

CNRC 3018W – Ancient Ethics from Plato to Stoicism

Dr. Charles McNamara – mcnamarc@umn.edu

Kolthoff Hall 133

TTh 11:15–12:30

Credits: 3 Credits

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:30–4:30pm

Course Description

Our decisions about how to act are almost never simple. Should we strive to obey our country's laws, or should we follow a personal set of guiding principles? Should we direct our lives toward some common social or political goal, or should we seek out a pleasant existence for our individual selves? Should we expect others around us to follow the ethical rules we set up for ourselves, or should we expect them to determine their own guidelines, even if they radically differ from our own? These questions have vexed philosophical thinkers for millennia, and there are no easy answers. In this course, we will look at a selection of ancient Greek and Roman writers who provide compelling yet competing views of these central considerations about what we must do to be good humans and good citizens.

Course Objectives and Expectations

This course aims to improve students' comprehension of the intellectual history of the ancient world, specifically surrounding its various philosophical schools and their approaches to ethics. Students will comprehend some central tenets of Academic, Peripatetic, Epicurean, and Stoic schools of thought. Over and above this comprehension-level mastery of content, students will also improve their ability to synthesize arguments about ethical ambiguities in writing and to evaluate the cogency of philosophical and rhetorical arguments. They will also apply their new-found ethical vocabulary from the ancient world to an evaluation of problems of contemporary life.

This course satisfies the Writing Intensive (WI) Liberal Education Requirement.

Required Texts

- Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford: OUP, 2009. (ISBN: 9780199213610)
- Cicero. *On Duties*. Cambridge: CUP, 2019. (ISBN: 9780521348355)
- Cicero. *On Moral Ends*. Cambridge: CUP, 2001. (ISBN: 9780521669016)
- Epictetus. *Enchiridion*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983. (ISBN: 9780915145690)
- Plato. *Five Dialogues*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002. (ISBN: 9780872206335)
- Plato. *Republic*, Third Ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004. (ISBN: 9780872207363)
- Additional selections listed in the course schedule below will be provided on Canvas.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this course, you will ...

- ... understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies.
- ... communicate effectively.
- ... have acquired skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning.

This course is designed as a Writing Intensive class. Accordingly, the course will focus on cultivating your abilities as a clear, persuasive, and argumentatively coherent writer. As detailed below, the two required essays in the course will undergo a thoughtful revision process. Over and above your mastery of the philosophical and political content of our readings, your careful attention to precision in language and clarity in argument will be central to your success.

Assignments and Grading

Grades in this course will be calculated according to the following criteria:

- Attendance and Participation (10%)
 - This course is run entirely as a seminar, so your participation as an interlocutor is essential to the success of the course. Attendance is therefore mandatory. If you foresee a legitimate absence (detailed below among other university policies), you must notify me in advance. Accruing more than **two** unexcused absences will lower your overall course grade.
- On-Line Commentary / Response Papers (20%)
 - Before every class, I will post a few discussion questions on Canvas to guide your reading for that day. **For every class meeting**, you must respond to **one** of these discussion questions on Canvas **by midnight** before our class meeting (that is, about twelve hours before class). You should respond to this one question with just 3–5 thoughtful sentences.
 - Alongside these daily reading questions, I will also post one question for more extended commentary. You must respond to **five** of these more involved questions over the course of the term, submitting your response (about 300 words) as an attachment over e-mail **before class**. You cannot submit these responses later in the term, and it is your responsibility to complete five of these response papers during the term.
- Essays (30%)
 - One central aim of this course is to develop your abilities as an argumentative writer. To that end, you will write two essays in the course that offer an opportunity to respond to our various texts and their ideas. Prompts and guidelines will be distributed according to the schedule below. Each paper should be approximately 1,500–2,000 words in length.
 - To help you produce top-quality writing in this course, you **must** meet with me at least once within one week of the final due date of each paper. This brief meeting will allow us to discuss your central claim and the structure of your paper's argument.
- Midterm Exam (15%)
 - This course aims both to improve your analytical skills used for writing argumentative essays and to increase your knowledge of ethical theories of the Greco-Roman world.

The midterm exam will focus on this second aspect by asking you to identify and comment on passages from our readings.

- Final Exam (25%)
 - The final exam in this course is an oral exam, conceived as an exit interview. I will distribute guidelines near the end of the term.

Attendance and Late Work

For a discussion-based seminar like this one, attendance is crucially important. Please do not miss class. Habitual tardiness or absence will result in grade penalties. If you need to miss class (as outlined in the university policy below), please give me advance notice.

I don't offer make-up exams, except as outlined in the **university policy below**. Late on-line responses and response paper will not be accepted. Late essays are penalized one grade level (e.g., B+ to B), compounded every 24 hours after the deadline. Late essays are not accepted after one week.

Schedule of Classes (Subject to Minor Revision)

- Week 1 – Introduction
 - January 18: Course Introduction
 - January 20: Plato, *Apology*
- Week 2 – Human and Citizen
 - January 25: Plato, *Crito*
 - January 27: Plato, *Republic*, Book 1
- Week 3 – Justice and the City
 - February 1: Plato, *Republic*, Book 2
 - February 3: Plato, *Republic*, Book 4
- Week 4 – Reason and Excellence
 - February 8: Plato, *Republic*, Book 5
 - February 10: Plato, *Republic*, Book 6–7 (up to 521A)
- Week 5 – Aristotelian Teleology
 - February 14: Assign Paper #1
 - February 15: Aristotle, *NE*, Book 1
 - February 17: Aristotle, *NE*, Books 2–3.5
- Week 6 – Intellectual and Moral Virtue
 - February 22: Aristotle, *NE*, Book 5
 - February 24: Aristotle, *NE*, Book 6.5–8, 12–13
 - February 25: **Paper #1 Due**
- Week 7 – The Wise Lawgiver and Citizenship
 - March 1: Aristotle, *NE*, Book 10
 - March 3: **Midterm Exam**
- Week 8 – Spring Break
 - March 8: **No Class**
 - March 10: **No Class**
- Week 9 – Freedom, Individual, and State

- March 15: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1 (On Canvas)
- March 17: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 3.1–13 (On Canvas)
- Week 10 – Pleasure and Epicureanism
 - March 22: Letters and Sayings of Epicurus (On Canvas)
 - March 24: Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Books 1.13–71
- Week 11 – A Stoic Alternative
 - March 29: Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Book 2.1–40
 - March 31: Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Book 3
- Week 12 – A Stoic Alternative, cont.
 - April 5: Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, 5.7–45
 - April 7: Epictetus, *Enchiridion*
- Week 13 – Public Ethics
 - April 11: Assign Paper #2
 - April 12: Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.1–60
 - April 14: Cicero, *On Duties*, 2.1–22
- Week 14 – Public Ethics, cont.
 - April 19: **No Class**
 - April 21: Cicero, *On Duties*, 3.1–49
- Week 15 – Post-Classical Approaches
 - April 26: Selections from Nussbaum, Annas, and MacIntyre (On Canvas)
 - April 28: Selections from Machiavelli and Nietzsche (On Canvas)
- May 2: **Paper #2 Due**
- **Oral Exams Scheduled Individually**

Important University Policies

Grading Scale

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following overall percentages:

A	B	C	D	F
	B+: 88–89	C+: 78–79	D+: 68–69	Below 60
A: 93–100	B: 83–87	C: 73–77	D: 60–67	
A-: 90–92	B-: 80–82	C-: 70–72		

Scholastic Dishonesty

You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or mis-

using a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. (Student Conduct Code: https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_student_conduct_code.pdf) If it is determined that a student has cheated, the student may be given an “F” or an “N” for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. For additional information, please see: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/instructorresp>.

The Office for Community Standards has compiled a useful list of Frequently Asked Questions pertaining to scholastic dishonesty: <https://communitystandards.umn.edu/avoid-violations/avoiding-scholastic-dishonesty>. If you have additional questions, please clarify with your instructor for the course. Your instructor can respond to your specific questions regarding what would constitute scholastic dishonesty in the context of a particular class, e.g., whether collaboration on assignments is permitted, requirements and methods for citing sources, if electronic aids are permitted or prohibited during an exam.

Make-Up Work for Legitimate Absences

Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. Such circumstances include verified illness, participation in intercollegiate athletic events, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, bereavement, and religious observances. Such circumstances do not include voting in local, state, or national elections. For complete information, please see: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/makeupwork>.

Student Conduct Code

The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community.

As a student at the University you are expected to adhere to Board of Regents Policy: Student Conduct Code. To review the Student Conduct Code, please see:

https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_student_conduct_code.pdf

Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means “engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor’s ability to teach and/or a student’s ability to learn.” The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities.

Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Stalking, and Relationship Violence

The University prohibits sexual misconduct, and encourages anyone experiencing sexual misconduct to access resources for personal support and reporting. If you want to speak confidentially with someone about an experience of sexual misconduct, please contact your campus resources including the Aurora Center, Boynton Mental Health or Student Counseling Services

(<https://eoaa.umn.edu/report-misconduct>). If you want to report sexual misconduct, or have questions about the University's policies and procedures related to sexual misconduct, please contact your campus Title IX office or relevant policy contacts.

Instructors are required to share information they learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office that addresses these concerns. This allows a Title IX staff member to reach out to those who have experienced sexual misconduct to provide information about personal support resources and options for investigation. You may talk to instructors about concerns related to sexual misconduct, and they will provide support and keep the information you share private to the extent possible given their University role. https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_sexual_harassment_sexual_assault_stalking_and_relationship_violence.pdf

Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action

The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, membership or activity in a local commission created for the purpose of dealing with discrimination, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult Board of Regents Policy: https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_equity_diversity_equal_opportunity_and_affirmative_action.pdf.

Disability Accommodations

The University views disability as an important aspect of diversity, and is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

- If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as, mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the DRC office on your campus (UM Twin Cities - 626.1333) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.
- Students with short-term disabilities, such as a broken arm, can often work with instructors to minimize classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, students should contact the DRC as noted above.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your instructor early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in the course.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have questions or concerns about your accommodations please contact your (access consultant/disability specialist).

Mental Health and Stress Management

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concen-

trating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Student Mental Health Website: <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu>.

Academic Freedom and Responsibility

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.

Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost.
