

IDS 2935: What is the Common Good?

Quest 1: The Examined Life

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- Fall 2024
- 100% In-Person, no GTAs, 35 residential students
- MWF Period 6

Instructor

- Dr. Carlos Casanova
- MWF, 12:50-1:40 PM
- ccasanova1@ufl.edu

Course Description

What, if anything, is the common good? The idea of the common good—which is to say, the good of a community *qua* community—is fascinating and practically fundamental. Contemporary political debates, and the recent pandemic, provide a natural opportunity to reconsider what it means to pursue the good of a community as a whole, and how it is the only principle that can harmonize the good of the individuals within the community. This course explores the concept of the common good, as articulated in philosophy and illustrated in drama, literature, and film. We begin by studying the blueprint for a concept of the common good that Aristotle sets out in the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, and its full development in St. Thomas Aquinas. Armed with this theoretical background, we apply ourselves to questions such as: how should regimes and authority figures provide for the common good through the law? What does pursuing the common good involve when the demands of justice are in tension with general beneficence? How compatible is value pluralism with the pursuit of the common good? We will read Sophocles, Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and St. Thomas More, among others, to reflect on the nature of leadership, justice, dissent, and principle, and how we can pursue the common good while remaining true to our conscience. In the last weeks of the course, we turn to three contemporary subjects—the family, the environment, and public health, particularly in the recent pandemic—to consider how the pursuit of the common good shapes prudent practical reasoning about each issue.

Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities

This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

Materials and Supply Fees

1. All readings will be made available in Canvas or provided in class; bibliographic information is included in the weekly schedule.
2. Materials and Supplies Fees: n/a

Required Textbooks and Software

Average: 20-25 pages per week.

Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, qq. 90, 91 (aa. 1-3), 95.

Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, chapters 121-126.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, books 1, 2, 5 (1-7 and 10), 8 (chapter 1) and 10 (9).

Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace* (Berkeley: Counterpoint 2002): p. 135-143 (“Men and Women in Search of the Common Ground”); 182-194, 195-204.

John Finnis, “Marriage: A Basic and Exigent Good”, *The Monist* 91:3/4 (2008): p. 388-406.

Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

Abraham Lincoln, letters to Hodges and to Erastus Corning and others.

Alasdair MacIntyre. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth 1999), pp. 99-146.

St. Thomas More, “Dialogue on Conscience”

Plato, *Crito*, in *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943).

Gustav Radbruch, *Laws that are not Right and Right Above the Laws*;

Sophocles, *Antigona*.

Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, in *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 32-93.

Movies:

Sophie Scholl: the Final Days (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrbBlXqc1Is>)

Look & See (2018; 82 minutes)

Eye in the Skie, the movie (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3t-7731GzA>)

High Noon (https://archive.org/details/HighNoon_201603)

Recommended materials

II. Graded Work

Assignment	Total Points	Percentage of Final Grade
Short report of prior week’s discussion, with self-reflection on the challenge to our own prejudices (14). Required each week by class time regardless of attendance.	75	7,5%
Experiential short essay	75	7,5%
Midterm exam	350	35%
Week 14, draft of final paper	150	15%
Final Paper (2,000 words)	350	35%
	1000	

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Total Points</i>	<i>Percentage of Final Grade</i>
		100%

Writing Rubric

	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
CONTENT	Papers exhibit at least some evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide at least an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off- topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Documents and paragraphs exhibit at least some identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement but may require readers to work to follow progression of ideas.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT	Documents hold a clear thesis and use persuasive arguments, strongly supported with evidence and/or authorities; documents consider contrary arguments and authorities as well and give satisfactory responses. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, documents may be lacking in a clear thesis and or provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
STYLE	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical sentence structure. At a minimum, documents will display a less precise use of vocabulary and an uneven use of sentence structure or a writing style that occasionally veers away from word choice or tone appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
MECHANICS	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, papers may contain some spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive so they do not muddy the paper's argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.

1. The student must earn a grade of C or better in the course.

Grading Scale

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
A-	90 – 93%		C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%		D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Content	Readings and tasks
1	Aug. 23	<p>What is the good? Is there a final good? Arguments that connect man’s good and political society’s good.</p> <p>During this week, the students are introduced into the basics of classical Greek ethics and political philosophy. They are also informed about the structure of the course and its evaluations.</p>	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 1./ Class discussion
2	Aug. 26	Diverse opinions concerning the final good. How to evaluate them.	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 1./ Class discussion (first and second weeks number of pages: 20)
2	Aug. 28	Minimal philosophical anthropology to understand the consistency of the final good: reason and what obeys reason. A good that is by its very nature shared with others. Order in the cosmos (wisdom), order in the city (political prudence) order in the soul (personal prudence).	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 1./ Class discussion
2	Aug. 30	Virtue: is it acquired or natural? Is it taught or exercised? It is not “natural” but it is not against nature. Diverse meanings of “natural.”	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 2/ Class discussion

		<p>Its genus: a habit. What is a habit? The proximate genus of virtue: an elective habit. Kinds of habits. Examples. Conscious actions and semi-conscious actions. Virtuous actions are fully conscious.</p> <p>During this week, the students learn how the classics understood ethics as a discipline transmitted not just in the class room, but in an authentic tradition. Besides, the students will reflect on the fascinating epistemological problems posed by the ethical discipline.</p>	
3	Sept. 4	<p>The epistemological problem of virtue. MacIntyre's take on the problem. The need of tradition. The knowledge of what is good. There is truth in practical matters. Prudence and moral virtue. <i>Auriga virtutum</i>. Virtue is about the mean. Examples of temperance, fortitude and justice.</p> <p>The need for concord or civic friendship in the city.</p>	<p>Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 2, 8 (ch. 1)/ Class discussion</p> <p>(Third week number of pages: 17)</p>
3	Sept. 6	<p>Justice as the most important virtue in the city. Its object is "what is just." It is in things, not in the subject. What that means. "Law" as a profession. Among the Romans, <i>Ius</i>. Main distinction of meanings: legal and equal. <i>Ius</i> as legal: total virtue regarding other. This presupposes a conception of the law and of society. Cooperative enterprise with a common good. The common good or end is to live and to live well. To live well is to live virtuously. Division of offices, to live. Magistrates, judges, priests, to live well. Reflect on your experience: do we live together so that we do not harm each other?</p> <p>During this week the students reflect on the possible tensions between what is just in general and what is just in particular; between what is just by law and what is just by nature.</p>	<p>Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 5 (ch. 1)/ Class discussion</p>
4	Sep. 9	<p>Justice as equality. Distributive. Cooperation in obtaining goods and supporting evil requires fair distribution. Proportion of "fairness." The law and distribution. Locke and Aristotle. Equality in exchange, presupposes the comparison of heterogenous things. Harm and restoration of equality. The judge. The example of money and the market.</p>	<p>Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 5, (ch. 2-5)/ Class discussion</p> <p>(Fourth week number of pages: 15)</p>
4	Sep. 11	<p>The good government and justice. Civil justice and domestic justice. Natural right and positive right. Does it exist, natural right? (The example of Sophie Scholl and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.) Equity and the truth of "what is just" in the concrete case.</p>	<p>Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 5, (ch. 6, 7, 10)/ Class discussion</p>
4	Sep. 13	<p>Brief Aristotelian study of the law.</p> <p>During this week the students reflect on the nature of the law and the types of law. Also, between the difference and the connection between law and right.</p>	<p>Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean</i> 10 (ch. 9)/ Class discussion</p>

5	Sep. 16	The notes of the law (as different from Right).	S th I-II, q. 90 (Fifth week number of pages: 30)
5	Sep. 18	Connection between natural law and human law. What does God have to do with them? Kinds of human laws. Conclusions from natural principles, <i>ius gentium</i> ; determinations by authority, <i>ius civile</i> .	S. th. I-II, qq. 91 (aa. 1-3) and 95 (aa. 1-2.4) / Class discussion
5	Sep. 20	Social relationships, practical reasoning, common goods, and individual goods. During this week the students reflect on the formation of the right judgment that must precede action.	A. MacIntyre, <i>Dependent Rational Animals</i> , chapter 9 (pp. 99-118) / Class discussion
6	Sep. 23	The virtues of acknowledged dependence.	A. MacIntyre, <i>Dependent Rational Animals</i> , chapter 10 (pp. 119-128) / Class discussion (Sixth week number of pages: 40)
6	Sep. 25	The political and social structures of the common good.	A. MacIntyre, <i>Dependent Rational Animals</i> , chapter 11 (pp. 129-146) / Class discussion
6	Sep. 27	<i>Crito</i> : the apparent conflict between the common good and the private good. Socrates' solution.	Plato, <i>Crito</i>
7	Sep. 30	<i>Crito</i> : the apparent conflict between the common good and the private good. Socrates' solution.	Plato's <i>Crito</i> (Seventh week number of pages: 64)
7	Oct. 2	<i>Antigone</i> : the apparent conflict between the common good and the private good. Socrates' solution.	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
7	Oct. 4	The clash between divine and natural law, on the one hand; and human, positive law, on the other.	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i> / Class discussion

		During this week the students reflect on the possible clash between positive and natural law; between command and conscience.	
8	Oct. 7	Abraham Lincoln, <i>Letters to Hodges</i> and to <i>Erastus and others</i> .	<i>Letters to Hodges</i> and to <i>Erastus and others</i> (2 pp.)/ Class discussion
8	Oct. 9	Comments on the movie <i>High Noon</i> (1952; 85 minutes).	Movie: <i>High Noon</i> .hode
8	Oct. 11	Midterm preparation: This and the following class sessions will be devoted to midterm review. The midterm exam will be composed of textual identification and analysis questions: students will be given blind passages from the texts we have studied and be asked to identify the authors, the argumentative contexts, the significance of each passage, and provide a brief analysis of the passages' content. This is a closed-book exam. Class time this week will focus on concept review and consolidating our reading so far, to help students prepare for the exam.	
9	Oct. 14	Midterm preparation: This and the previous class sessions will be devoted to midterm review. The midterm exam will be composed of textual identification and analysis questions: students will be given blind passages from the texts we have studied and be asked to identify the authors, the argumentative contexts, the significance of each passage, and provide a brief analysis of the passages' content. This is a closed-book exam. Class time this week will focus on concept review and consolidating our reading so far, to help students prepare for the exam.	
9	Oct. 16	Midterm exam The students demonstrate assimilation of the texts and ability to apply them to a problem. They also must prove writing skills.	
10	Oct. 21	Utility, safety and justice. Positive Laws and Natural Right. Gustav Radbruch's position. During this week the students reflect on the possible clash between the apparent good or utility of society, on the one hand, and justice, on the other.	Gustav Radbruch, "Laws that are not Right and Right about the Laws" / Class discussion (Tenth week number of pages: 8)
10	Oct. 23	Utility, safety and justice. Positive Laws and Natural Right. Gustav Radbruch's position.	Right about the Laws" / Class discussion

		During this week the students reflect on the possible clash between the apparent good or utility of society, on the one hand, and justice, on the other.	
10	Oct. 25	Movie: <i>Sophie Scholl, The Final Days</i> . (2005, 117 min.)	Movie: <i>Sophie Scholl, The Final Days</i> .
11	Oct. 28	Authority and responsibility During this week the students reflect on the demands that political reality address to the responsible politician or practical agent. Not always can one avoid collateral damage. The tensions of political decision-making.	Max Weber, <i>Politics as a Vocation</i> . / Class discussion (Eleventh Week number of pages: 63)
11	Oct. 30	Authority and responsibility	Max Weber, <i>Politics as a Vocation</i> . / Class discussion
11	Nov. 1	The movie: <i>Eye in the Sky</i> (2015; 102 minutes)	The movie: <i>Eye in the Sky</i>
12	Nov. 4	St. Thomas More, “Dialogue on Conscience” During this week the students reflect on very real cases of tension between the discerned moral good and the constraints of a particular political situation.	St. Thomas More, “Dialogue on Conscience” (13 pages) / Class discussion (Twelfth week number of pages: 29) / Class discussion
12	Nov. 6	Martin Luther King Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail”	Martin Luther King Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (11 pages) / Class discussion
12	Nov. 8	The structure of traditional marriage and family. St. Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa contra gentiles</i> III chapters 121-126. Experiential learning essays are due. (See details of experiential learning below.) During this week the students reflect on the structure of the traditional family, its <i>rationale</i> and its demands. The essays must demonstrate how the students have assimilated the contents of the course and applied them to their own experience, with a sample based on a book, a movie, or a work of art that is somehow connected to those contents.	<i>Summa contra gentiles</i> III chapters 121-126. (6 pp.) / Class discussion

13	Nov. 11	John Finnis, "Marriage: A Basic and Exigent Good", <i>The Monist</i> 91:3/4 (2008): p. 388-406.	"Marriage: A Basic and Exigent Good" (19 pp.) / Class discussion (Thirteenth week number pages: 41)
13	Nov 13	Wendell Berry, <i>The Art of the Commonplace</i> (Berkeley: Counterpoint 2002): p. 135-143 ("Men and Women in Search of the Common Ground")	"Men and Women in Search of the Common Ground" (9 pp.) / Class discussion
13	Nov. 15	Wendell Berry, <i>The Art of the Common Place</i> , pp. 182-194, "People, Land, and Community" (it can be borrowed from archive.org) During this week the students will reflect on the connection between technical knowledge and moral decision making. Final paper drafts due.	Wendell Berry, "People, Land, and Community" (13 pages) / Class discussion Final paper drafts due.
14	Nov. 18	Wendell Berry, <i>The Art of the Common Place</i> , pp. 195-204, "Conservation and local economy"	"Conservation and local economy" (10 pages) / Class discussion (Fourteenth week number of pages: 10)
14	Nov. 20	Movie: <i>Look and See</i> (2018; 82 minutes)	
14	Nov. 22	Discussion of paper drafts During this session the professor will give each student advice concerning how to make better the final paper.	
15	Dec. 2	Discussion of paper drafts During this session the professor will give each student advice concerning how to make better the final paper.	
15	Dec. 4	Presentation of 6 best reflective essays.	<i>Presentations of best reflective essays</i>
16	December 13	Final papers due.	

IV. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) learning outcomes as follows:

Content: *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- Identify, describe, and explain the methodologies used across humanities disciplines to examine essential ideas about the common good. **Assessments:** midterm exam, weekly reports.
- Identify, describe, and explain key ideas and questions about the nature of justice, pluralism, conflict, common flourishing, and common good. **Assessments:** midterm exam, weekly reports, final paper.

Critical Thinking: *Students carefully and logically analyze information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- Analyze how the philosophical, theological, political, and artistic works we study in class present competing (or cohesive) pictures of common flourishing and the relationship between individuals and their communities. (H) **Assessments:** midterm exam, weekly report, essay draft and final paper.
- Apply philosophical and theological analysis of the concept of the common good to contemporary social, political, and cultural debates (Q1) **Assessments:** midterm exam, weekly reports, essay draft, final paper.

Communication: *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- Develop and present clear and effective written and oral work that demonstrates critical engagement with course texts, visual and auditory media, and experiential learning activities. (H & Q1) **Assessments:** weekly reports, midterm exam, essay draft, final paper.
- Communicate well-supported ideas and arguments effectively within class Socratic discussion, with written work articulating students' personal reflections on (i) the light the classical idea of the common good sheds on their own prejudices and attitudes and (ii) on the demands it places on individual agents (Q1). **Assessments:** final paper, in-class discussion, weekly reports.

Connection: *Students connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- Connect course content with students' intellectual, personal, and professional lives at UF and beyond. (Q1) **Assessments:** in-class discussion, weekly reports.
- Reflect on students' own and others' experience with the importance of community and the pursuit of the common good in class discussion and written work. (Q1) **Assessments:** in-class discussion, weekly reports.

V. Quest Learning Experiences

1. Details of Experiential Learning Component

After carefully reflecting on the central question of our course, and related themes in our readings and class discussion, choose a novel, film, or work of art which, in your view, displays, challenges, or clarifies some of the ideas we have examined about the nature of the common good. Prepare an essay of between 800-1000 words, describing your chosen work, why you chose it, how it reflects or refracts the ideas we have studied in class, and how it has affected your own thinking about the nature of the common good. It will be handed in at week 12. The 6 best papers will be the subject of a 5-6-minute class presentation, in which the author introduces and describes the

chosen work, explain its relevance to the central question of our course, and explain what it can teach us about the pursuit of the common good.

2. Details of Self-Reflection Component

The texts we read invite us to consider how communal flourishing is a part of individual flourishing, and vice versa. We see deep challenges to prevailing contemporary ideals of individualism and individual fulfillment. Every week you will have to write a report with a summary of the discussion of the previous week, adding a reflection about how the examined materials challenge your prejudices and attitudes concerning the mutual harmony and the mutual demands between the common good and the good of the individual.

VI. Required Policies

Attendance Policy

Class attendance and participation are expected, and are an important part of your final grade. Two free unexcused absences per semester are allowed; any further unexcused absences will result in a 5 point reduction in your overall final grade. Excused absences are permitted consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>). Students requesting an excused absence should email the instructor as soon as possible and may be asked to provide supporting documentation of the reason for their absence.

Make-up dates for in-class exams and presentations will only be allowed in the event of a documented emergency. Students should contact the instructor as early as possible to make arrangements.

Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

UF Evaluations Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated

to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/> , 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

The Writing Studio

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

In-Class Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.