



POLI 2510 Ancient and Medieval Political Thought
Political Science Department
Fall 2025
Mondays & Wednesdays 8:30-10 am via Zoom

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Mathie

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Office Hours: By appointment, via Zoom.

Course Description

In this course in ancient and medieval political philosophy, we will closely read and study key works by ancient and medieval western thinkers that explore difficult and enduring questions about human nature and how human beings can live well together in political associations. Such questions include: What is justice? What is human excellence? Is there a best way for human beings to live? What limits does human nature put on politics? What can justify the rule of some human beings over others? What tensions exist between the good of the whole political community and the good of individuals? How does friendship relate to these goods?

Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle wrestled so profoundly with such questions in the *Republic* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (respectively) that these ancient books shape debates in political theory to this day. Their writings also influenced medieval Christian thinkers Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who explored many of the same questions, but also endeavoured in their works the *City of God* and *On Kingship* (respectively) to defend political understandings consistent with Christian doctrines about the relationship between human beings and the Divine. In this course, we will work to understand and confront the questions that all of these thinkers posed and the answers that each offered by carefully reading, reflecting on, and discussing their books.

The objective of this course is not merely for students to learn the philosophical concepts and theories that are presented in these writings. The questions these ancient and medieval political philosophers ask are not dryly theoretical: human beings' answers to them have shaped political history, and our own judgments about these questions will have practical consequences for our own lives, friendships, and societies. This course will require students to directly participate and to engage in a variety of forms of experiential learning in order to foster their ability to freely and thoughtfully consider and confront the enduring questions about political life raised by the ancient and medieval philosophers we are studying in this course. Although I will sometimes lecture, our classes will proceed as much as possible by discussion. In order to engage well in class discussions, you will have to be diligent in carefully preparing the complex and difficult texts which we will consider each class, and be charitable, thoughtful and open in class sessions (and you will require a working webcam for class).

The course is designed to foster students' abilities to: (a) read complex and nuanced philosophical texts and arguments with care, insight and reflection; (b) compose written work about ancient and medieval political philosophy that is thoughtful, well-reasoned and clear; and (c) engage in free, respectful and reasoned discussion with others about profoundly important questions about political life.

Course Requirements

Required Texts:

You **must** either have paper copies of the **exact translations identified below** or digital copies of the same translations (if you select digital, you should have a secondary device that you can load these readings on so that you can have them readily accessible during our discussions without disrupting your access to Zoom).

Ancient Greek is a very difficult language to translate literally into English, and many freely available translations/editions of the required readings are not very good (e.g. many translators give their own "clarifying" interpretations in places where the original texts are intentionally ambiguous). It is important for our discussions that we bring our texts to reference in each class session, that we all have the same texts to reference, and that these texts are faithful to the meaning of the original authors.

Plato *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books) ISBN-13: 978-0465094080

Available from [Amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca/Republic-Plato-Adam-Kirsch-ebook/dp/B01IMZ5HCU) or [Indigo.ca](https://www.indigo.ca/en-ca/the-republic-of-plato/0160c32f-d08a-3584-8257-adbd65a5dc60.htm) for \$29.99 plus tax.

If you wish to buy a digital ebook version (\$21.99), please use one of the links given below to avoid getting the wrong ebook translation:

<https://www.amazon.ca/Republic-Plato-Adam-Kirsch-ebook/dp/B01IMZ5HCU>

<https://www.indigo.ca/en-ca/the-republic-of-plato/0160c32f-d08a-3584-8257-adbd65a5dc60.htm>

Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins (University of Chicago) ISBN-13: 978-0226026756

Available from [Amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca/Amazon.ca) for \$24.74 plus tax (currently out of stock from [Indigo.ca](https://www.indigo.ca/Indigo.ca)).

If you wish to buy a digital ebook version (range = \$20.99 - \$23.50), please use one of the links given below to avoid getting the wrong ebook translation:

<https://www.indigo.ca/en-ca/aristotles-nicomachean-ethics/9780226026756.html>

https://www.amazon.ca/Aristotles-Nicomachean-Ethics-Aristotle-ebook/dp/B006J8QAT2/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&dib_tag=se&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.YusUiq6t5RZ4AZS9d5JUbOgco_LDs5mIopE0yVCleTuVdFgGd5ZqONhZIg-Iwwax.fjPoZ5GpOtByKtYJvJzb6Bpxnp00P69T9sdhziIZv6Y&qid=1756817696&sr=1-1

Reading packages (**free** pdfs or urls to be posted on d2l):

Selections from Livy, *History of Rome* and Augustine, *City of God*.

Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship: to the Kind of Cyprus*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies

Total Costs for Required Texts = \$55 plus tax for paperback editions

Grading:

Assignments: 10% (2, worth 5% each)

Paper: 25%

Midterm: 20%

Quizzes: 8%

Participation: 12%

Final Exam: 25%

Assignments: Small assignments will be due at 11:59 pm on Saturday September 20, and at 11:59 pm on Saturday November 1 (instructions to be provided on d2l). Late assignments will see a grade deduction of 2% per day. Extensions may be requested well in advance of the due date, but not afterwards.

Paper: Papers will be 5-7 pages and due on Saturday November 29, at 11:59 pm (instructions to be provided on d2l). Late papers will see a grade deduction of 2% per day. Extensions may be requested well in advance of the due date, but not afterwards.

Quizzes: Short open book reading quizzes will be administered at the start of class through d2l every week or so throughout the semester. Because these quizzes are intended to ensure that students are keeping up with assigned readings, they will not be announced ahead of time. Students will be required to take the quiz with their zoom cameras on (mics muted). There will not be an opportunity to retake missed quizzes, but your lowest quiz score will be dropped at the end of the term, and there will be an extra credit opportunity that students will be able to substitute for an additional quiz score.

Participation: All students are expected to:

- 1) Read assigned material carefully.
- 2) **Have working zoom cameras and turn them on throughout the entirety of our class sessions.**
- 3) Be prepared to discuss or answer questions about the readings over Zoom.
- 4) Have hard or digital copies of the readings with them during the Zoom seminar.
- 5) Avoid: (a) excessive absences from or lateness to our seminars; (b) being or appearing inattentive to seminars; (c) engaging in conversations with others outside of the Zoom seminar during class time.

Participation marks are not free:

- Consistently meeting these expectations will earn a mark in the B range (70-79%).
- Consistently meeting these expectations AND regularly participating thoughtfully in our discussions will be required for a mark in the A range (80-100%).
- Failure to follow even one of the expectations may result in an extremely low grade.

Other Important Policies

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is expected of all Lakehead University students. It should go without saying that cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to make themselves fully familiar with Lakehead's policies in this area. You should familiarize yourself with the Student Code of Conduct – Academic Integrity – and, in particular, sections 26 and 83 through 85. All of these policies will be enforced in full in this course, and the Code will be adhered to in terms of disciplinary action. It is worth emphasizing the following:

PLAGIARISM INVOLVES PRESENTING ANOTHER'S WORK, IDEAS, THEORIES, OR INTERPRETATION AS ONE'S OWN.

To avoid plagiarism, always:

- 1) Put quotation marks around any words taken from sources.

- 2) Paraphrase material completely; do not simply rearrange words from a source or change them using a thesaurus, etc.
- 3) Whether it is being quoted or paraphrased in your work, always give accurate and complete citations for all material that comes from another source.
- 4) Avoid borrowing entire arguments or ideas from another writer. Your arguments should be original to you.

GenAI Use Prohibited:

Generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI or GenAI) is a category of AI systems capable of generating text, images, or other media in response to prompts. These systems include ChatGPT and its variants Bing (built by OpenAI) and Bard (built by Google) among several others. Other Generative AI models include artificial intelligence art systems such as Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, and DALL-E.

Any use of GenAI systems to produce assignments for this course is not permitted. All work submitted for evaluation in this course must be the student's original work. The submission of any work containing AI generated content will be considered a violation of academic integrity ("Use of Unauthorized Materials").

Academic Accommodations: Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities/medical conditions. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities/medical conditions to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability/medical condition and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, please email sas@lakeheadu.ca or visit <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/sas>.

Course Outline

NOTE: Readings and schedule may be adjusted as necessary at my discretion. Of course, Zoom discussions pose special challenges, so as we proceed with the seminar, I may find it necessary to make some changes with the structure of class discussions. I greatly appreciate your flexibility and understanding.

Sept 3	Course outline/introduction
Sept 8	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , up to 336b in Book I
Sept 10	<i>Republic</i> , remainder of Book I
Sept 15	<i>Republic</i> , Book II
Sept 17	<i>Republic</i> , Book III, starting at 398b.
Sept 22	<i>Republic</i> , Book IV
Sept 24	<i>Republic</i> , Book V
Sept 29	<i>Republic</i> , Book VI
Oct 1	<i>Republic</i> , Book VII (to 520b)
Oct 6	<i>Republic</i> , Book VIII
Oct 8	<i>Republic</i> , Book IX
Oct 13-17	FALL STUDY WEEK – No Class
Oct 20	MIDTERM
Oct 22	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I

Oct 27 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Ch. 1, 3, 5-9; Book III, Ch. 6-12

Oct 29 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV, Ch. 1-4, 9

Nov 3 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, Ch. 1-5, 7, 9-11

Nov 5 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Ch. 1-2, 5, 12-13; Book VII

Nov 10 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII

Nov 12 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX

Nov 17 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X

Nov 19 Selections from Livy, *History of Rome* and Augustine, *City of God*
(available on d2l)

Nov 24 Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship*, (available on d2l):
“To the King of Cyprus,” Book I, Chapters 1-6

Nov 26 *On Kingship*, Book I, Chapters 7-12; Book II, Chapters 1-4

Dec 1 *On Kingship*, Book II, Chapters 5-8

TBD **FINAL EXAM**