

# CEL 394: Justice and Virtue: Ancient Political Thought

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## Course and Faculty Information

**Course Description:** *What is justice? This course explores this question through the lens of ancient political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. Students will philosophize alongside great ancient minds through critical reading, analysis, and comparison of primary source texts in a participatory classroom environment. They will further enrich their perspective on perennial themes at the heart of politics and ethics: justice, citizenship, political and personal virtues, the rule of law, and the origins and purpose of political life.*

What is justice? What is virtue or excellence? How ought we to live together and live well? Who can teach us these things, or must we learn them for ourselves? What's the relationship between our education as citizens and our personal or communal search for wisdom? To begin the course, we will examine two texts outside the classical philosophical tradition that raise important questions about the purpose, meaning, and limits of instruction in just and virtuous living: *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* (*Mishlei* and *Qohelet*) from the Hebrew Bible. We will then study Plato's dialogue on sophistry called *Protagoras*, in which a young person desires to learn from a famous teacher how to live their best life, and a dialogue on the teachability of virtue called *Meno*. To consider how these political and moral questions fit into a broader picture of human experience, we will read the surviving work of the lyric poet Sappho of Lesbos, whose book, we are told by certain authorities, Plato liked to keep under his pillow! To continue our engagement with the Socratic tradition of political thought, we will carefully consider Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero's *On Obligations* (or *On Duties*).

This course will rely heavily on student-led discussion to encourage active learning, and students will be expected to write analytical papers to complement class discussion, to hone writing skills, and to engage in the course's themes more critically. Honors contracts are available for this class.

**Time and Location:** TTh 1:30-2:45; ART246

**Instructor:** Jordan Dorney

**Email:** [jmdorney@asu.edu](mailto:jmdorney@asu.edu)

**Office Phone:** 480-727-2204

**Office:** 6660 Coor Hall

**Office Hours:** Thursday 2-4. I am happy to schedule other appointments via email.

# Course Learning Outcomes

The readings, discussions, and assignments in this course are designed to enhance your ability to:

- **read** texts discussing fundamental political and ethical ideas in order to understand their arguments, including their premises, assumptions, implications, and evidence
- **summarize** competing conceptions of politics within what is called the classical tradition, especially as these relate to debates about justice and virtue
- **compare** and **contrast** the arguments made and positions taken within classical Greek thought, as well as those from alternative religious or philosophical traditions
- **apply** insights from these debates to ongoing political and social questions
- **recognize** and **explain** some of the challenges presented by this historical analysis for modern, pluralistic, constitutional democracies
- **communicate** clearly and effectively through critical discourse in speech and writing

## Texts

To facilitate classroom discussion, please purchase the following editions of each text and always bring the day's assigned reading to class:

*The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes*, trans. Robert Alter (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

Plato, *Protagoras* and *Meno*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Ithaca: Cornell, 2004).

*Sappho*, trans. Mary Barnard (Oakland: University of California, 2019).

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012.).

Cicero, *On Obligations*, trans. P. G. Walsh, (Oxford: Oxford, 2000).

## Course Requirements

### Seminar Participation (15%):

The foundation of this seminar is the reading and discussion of our shared texts. This portion of your grade reflects your **regular attendance** and your **comments, questions, and conversation** for each reading assignment/class session. Be sure to bring the day's reading to each class. Attendance is expected for all sessions of the course, but you may mitigate potential penalties by scheduling a meeting with the instructor to discuss the material covered during an absence. Of course, you are always encouraged to come to office hours or schedule an appointment to supplement class discussion. Please see all relevant policies regarding excused absences covered by ACD 304-02, "Missed Classes

Due to University-Sanctioned Activities,” and ACD 304-04 “Accommodations for Religious Practices.”

### Reading Responses (15%):

It is your personal and civic duty to be well-prepared for class discussion, as a courtesy to your fellow students and as the basis for your own understanding of the course materials. To that end, you will complete for each day’s reading a **short (150-250 word) reading response** in advance of class discussion. These should be posted to Canvas no later than **one hour before the scheduled class time** to be considered eligible for credit. What questions did you have when reading the text? What was exciting, weird, funny, inscrutable, etc.? What do you think is worth discussing? Be specific, and avoid summary. Our conversations should be student-led and oriented toward critical engagement with the texts. Ordinarily you are expected to submit a response even if absent, but please communicate with your instructor if you are unable to do so (e.g., if you need an extension due to illness).

### Interpretive Essays (20%/25%/25%):

You will write a total of **three interpretive essays (1500 words; 1500 words; 2000 words)**. Each of these will **develop and support a thesis** concerning the **interpretation, analysis, and evaluation** of course readings. You will be given a choice of prompts as well as the option to write on a topic of your selection. You will receive **extensive feedback** and will be expected to **incorporate this guidance** into upcoming assignments. Papers are due February 12, March 26, and [final exam date]—spaced so that you have time to process and understand feedback.

Do not use any outside sources or scholarship; focus your writing solely on close reading of and argument about the relevant texts. Proceed immediately to a clear statement of your thesis and support the same with evidence. These assignments call for relatively short papers, and so a premium will be placed on efficiency and economy of thought. Consult the specific instructions and prompts for each assignment and the interpretive essay rubric for more detail.

## Grading

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	E
100-94	93-90	89-87	86-83	82-80	79-77	76-73	72-70	69-65	<65

## Submitting Assignments / Technology Support

All assignments, unless otherwise announced, **MUST** be submitted to the designated area of Canvas. Do not submit an assignment via email except in case of Canvas outage. For technical issues, contact Canvas support; if something seems incorrectly configured in the Canvas shell itself (e.g., incorrect due date prevents submission), contact the instructor for assistance.

## Grading Procedure

Grades reflect your performance on assignments and adherence to deadlines. Grades on assignments will be available in Canvas. All papers will be graded, with a completed rubric, in-line comments, and other feedback, in a timely manner so that you can understand and apply them to the next assignment.

## Absences and Late or Missed Assignments

Attendance is expected for all sessions of this course. See course requirements for seminar participation above.

Notify the instructor **BEFORE** an assignment is due if an urgent situation arises and you are unable to submit the assignment on time. Late reading responses or papers will not ordinarily be accepted without prior authorization for an extension. Communicate with the instructor as soon as possible. If you need an extension, ask!

Follow the appropriate University policies to request an [accommodation for religious practices](#) or to accommodate a missed assignment [due to University-sanctioned activities](#).

## Communicating With the Instructor

### Email

ASU email is an [official means of communication](#) among students, faculty, and staff. Students are expected to read and act upon email in a timely fashion. Students bear the responsibility of missed messages and should check their ASU-assigned email regularly. ***All instructor correspondence will be sent to your ASU email account.***

### Office Hours

You are always encouraged to stop by my office during office hours (or to set up an appointment via email) to ask any questions you might have or to discuss course material, related topics, potential courses, a SCETL major or minor, etc. Feel free to come with any concerns or feedback. Office hours can be under-utilized, but they are also a great opportunity to delve into your papers (before or after submission) and enhance your experience in the course in other ways.

### Community Forum

This course also uses a discussion topic in Canvas called "Community Forum" for general questions and comments about the course. Prior to posting a question or comment, check the syllabus, announcements, and existing posts to ensure it's not redundant. You are encouraged to

respond to the questions of your classmates. Email questions of a personal nature to your instructor.

## **Academic Integrity**

Academic honesty is expected of all students in all examinations, papers, and laboratory work, academic transactions and records. The possible sanctions include, but are not limited to, appropriate grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>

## **Disability Resources**

Students who feel they will need disability accommodations in this class but have not registered with the Student Accessibility and Inclusive Learning Services office should contact SAILS immediately. The SAILS Tempe office is located on the first floor of the Matthews Center Building. SAILS staff can also be reached at (480) 965-1234 (V) or (480) 965-9000 (TTY). For additional information, visit: [www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc](http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc).

## **Policy Against Threatening Behavior**

All incidents and allegations of violent or threatening conduct by an ASU student (whether on-or off campus) must be reported to the ASU Police Department (ASU PD) and the Office of the Dean of Students. If either office determines that the behavior poses or has posed a serious threat to personal safety or to the welfare of the campus, the student will not be permitted to return to campus or reside in any ASU residence hall until an appropriate threat assessment has been completed and, if necessary, conditions for return are imposed. ASU PD, the Office of the Dean of Students, and other appropriate offices will coordinate the assessment in light of the relevant circumstances.

## **Reporting Title IX Violations**

Title IX is a federal law that provides that no person be excluded on the basis of sex from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. Both Title IX and university policy make clear that sexual violence and harassment based on sex is prohibited. An individual who believes they have been subjected to sexual violence or harassed on the basis of sex can seek support, including counseling and academic support, from the university. If you or someone you know has been harassed on the basis of sex or sexually assaulted, you can find information and resources at <https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/faqs>.

As a mandated reporter, I am obligated to report any information I become aware of regarding alleged acts of sexual discrimination, including sexual violence and dating violence. ASU

Counseling Services, <https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling>, is available if you wish discuss any concerns confidentially and privately.

## Policy on Sexual Discrimination

Arizona State University is committed to providing an environment free of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation for the entire university community, including all students, faculty members, staff employees, and guests. ASU expressly prohibits [discrimination](#), [harassment](#), and [retaliation](#) by employees, students, contractors, or agents of the university based on any protected status: race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and genetic information.

## Copyrighted Materials

Students must refrain from uploading to any course shell, discussion board, or website used by the course instructor or other course forum, material that is not the student's original work, unless the students first comply with all applicable copyright laws; faculty members reserve the right to delete materials on the grounds of suspected copyright infringement.

## Schedule of Readings

### I. Justice as Righteousness; Virtue as Vanity

Jan 11: Introduction and  
*Proverbs*, Ch. 1  
Jan 13: *Proverbs*, Ch. 2-15  
Jan 18: *Proverbs*, Ch. 16-31  
Jan 20: *Ecclesiastes*, Ch. 1-4  
Jan 25: *Ecclesiastes*, Ch. 5-8  
Jan 27: *Ecclesiastes*, Ch. 9-12

### II. Learning the Art of Politics™

Feb 1: *Protagoras* 309a-317c  
Feb 3: *Protagoras* 317d-328d  
Feb 8: *Protagoras* 328d-338c  
Feb 10: *Protagoras* 338c-349d

### First Paper Due Feb 12

Feb 15: *Protagoras* 349e-362a  
Feb 17: *Meno* 70a-80e  
Feb 22: *Meno* 81a-90b  
Feb 24: *Meno* 90b-100c  
Mar 1: Sappho, Parts 1-3  
Mar 3: Sappho, Parts 4-6  
\*\*Spring Break: Mar 6-13\*\*

### III. Good and Happy

Mar 15: Aristotle, *Ethics*,  
Book I  
Mar 17: *Ethics*, Book II  
Mar 22: *Ethics*, Book III  
Mar 24: *Ethics*, Book IV

### Second Paper Due Mar 26

Mar 29: *Ethics*, Book V  
Mar 31: *Ethics*, Book VI  
Apr 5: *Ethics*, Book VII  
Apr 7: *Ethics*, Book VIII  
Apr 12: *Ethics*, Book IX  
Apr 14: *Ethics*, Book X  
Apr 19: Cicero, *On Duties*,  
Book I  
Apr 21: *On Duties*, Book I  
Apr 26: *On Duties*, Book III  
Apr 28: Review and  
Conclusion  
**Third Paper Due [Day of  
Scheduled Final Exam]**

## Instructions for Interpretive Essays

For each paper assignment, I'd like you to write an essay of around 1500 words (2000 for the third paper), in response to a prompt or on a topic of your choice. That is, in addition to a few options provided to you, you may **formulate a thesis** centered on any argument or idea you have encountered since your last paper assignment was due. When I grade your paper, the process will follow what I describe below, as I look at your **introduction, evidence, and argument**. See the rubric for more specifics and to get examples of "A", "B", "C" and "D"/"E" work in particular categories (*strength/clarity of thesis, efficiency/economy of thought, textual analysis, quality of writing*). There are many ways to write well, and so these are not meant to be exhaustive! You will probably find some benefit in comparing descriptions within a particular category: what distinguishes an OK thesis from an excellent one? Read each description carefully. When I return your papers, you will find more specific comments in each category and on the overall paper where helpful.

First, I will examine your **introduction**. I will ask: does this introduction do what a good introduction should? Does it clearly identify the question that your paper will address? Does it clearly identify the author(s) and text(s)—and the specific parts of the text(s)—that you will be examining in order to answer that question? Most importantly, does your paper have a clear thesis statement? Consider that the course itself and our discussions are the context for these papers; you don't need to introduce general concepts or give a general historical or philosophical overview that is extraneous to your specific argument. The cogency of your analysis will depend in large part on the strength and specificity of your thesis, and so your introduction will contribute to the rating (excellent to poor, or A to D/E) for your thesis as well as establish a baseline for the other categories.

Second, I will turn to the body of your paper and look to see how well you support your argument with **evidence**. For these papers, most and perhaps *all* of your evidence will come from one or more of the texts we have read in class. I will ask: did this paper provide sufficient evidence to justify your analysis and interpretation of the text(s) you chose to examine? Did this paper provide sufficient evidence to justify your evaluation? Read what I say in the rubric about the difference between using evidence "offensively" rather than "defensively," because...

Third, I will examine the quality of your **argumentation**. I will ask: what is the quality of your interpretation and analysis of the text you examine? Do you merely summarize the text? Or do you engage with it in a more sophisticated fashion? Do you clearly explain what you think the text means, when this is necessary or when the text is ambiguous? Is your explanation persuasive? Do you just repeat everything the author says, or do you use the text in a way that corresponds to the specifics of your argument? In short, I will ask, do you provide a thoughtful, interesting, well-defended account of what you think the text you are examining is saying?

Please upload your paper to Canvas in .doc, .docx, or .pdf format by the deadline listed for each assignment. If you need an extension, please contact me as soon as possible.

### Interpretive Essay Rubric

Criteria	Ratings			
Strength and Clarity of Thesis	<p><b>Excellent</b> The thesis clearly establishes a unified claim in response to the prompt, offers a nuanced argument, points to specific features of the text(s) to be examined, and provides a sound structure for the paper.</p>	<p><b>Good</b> The thesis offers a series of responses to the prompt but may lack a unified logical claim; OR the thesis may make general but not specific references to manageable portions of the text(s); OR the thesis may be deficient in (but not lacking) an identifiable, defensible, and productive structure.</p>	<p><b>Fair</b> Although an argument is present in the body of the paper, the thesis merely restates the question(s) of the prompt as a statement. There is little or no indication of the specifics of the argument or the texts or passages under consideration.</p>	<p><b>Poor</b> The thesis is insubstantial or absent. Arguments which demonstrably do not respond to the prompt will always be marked poor.</p>
Efficiency and Economy of Thought	<p><b>Excellent</b> The paper wastes no time at all in advancing its claim and supporting it with evidence. There is no extraneous material, no 'personal opinion', no outside material at all. Words are carefully chosen, sentences carefully formed, and paragraphs carefully constructed to maximize what may be accomplished in the space available.</p>	<p><b>Good</b> The paper, on the whole, argues efficiently but has a degree of "fluff": unnecessary introduction, repeated points, overly and unjustifiably long quotations (text dumps without analysis). None of these may materially impact the argument.</p>	<p><b>Fair</b> The paper argues rather inefficiently and has a moderate degree of "fluff": unnecessary introduction, repeated points, overly and unjustifiably long quotations (text dumps without analysis).</p>	<p><b>Poor</b> The paper is substantially too short (or substantially too long). Regardless of word count, the paper takes a very long time to say anything at all or goes through material with no regard for the space needed to make a clear and convincing argument.</p>
Textual Analysis	<p><b>Excellent</b> The paper consistently and persuasively makes appropriate use of the text. Evidence is not merely "defensive" but "offensive": the paper does not seek only to prove that the claims being made do in fact exist somewhere in the text but rather shows, through close reading, how the text introduces subtlety and nuance that may not be apparent on a first read-through. The paper does not attempt to interpret entire books or other unmanageable length passages, nor are quotations cherry-picked at random. Instead, the paper addresses coherent and highly relevant portions of the text.</p>	<p><b>Good</b> The paper is inconsistent though persuasive in its use of the text. The level of analysis is at times inappropriate to the prompt. The paper may at times fail to maintain focus in accounting for the larger structure of the text or fail to connect details together or to the argument of the paper.</p>	<p><b>Fair</b> The level of analysis is inappropriate to the prompt AND the text is merely used "defensively." The paper may fail to interpret details or account for context.</p>	<p><b>Poor</b> There is no textual analysis, whether because the paper exclusively summarizes the material OR reflects only personal opinion or emotive evaluation OR fails to engage the text at all.</p>
Quality of Writing	<p><b>Excellent</b> The paper is virtually free from typographical, semantic, or syntactical error.</p>	<p><b>Good</b> To a degree that does not substantially detract from the ability to communicate a clear and persuasive argument, the paper contains a low number of infelicities in language.</p>	<p><b>Fair</b> To a degree that substantially impedes the clear communication of ideas, the paper contains a moderate number of infelicities in language.</p>	<p><b>Poor</b> The paper is burdened with a high degree of serious errors in writing and style that make it almost impossible to understand its meaning.</p>