

PSCI 4330  
Spring 2024  
W 6:30-9:20pm  
BLB 050

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.**

## ARISTOTLE'S VIRTUE ETHICS

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

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Bartlett and Collins (Chicago)  
Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*. Trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Chicago)

### Course Rationale:

According to Nietzsche, the “death of God” means (among other things) the death of Judeo-Christian ethics or morals. And, he warned, there is no underlying “moral instinct” in humans to take up the slack. Accordingly, he (rightly) predicted that the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be one of savage brutality. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Heidegger (and almost all postmodernists) declared there could be no philosophical ethics. Heidegger urged us—or at least the Germans—to follow, instead, the strongest Will (which he notoriously located in Hitler). Most postmodernists urged us, contrariwise, to “embrace the Other,” on the grounds that allegiance to “our” (dying? unjustified?) ethical code kept us from appreciating theirs. (Instead of requiring other cultures to reciprocate by exercising an ethical self-critique of their own, we simply *assumed* they would, surely longing for the same multicultural result we did.) Our highest philosophical authorities, then, have not offered a serious replacement for our fading ethical code.

This course will examine Aristotle's alternative, named “virtue ethics” by a late 20<sup>th</sup> century school of ethical philosophy. (That school arose in response to the moral emptiness of the “procedural liberalism” that was left standing at the end of the Cold War. Something was needed to recover a sense of *duty or obligation to others* that was being lost in the incessant demand for “my” rights.) In brief, Aristotle's approach to ethics (in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) differs from ours in two key ways: (1) rather than learning how to navigate this or that discrete “ethical dilemma” (do we pull the plug on grandma?), Aristotle insists on a life-long, all-encompassing effort at “character development” (which alone will stand you in good stead when Life comes at you); and (2) rather than demand ethical change in *others* (including, as is our habit today, in “society” or the hidden power structures that purportedly run it) Aristotle considers virtues that we must embrace for—and develop in—*ourselves*.

Accordingly, we will study the 11 moral virtues that Aristotle lists—and makes the case for—with a special emphasis on his suggestion that they can only be done well under the direction of an intellectual virtue (*phronesis* or “practical wisdom”). Good intentions alone, that is, won't cut it (sorry, Kant!). We then examine Aristotle's political psychology (in his *Rhetoric*) or the ways by which society as a whole (not always possessed of great intellectual virtue) can be induced to act more virtuously. We then return to the *Ethics* and Aristotle's analysis of friendship.

## 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 ahead of class to make alternate (Zoom) arrangements. Your colleagues and I will be grateful for your consideration of our health and safety 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

\*It's fine to have (non-alcoholic!) drinks in class, but eating is prohibited: it is inevitably distracting to your colleagues!

\*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                | 30% |
| ➤ one short (4-5 page) interpretive paper (*F. Feb. 23) | 20% |
| ➤ one (6-7 page) interpretive paper (*M. Apr. 22)       | 30% |
| ➤ a final examination (W. May 8; online 2-11:59pm)      | 20% |

--The **Discussion Boards** will happen several weeks, but never when another assignment (such as a paper) happens that week. I will post a Question the day after class—on that week's reading—which you must provide an Answer to by the next Tuesday at 11:59PM. Your response should consist of ~300 words and must quote and cite a few remarks in the text.

\*\*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 first TWO DBs.

--The **final exam** (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).

--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 guide you through Aristotle's *Ethics*, which seeks to show how the various moral virtues, reason, and the proper attitude toward happiness and even the pleasures might fit into the economy of the human soul.

**Tentative Schedule:**

(\* = a required DB week)

W. Jan. 17: Introduction: "What are Virtue Ethics? Do We Need Them?" (1 class)

**How do Moral Virtues Fit into Our Lives?**

W. Jan. 24—*Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 1 [Why do people choose to do what they do?]  
First DB assignment opens on R. Jan. 25.

**The Moral Virtues #1: Standing up to Pleasure and Pain; Choice; The "Mean"**

W. Jan. 31—*Ethics*, Bk. 2. [Note Aristotle refuses to speak of "free will"; the case for the "golden Mean"]

**\*Note:** Your first Discussion Board (required) Reply is due Tuesday (Jan. 30) by 11:59PM.

**The Moral Virtues #2: Voluntary Actions/Deliberation; Courage; Moderation**

W. Feb. 7—*Ethics*, Bk. 3. [What conditions are needed for acting "voluntarily"? Why do these two virtues come first?]

**\*Note:** Discussion Board #2 Response is due Tuesday, Feb. 6 at 11:59 PM.

**The Moral Virtues #3: Liberality; Magnificence; Greatness of Soul; "Proper Pride";  
Gentleness; Friendliness; Truthfulness; Wittiness; Shame**

W. Feb. 14—*Ethics*, Bk. 4 [Are any of these virtues promoted in our time? Frowned upon?]

### The Moral Virtues #4: Justice

W. Feb. 21—*Ethics*, Bk. 5

\*\*\***FIRST PAPER DUE** F. Feb. 23 at 11:59PM

### On Political Psychology: The Rhetoric

W. Feb. 28—*Rhetoric*, Bk. 1, chs. 3 (kinds of rhetoric); 9 (the noble and praiseworthy); 10-14 (injustice and its causes) [Be careful what you praise or blame! Does Aristotle recommend praising or blaming self-interest?]

\*DB Question released R. Mar. 1

W. Mar. 7—*Rhetoric*, Bk. 2, chs. 1-11 (the passions); 12-17 (character) [Why the focus on anger?]

\*DB Reply due T. Mar. 6 at 11:59pm.

\*W. Mar. 14: **SPRING BREAK** (no class)

### Guiding and Ranking the Virtues: Prudence

W. Mar. 21—*Ethics*, Bk. 6 [This chapter may be hard to follow, but that's NOT because it's "abstract"—it's meant to *replace* being guided by truly abstract "doctrines" or "ideologies"!]

### Self-Control in the Face of Pleasure

W. Mar. 28—*Ethics*, Bk. 7 [How does Aristotle differ from simple condemners of pleasure?]

**Note:** DB Reply is due Tuesday, Mar. 27 at 11:59PM.

### Friendship

W. Apr. 3—*Ethics*, Bk. 8 [Are friends the reward for being virtuous? Does having friends replace the need for virtues?]

W. Apr. 10: *Ethics*, Bk. 9 [Do we seek our good or our friend's good in a genuine friendship?]

**Note:** Discussion Board Reply is due Tuesday Apr. 11 at 11:59PM.

### Pleasure Reconsidered

W. Apr. 17—*Ethics*, Bk. 10 [Can there be a noble pleasure and can it be the goal of life?]

**M. Apr. 22: FINAL PAPER DUE!**

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

W. May 1: Summary & Review Session

**FINAL EXAM:** Wednesday, May 8, online; available 2-11:59 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.