



Lakehead University  
*POLI 3515 FDE (2020):*  
*Political Thought and Contemporary Issues*  
*Thursday Zoom Meetings 1-2:30 (required)*  
*Tuesday Zoom Meetings 1:00 (optional)*

**Instructor:** Dr. Patrick Cain (Political Science)

**Contact Information and Office Hours:** Most course related questions are best asked before or after or during class meeting time. If academic advising is required, please stay on after our class Zoom meetings to arrange a time to speak (or we can just do it then in a Zoom breakout room). If these options are not possible, you may contact me via email at [pnccain@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:pnccain@lakeheadu.ca). If you do not receive a response in 2-3 business days, please do not hesitate to follow up with an additional email.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION and OBJECTIVES**

This course is a seminar run over Zoom. Its primary aim is not to cover specific information or to provide students with pre-arranged sets of learned material. Rather, this course is meant to develop and enhance students' ability to: (a) freely partake in the art of thoughtful and reasoned discussion about the most important human questions; (b) produce well organized and reasoned writings about the most important human questions; (c) read and consider important and complex texts with care and insight, attempting to understand them as they were understood by the authors themselves, and reflecting on how they might illuminate and guide our own lives.

To achieve these aims, this course focuses on important texts in political philosophy, and brings them into conversation with the contemporary debates at the centre of our political life. Our core text for this year's version of the course is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. We will read and discuss it with the aim of reaching a fuller understanding of the strengths, limits, and problems of our politics and of political philosophy. The contemporary issues explored will develop organically through the class's discussion and interests, and will discuss specific issues as they emerge, but are expected to be generally related to the following issues: how to best understand human nature, freedom, identity, morality and virtue; and how to best reconcile these important features of human life with our membership in various communities (such as families, friendships, and political regimes).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Required Texts:

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by Bartlett and Collins); please purchase this translation.
2. Other readings and required videos will be posted on the course website or embedded in the schedule below

### Grading:

Writing Portfolio Assignments: 40%

Discussion Facilitation: 10%

Seminar Participation: 20%

Final Take-Home Exam: 30%

### Assignment and Grading Details:

*Writing Portfolio Assignments (WPAs) (40%)*

There will be two types of Writing Portfolio Assignments (WPAs): In-class WPAs and Post-class WPAs. Each assignment will have its own specific and idiosyncratic requirements, but will generally ask you to reflect on questions raised by the assigned reading and/or by class discussion, and should be about 500 words in length, unless otherwise directed

**In-class WPAs** will be assigned and begun during class time and must be uploaded to students' Online Portfolios by midnight on the day they are given.

**Post-class WPAs** will be assigned during meeting times but are to be completed after class times. WPAs given on Tuesdays will be due Wednesday by midnight. WPAs assigned Thursdays are due Friday at midnight. They will be also be posted that same day in that Week's Module on the course website. All tasks given must be submitted by students to their Online Portfolios by the deadline.

There will be at least 4 In-class WPAs assigned and at least 12 Post-class WPAs assigned. Students are expected to hand in 14 assignments in total (using whatever mix of In-Class and Post-class WPAs they like).

Each file submitted to the Online Portfolios (under assignments on the course webpage) should be consistently named as follows: LastNameWPANumber (CainWPA1, CainWPA3, etc.).

The Portfolio will be graded as a whole at the end of the semester on the basis of (in no particular order): (a) depth and accuracy of analysis; (b) thoughtfulness and cogency of analysis; (c) writing quality; (d) the degree to which the writing addresses and answers the tasks assigned; (e) the percentage of tasks completed. To not lose marks for (e), students should hand in at least 12 WPAs.

Any tardy WPAs will receive a penalty of 10% for each day late.

### *Discussion Facilitation (10%)*

Students will sign up for one week for which they will email the instructor two discussion questions in a Word Document by midnight on the Wednesday night before that week's Thursday meeting. These questions should be designed in line with the Course Description and Objectives (found on page 1, above). They must also come to Thursday's class prepared to introduce their questions, and to help in whatever way is useful to the instructor. They should also put extra time into that week's readings, doing their best to arrive in class as an "expert" on those readings, and therefore be prepared to answer detailed questions about the text that may be posed by classmates and the instructor.

### *Participation (20%)*

For class meetings all students are expected to:

1. Read assigned material carefully
2. Be prepared to discuss the readings
3. Bring the hard copies of the readings to class
4. Discuss the readings with fellow students during class time
5. Stay focused on the class discussion (ignoring other apps, texts, etc.)
6. Avoid: (a) excessive absences and tardies; (b) private conversations; (c) being inattentive and/or appearing inattentive.

In addition to demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the assigned readings, to achieve a high participation mark, students should participate with regularity, integrating the readings into the discussion in a way that responds to the contribution of others and moves forward our consideration of the topic and the issues at hand.

Tuesday classes are optional (no marks for participation from these), but students should attend them as much as possible, viewing them as extra study sessions that are available. They will hopefully enrich your experience in this course.

### *Zoom Participation Guidelines*

Students must follow the class guidelines of the instructor as we proceed, including turning on your video function during meetings and following guidelines regarding the use of the chat, annotation, breakout rooms, and other Zoom functions. Zoom is a new teaching and learning platform for many of us, so the instructor will be experimenting and making adjustments along the way.

**Class Readings:** The readings and videos from this course involve complicated ideas and difficult arguments. Moreover, the presentation of these ideas and arguments sometimes take forms that may not be familiar to students. Students should therefore read/watch the assigned materials carefully, slowly, and at least several times in order to grasp their content. The importance of this task is reflected in the weight of the grade given to seminar facilitation, portfolio assignments, class participation, and the exam, all of which will ask you to focus on class texts.

**Other Policies:***Recording of Classes is Prohibited*

No audio or video recording of the class is allowed without the written permission of the instructor, which likely will not be given in order to protect the security and freedom of all members of the class. If recording is permitted, it will be strictly for private use and cannot be shared with others without the written permission of the instructor.

*Communication*

The instructor will regularly communicate with students about a variety of matters, both through in-class announcements and via email (using students' Lakehead email account).

*Academic Honesty*

Academic honesty is expected of all Lakehead University students. Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to make themselves fully familiar with Lakehead's policies in this area. Although all these policies will be enforced in full, it is worth emphasizing the following:

*Plagiarism involves presenting another's work, ideas, theories, or interpretation as one's own.*

To avoid plagiarism, writers should always:

1. Put quotation marks around any words from sources
2. Paraphrase material completely; changing or rearranging a few words or the tense of a verb is NOT paraphrasing.
3. Give accurate and complete citations for all material including paraphrased material.
4. Avoid borrowing entire arguments or approaches to a subject from another writer. Make it 'original' while staying faithful to the assignment parameters.

*Accessibility and Accommodation*

Students with accessibility issues or requiring accommodations of should contact Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

<https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/sas>.

## READING SCHEDULE

*Tuesday classes are optional (no marks for participation), but students are encouraged to attend them as much as possible, and should view them as open office hours for the course that provide chances for extra study. They will hopefully enrich your experience in this course. Please complete the scheduled readings in advance of any Tuesday meetings you attend.*

*Also, please note that readings and videos listed as due for Tuesday and Thursday classes are ALL required. I have split them up between Tuesday/Thursday in order to allow you to properly pace your work, and to give you a sense in advance of the material that will likely be needed to complete the regularly assigned Writing Portfolio Assignments.*

*Finally, please note that the Reading Schedule will be adjusted throughout the year in response to the fruitfulness of class discussion, and how quickly we are proceeding through the material. Some readings will be added in response to class discussion of contemporary issues.*

9/10 Aristotle, Ethics 1.1-3

9/15 Aristotle, Ethics, 1.1-7  
Bartlett, *Aristotle's Guide to the Good Life* (1<sup>st</sup> 12 minutes only)  
<https://youtu.be/0rxHiA0pv8Q>

9/17 Aristotle, Ethics 1.1-7

9/22 Aristotle, Ethics 1.5-9  
Burger, *The Best Human Life: On Aristotle's Ethics 1.5* (please watch from the beginning of the video, even if the link doesn't put you there).  
<https://youtu.be/fa1dZpO0fFM>

9/24 Aristotle, Ethics 1.1-13  
Aristotle, Ethics 2.1-2

9/29 Aristotle, Ethics 2.1-7  
How to write and how not to write:  
George, *Courage: The Defining Characteristic of Great Leaders*  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hbsworkingknowledge/2017/04/24/courage-the-defining-characteristic-of-great-leaders/#545b665111ca>

10/1 Aristotle, Ethics 2.3-7  
Aristotle, Ethics 3.5

10/6 Aristotle, Ethics 3.6-10

10/8 Aristotle, Ethics 3.6-12

10/13 STUDY WEEK

10/15 STUDY WEEK

10/20 Aristotle, Ethics 4.1-2

Gopnik, *Why is Art so Damned Expensive?*

<https://www.newsweek.com/why-art-so-damned-expensive-65919>

10/22 Aristotle, Ethics 4.3-5

10/27 Aristotle, Ethics 4.4

10/29 Aristotle, Ethics 4.5-9

11/3 Aristotle, Ethics 6.5-8,

11/5 Aristotle, Ethics 6.5-8, 11

Aristotle, Ethics 7.1-3

11/10 Aristotle, Ethics 8.1-3

11/12 Aristotle, Ethics 8.1-14

11/17 Nichols, *Friendship in Aristotle's Ethics* (please watch the whole video, even if it doesn't begin at the beginning).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CexYqg-CXEw&t=2074s>

11/19 Aristotle, Ethics 9.1-5

1/24 Aristotle, Ethics 9.1-10

11/26 Aristotle, Ethics 9.1-12

12/1 Aristotle, Ethics 10

12/3 Catch up and Conclusion