)

Monday, March 13: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

Reading: None

Wednesday, March 15: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

Reading: None

Monday, March 20: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: *Guerrero, "Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative" (p. 154-end)

Debate groups assigned Monday

Wednesday, March 22: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: *Ackerman and Fishkin, "Deliberation Day"

Monday, March 27: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: Mill, "Considerations on Representative Government" (ch. 8)

Wednesday, March 29: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: Brink, *Mill's Progressive Principles*

Monday, April 3: Voting debates

Reading: None

Wednesday, April 5: Voting debates

Reading: None

Monday, April 10: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: King, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

Final paper assigned Monday

Wednesday, April 12: Citizens' obligations in a democracy

Reading: None

Monday, April 17: Challenges for democracy

Reading: Blum, *I'm Not a Racist, But...*

Wednesday, April 19: Challenges for democracy

Reading: *Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto"

Monday, April 24: Challenges for democracy

Reading: Young, "The Politics of Difference"

Tuesday at 5pm is your last chance to turn in your third reading response on time
Wednesday, April 26: Challenges for democracy
Reading: Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

Thursday, May 4: Final and course wrap-up
Final paper due Thursday at 12 pm