

PSCI 3310  
Spring 2024  
MW 2-3:20pm  
SAGE 355

Prof. Richard Ruderman  
133 Wooten  
Office Hours (in person): MW 11am-12  
and on Zoom R 11am-noon

e-mail: Richard.Ruderman@unt.edu (please identify the course in the Subject line—so I'll open it—and identify yourself in the sign-off—so I'll know who you are). I do not reply to emails on Friday night and Saturdays. **\*\*Please rely on this syllabus and NOT the Calendar for all dates and requirements.**

## THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE

### Required Texts (available through campus bookstore):

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)

### Course Goals:

In this course, you will learn to develop your skills of:

- *Critical Thinking*—by learning to decipher how it was done by the masters (including Socrates and Plato), and how they enable us to analyze and evaluate our situation;
- *Communication*—by learning how to write interpretive essays that present complex and subtle arguments in clear and persuasive fashion; and by constructing Powerpoint presentations that introduce your colleagues to crucial parts of the texts' argument;
- *Personal Responsibility*—by learning what Socrates meant by “Know Thyself,” that is, by liberating your heart and mind from the pressing concerns of “today”;
- *Social Responsibility*—by coming to recognize resources for living well that transcend how “we” (and all other cultures) have done it.

### Course Rationale:

While there is no shortage of people seeking to *have* Justice, this course focusses on the far rarer quest to *understand* what Justice is—and whether, once we find it, we are justified in pursuing it “by any means necessary.” After all, not everyone understands “justice” the same way. And when they do—as we Americans say “justice is equality”—they don't understand that content (“equality”) in the same way. Moreover, “civilization” is practically defined by placing limits on the means by which we can achieve just ends. Is there some way of escaping from our confusion over the meaning—and limits—of justice?

Political/public life is in crisis throughout the West, a crisis marked by a deepening uncertainty that it's worth defending. The modern “project” of Enlightenment liberal democracy is under siege from multiple sides—and has precious few defenders. While Steven Pinker (a leading Harvard psychologist), its biggest contemporary fan, can point out that the Enlightenment has lengthened lives, raised incomes (overall), and lessened violence across the centuries, he often overlooks what is lost or destroyed in our enlightened world, namely a sense of meaning that is desperately papered over by a strange combination of frantic work and escapist entertainment.

Not only are the basic institutions of liberal democracy—each of the three branches of government, the media, NATO, higher education, capitalism—held in widespread contempt, but the underlying idea or spirit of modernity is increasingly dismissed. Who, after all, still “holds these truths to be self-evident”—the “truths” that there is a universal category called “humanity” with natural needs and that cultural “identity” is largely an imposition of pre-enlightened times?

Above all, we doubt the very existence of Reason, at least as a *guide* to a good life. Post-modernists (on both the left and the right) urge us to move beyond modernity, largely because it (1) naively believed in something called “disinterested reason” and (2) imposed a way of life that was not truly “universal” (as advertised) but in fact was white, Western, and patriarchal, leading to extending dominion over everything (the Earth included) in the name of order and profit.

Worst of all—especially for college students—is the current shutting of doors that, once upon a time, led to a way out of the pressures and accidental limits of their own time. In our politics, we are ferociously intensifying our partisanship and withdrawing from dialogue (the “American Way” of compromise seems a thing of the past). And our universities have largely given up on liberal education—meant to liberate the hearts and minds of students—in order to become high-end trade schools that will provide jobs. Now, the core of what was known as liberal education are the Greek thinkers covered (in part) in this class. To appreciate why, it is crucial to know this: modernity was not an extension of the classics but a *rejection* of them.

That is why we begin the course with Machiavelli, the first political thinker to reject the classical approach. Among other things, Machiavelli initiates a robust politics of competing self-interest in order to liberate humanity. Why *promote* self-interest? Because when it comes to getting money, he says, “humans are not *altogether* crazy.” We then turn to Marx and his reasons for replacing such robust politics with a revolution that will put an end to one class (the elite) and therewith an end to politics, in favor of a classless world in which we become a “we species,” supposedly devoid of self-interest. But if the modern outlook is failing—as all sides seem to agree it is—then perhaps we were wrong to have abandoned the classical view. Instead, that is, of leaping into postmodernity, let’s reconsider premodernity.

We return, for the remainder of the class then, to the classics. We do this not because of some museum-like interest in looking at humanity’s baby steps but because the classical understanding can be shown (after our 500-year experience with modernity) to be convincingly true. Socrates may remain the best guide to the human situation (including the threats—still with us and within us!—to living the best, most rational, life) and Plato remains the best guide to political life, mainly in understanding our expectations of it—and where we expect too much of it.

Philosophy, Plato warned, would always appear to be either “useless” or “vicious” (*Republic*, bk. 6, beginning). It is therefore that much harder to see it is what we most *need* now to understand our conflicted and confused situation. For philosophy dares to discuss the fundamental questions that modern philosophy tried to sweep under the rug—the meaning of justice, of the longing for love or friendship or community, of duty and citizenship, of the strengths and weaknesses of both philosophy (or science) and religion (or piety)—above all, if there is a space for a humanity in between extreme self-interest and extreme “we species” submersion into community.

### Course Policies

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly, especially as we will be learning how to navigate unusually complex written material. If health concerns prevent attending class, please contact me at least one hour before class to make alternate (Zoom) arrangements. Your colleagues and I will be grateful for your consideration of the health and safety of the community and you won't fall behind in the participation that is *essential to success* in the class.

### Course Format and Requirements:

The course consists of a careful reading of a few classic texts of political philosophy. The number of pages to be read is kept small, so that you will be able to read—and *reread*—each text carefully. Classes are a combination of lecture and discussion. Since discussion will help to clarify important matters for both you AND your colleagues, it is crucial both that you attend classes and that you read the assigned texts carefully *before* each class. And please have the books handy during class: we will be reading from them directly.

NOTES: Because of the benefits to everyone involved, your class participation can be used to improve your grade. Class participation means: ask and answer questions! The biggest mistake students make in this class is thinking they are the only one finding this or that passage confusing or even meaningless—PRO TIP: you are not alone! And because these books aren't "obvious" (like textbooks or tweets), attendance at all lectures is vital.

\*Please be on time

\*Unforeseen events may require a change in scheduled tests and/or classes or even Zoom.

\*If you are having any difficulties in class, please talk with me AT ONCE. Only then can I help you succeed in the course.

Your **course grade** will be calculated as follows (\*ALL assignments are required):

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| ➤ Participation, incl. Discussion Boards               | 20% |
| ➤ A small Group Presentation (varying dates)           | 10% |
| ➤ one short (4-5 page) NM paper (*F. Feb. 16; 11:59pm) | 15% |
| ➤ an online midterm exam (*F. Mar. 1)                  | 15% |
| ➤ one (6-7 page) Plato paper (*F. Apr. 19)             | 25% |
| ➤ a final examination (M. May 6; online 12-6pm)        | 15% |

--The **Discussion Boards** will happen several weeks, but never when another assignment (paper or exam) happens that week. There are two parts: (1) by Monday at 11:59PM, you must post a Question (to Discussion Boards on Canvas) about that week's reading, usually consisting of 2-3 sentences; and (2) by Friday at 11:59PM you must post a Response to one of your colleagues' questions (not your own), consisting of a paragraph or two. **\*\*I won't be providing a prompt!\*\***

Your question should be directly *about the text* (quote it): E.g., "What are the two kinds of gifts that Machiavelli describes in the Dedicatory Letter of the *Prince*? Which kind does he give to Lorenzo? What does that imply about their relationship?" You will then post a ~250 word response to a question posed by one of your colleagues. Be sure to cite and quote the text in your response too! Each week, your Question will count for 1/3 of the Discussion grade and each Answer will count for 2/3. **\*\*The lowest DB grade will be**

dropped. This helps only if you do them all; you may elect not to do 1 of them.\*\*  
NOTE: You MUST do the starred (\*) DBs, including the first DB (on Machiavelli).

--The **exams** (multiple choice questions) will require you to understand what the texts are getting at (not to repeat or summarize what they say on the surface).

--Your **small group presentation** (you choose the date) involves constructing a 3-4 slide powerpoint designed to introduce ONE IDEA for that day's class (NOT the entire reading!). See the separate link below (in Canvas) that discusses how to proceed. \*\*Please send me your top three choices, in order, of preferred dates by the second class date. And be sure to send me the presentation first thing on the morning of the presentation (so I can give usable feedback).

--More information will be given regarding the **interpretive papers** at the appropriate times. Paper extensions are granted only in extenuating circumstances. You must request permission IN WRITING, at least 24 HOURS before the due date. Grades on late papers will be reduced. **\*\*ALL written work must be completed to pass this course.\*\*** (A late paper is better than none at all.) I encourage you to meet with me to discuss your papers. Discussing them prior to submitting will help organize your paper; discussing afterwards will permit those with a re-writing plan to resubmit the paper for a higher grade.

Goals: This course attempts to acquaint you with the basic question of political philosophy: how will I know what to do? To that end, we will examine several moral and political problems: the tension between self-fulfillment and dedication to others (family, friends, political community); the tension between family, friends, and the political community; is wisdom or science good for life?; tradition vs. innovation; morality and expediency; is philosophy good, bad, or indifferent?; and, above all, what is the meaning of justice?

We will also learn how to read a great book with care, and how to make, analyze, and criticize an argument.

### **Tentative Schedule:**

(\* = a required DB week)

W. Jan. 17: Introduction: "What is Political Philosophy?" (1 class)

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

M. Jan. 22—*Prince*, Dedicatory Letter, chs. 1, 3. [Focus on NM and Louis XII and their goals] [No Discussion Board this week!]

W. Jan. 24—*Prince*, chs. 4, 6, 7 [Focus on Moses (*the* founder), Cesare Borgia]

M. Jan. 29—*Prince*, chs. 8, 10 (2<sup>nd</sup> last sentence only!), 11, 13 [Focus on Agathocles, Alexander VI and King David—are they good guys or bad guys??]

--PRESENTATION #1

**\*Note:** Your first Discussion Board (\*required) Q is due Monday (Jan. 29) by 11:59PM; your first DB Response is due Friday (Feb. 2) 11:59 PM.

W. Jan. 31—*Prince*, chs., 14-15. [Focus on Achilles and disentangling ch. 15's "qualities"]

M. Feb. 5—*Prince*, chs. 16-18 [Focus on "true" liberality, cruelty and its mysterious opposite, and "faith"] **\*Note:** Discussion Board #2 Q is due Monday 11:59PM  
--PRESENTATION #2

W. Feb. 7—*Prince*, chs. 19 (on Severus), 21. [Focus on Marcus Aurelius, Severus, King Ferdinand's "pious cruelty"]  
--PRESENTATION #3  
**\*Note:** Discussion Board #2 Response is due Friday 11:59 PM

M. Feb. 12—*Prince*, chs. 25, 26. [Focus on Fortune/Chance, NM's final self-presentation]

### **The ultimate "science" of political thought?--Marxism**

W. Feb. 14—Marx, *Selected Writings*: "Alienated Labor" (58-68); "Private Property and Communism" (68-79); "Theses on Feuerbach" (99-101)

**\*\*\*FIRST PAPER DUE** F. Feb. 16 at 11:59PM (on NM)

M. Feb. 19—Marx, *Selected Writings*, "The German Ideology" (115-132, 140-42, 150-53); "Communist Manifesto: I-II" (158-176) **Note:** Your Discussion Board #3\* Q is due by 11:59PM  
--PRESENTATION #4

W. Feb. 21—Marx, *Selected Writings*, "Communist Manifesto: III-IV" (176-186); "Critique of the Gotha Program" (316-332)  
--PRESENTATION #5  
**Note:** Your Discussion Board #3 (\*required) Response is due Friday 11:59 PM)

### **Classical Political Philosophy**

#### A) A Frenemy of Socrates: Aristophanes

M. Feb. 26—Aristophanes' *Clouds*, lines 1-411. [Characters of Strepsiades, Pheidippides, Socrates and his interaction with Strepsiades]

W. Feb. 28—*Clouds*, lines 412-866. [The Clouds; Socrates' failure to educate Strepsiades]  
--PRESENTATION #6

**\*\*F. Mar. 2: MIDTERM EXAM** (online; available 12-9pm)

M. Mar. 5—*Clouds*, lines 867-1104 [Just v. Unjust Speeches' Debate]  
**\*Note:** Discussion Board #4\* Q is due Mon. 11:59PM; Response is due Friday 11:59 PM)

W. Mar. 7—*Clouds*; lines 1105-1511 [Results of Socrates' education of Pheidippides; Strepsiades' Revenge]

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

M. Mar. 12-F. Mar. 16: **SPRING BREAK** (no class)

M. Mar. 19—*Republic*, bk I (327a-331d; Cephalus: Justice as Useful)

W. Mar. 21—*Republic*, bk I (331d-336a; Polemarchus: Justice as Noble).  
--PRESENTATION #7

M. Mar. 26—*Republic*, bk. I (336b-344c; Thrasymachus on justice as foolishness; 344c-354c [and see Socrates' comments at 498c-d!] Socrates' Qualified Refutation of Thrasymachus).  
**Note:** Discussion Board #5 Q is due Monday 11:59PM; Response is due Friday 11:59 PM)

W. Mar. 28—*Republic*, bk. II (357a-362c; Glaucon's questions on justice: how is it good *or* noble?)  
--PRESENTATION #8

M. Apr. 1— *Republic*, bk. II (362d-367e; Adeimantus's doubts about justice: What's it *for*?)

W. Apr. 3— *Republic*, bk. II (367e-383c; the healthy and "feverish" cities, Socrates' theology);  
--PRESENTATION #9

M. Apr. 8—*Republic*, bk. III (386a-394d; Achilles and the fear of death) and (412b-417b; the "noble lie")  
**Note:** Your Discussion Board #6 Q is due Monday 11:59PM.

W. Apr. 12: *Republic*, bk. IV (427e-441c, virtues and parts of soul; 443b-e, justice revisited).  
--PRESENTATION #10

M. Apr. 15— *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?

W. Apr. 17—Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, 17a-28b. [Old and New Accusers; Delphic Oracle story; Socrates' Quarrel with Meletus]

**\*F. Apr. 19: FINAL PAPER DUE!**

M. Apr. 22—*Apology*, 28b-36d. [Socrates' challenging Achilles; Arginusae/Leon; Conviction]

W. Apr. 24— **Class cancelled** (religious holiday)

M. Apr. 29: *Apology*, 36e-42a [Penalty Phase; Parting Speeches to Friends and Enemies]

W. May 1: Summary & Review Session

**FINAL EXAM:** Monday, May 6, online; available 9 AM-6 PM.

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You can drop classes until the tenth week (for a grade of W): information [here](#). Please discuss with me or an Advisor prior to dropping—and be aware that there is a 6 class drop limit overall.

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### **UNT Policies**

**Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences.** According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

**ADA Accommodation Statement.** UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at [disability.unt.edu](http://disability.unt.edu).

**Emergency Notification & Procedures.** UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.

**Acceptable Student Behavior.** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at [deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct](http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct).

**Survivor Advocacy.** UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship

violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at: [SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu](mailto:SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu) or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at [oeo@unt.edu](mailto:oeo@unt.edu) or at (940) 565-2759.