

POLI 3517 FDE: Modern Political Theory

Format: Online Synchronous on Zoom
Meeting: Thursdays at 8:30 AM – 11:30 AM
Fall Semester 2026

Professor: Dr. Taylor J. Green (Political Science)
Email: tjgreen@lakeheadu.ca
Office hours on Zoom: by appointment

Course Description: This course examines the modern context of politics to understand and evaluate its theoretical justifications. The course theme is the making of modernity and why history, otherwise referred to as progress, unfolds as a response to the principles of modernity and the Age of Enlightenment. The course evaluates key thinkers in the history of political thought and the foundation of their ideas. We trace how freedom, through material or moral progress, forms these political ideas. We also examine how paradoxical notions of freedom produce tension in the transition from the early to late modern period. The making of what we refer to as modernity commences with the Renaissance thinker Niccolo Machiavelli, whose realism in politics moves us away from ideal or imagined republics. Then, John Locke grounds the natural state in a natural right to private property. This produces the beginning of the political regime of liberal democracy. Immanuel Kant, during the period of Enlightenment, envisions morality to be tied to ethics and duty, embodying modern citizenship. Countering his fellow German, Karl Marx criticizes the bourgeois values of private property, citizenship, and private versus public distinction, for the means of production to belong to those who produce value, the proletariat. Commencing critical approaches of late modernity, Nietzsche and Heidegger emphasize a modern world of mistakes, forgetting our humanity, even in the material conditions of Marx's project, for us to consider other aspects of modernity like history, tragedy, poetry, secularity, humanism, and technology, which signals a theoretical completion of the traditional modern, commercial world.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, the student should be able to:

- ❖ Develop reading and writing skills for an independent analysis
- ❖ Engage in class debates on modern issues of politics
- ❖ Compare and contrast key arguments in the history of political thought
- ❖ Identify textual and interpretative arguments to evaluate different thinkers and their ideas
- ❖ Assess and contest core issues in political science, such as rule of law, democracy, regime, civil society, liberalism, the state of nature for contract government, realism, socialism, communism, modernity, private property, ethics, citizenship, liberty, community, alienation, and labour.

Required Texts:

- Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings* (Hackett).....\$22.42
- Karl Marx, *Selected Writings* (Hackett).....\$25.00
- Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (HarperCollins).....\$21.00

Recommended Texts:

- John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* (Broadview Press).....\$11.50
- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Broadview Press).....\$11.00

A Note on Readings:

The instructor is teaching and adhering to the texts by the publishers mentioned above. There are multiple different editions and translations of each of these texts, online or found at used bookstores. To follow along with passages in class, the instructor will be referring to the texts mentioned above. It is advised to purchase the Required Texts and, if possible, the Recommended Texts. Lakehead library has different editions available for free. Other editions and translations are not restricted. In the reading schedule, I have provided chapters if the student wishes to attain other editions.

Assessments Overview

Critical Engagement Assignment (25%) Due October 19
Participation (20%) Ongoing
Discussion Lead (10%) (once/term)
Follow-up Assignment (10%) (one week after Discussion Lead)
Create a Meme/Poster (10%) Due December 4
Take-Home Exam (25%) TBD

Critical Engagement Assignment (25%) Due October 19

The student is to pick five pages from any text studied in the first five weeks of the course and write three entries. While doing reading for coursework, choose five pages that stand out to you personally. The student is to read these chosen five pages three separate times and document the three readings in a minimum three and maximum five-page double spaced assignment (max. 1200 words). The student is to have three headings that signify three reflection-entries for each different reading. Provide the date for which day you undertook which subsequent reading, like a journal entry. Write how these passages are initially received upon first reading. For example, answer: Why did you pick these pages? What is their importance? Then, the student is to read these five pages in a follow-up read (second read), citing passages and core concepts that changed or became more salient while reading again, upon closer study. How does the author argue their position and engage the reader? What is the author's argument or is an argument missing due to insufficient evidence? Upon a third reading, the student should work towards understanding the author's intent, by capturing the meaning of what the thinker is expressing. Does the text contradict itself or provide enough context and evidence for an argument about politics? In the last entry, evaluate these five pages by critically engaging with the argument laid out in your second reading. Reading entries should answer the following: (1) How is the reading initially received? Why did you pick these passages? (2) What is the argument here of the author? How are some concepts refined under closer inspection? (3) Does the argument make sense? Why or why not? What is the intent of the author?

The student should state upfront which text and page numbers are under investigation. The student will be assessed on how thoughtfully the text is analyzed and evaluated throughout three engagements. The only reference cited is the text, and when quoting or summarizing the text, the student should refer to the page number in brackets at the end of the quoted/paraphrased sentence.

Participation (20%)

Each class meeting will be divided into two components: (1) lecture (2) discussion. The first half of each class will consist of a lecture from the instructor. The second half, after a break, will consist of a student led discussion. The student is expected to come to every class well prepared and ready to participate and respond to discussion questions. Preparation involves reading the required reading for that week.

Attendance to class is mandatory and is marked towards participation each week. Cameras on and ready to participate are the main standard the student should uphold. The student will be evaluated on the positive contribution to class discussion each week. Demonstrating that the student has done the weekly readings is essential to a high grade. The student must arrive to class on time and be ready to critically discuss core concepts and topics. The student plays an active role through participation.

Discussion Lead (15%)

The student is to pick one class to lead the discussion in the second half of that class. Aim to synthesize the core concepts from the required readings and, possibly, from lecture to lead the discussion with some questions for the second half of class. This is not a presentation. But this assignment involves, if possible, giving a very short summary of the reading material. Primarily the student will be evaluated upon the quality of the discussion questions to facilitate class dialogue on key issues from the text. The student is assessed on how well they prepared thoughtful discussion questions. At least TWO quality discussion questions should be asked of the class. The student is to provide not much more than a quick summary of the main points and themes of the text, despite any overlap from lecture, while trying to relate to concepts from previous weeks if applicable. The student should focus on keywords and core concepts. The student should especially raise any difficulties in the readings and bring these up in class. Raising challenging passages, and asking the class about them, is especially welcome. Drawing attention to important textual themes will receive the highest grade. More instructions to follow in class.

Follow-up Assignment (10%)

In a two-page double spaced write-up, due one week after discussion lead, please summarize the main points of discussion from the class. How were your discussion questions received? What was the thematic discussion of class? What did you agree/disagree with from class? Is there anything we did not get to that you would have liked to see discussed from the text? Did other students interpret the text similarly or differently than you? Answer these questions in a short write-up following discussion lead. This assignment is due one week after Discussion Lead assignment.

Create a Meme/Poster (10%) Due December 4

The student is to produce an original poster or meme that represents the philosophy of a chosen thinker. This is an assignment with image(s) and words. The student is also to write in no more than 300 words about the meaning behind the meme/poster. Page 1 is the image and minimal writing (meme) and Page 2 is a write-up about the image. These documents can also be submitted separately, if using different programs, but please indicate this to the instructor. The image is to be a portrait, landscape, or square. The student is to distill the political philosophy of a thinker into an image using minimal wording to convey a message. The meme/poster is to be academically and professionally appropriate and should use suitable language (i.e. no profanity, no vulgar language/imaging). The purpose of this assignment is to choose one

thinker from the course and represent their philosophy with images and minimal text to demonstrate comprehension of class material.

To receive a good grade, the meme/poster is directly relevant to and introspective of theme(s) we discussed in class. This assignment is evaluated upon how well the student uses an image and minimal wording to explain or represent the philosophy of a thinker. Programs available for this assignment: Canva, Microsoft Word (you have the app as a Lakehead student), Word document saved as a PDF (in Word under Inset Tab, Insert Pictures), PowerPoint, Mematic (Apple). Images are to be found on Wikimedia Commons. No A.I. is permitted whatsoever in the original construction of this assignment (image, etc.). More instructions to follow in class.

Take Home Exam (25%)

The take home exam will be scheduled during the exam period. More instructions to follow in class.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Assignment
September 10	Introduction to course & read course syllabus	
September 17	Machiavelli	
September 24	Machiavelli (II)	
October 1	Locke	
October 8	Kant	
Oct 12 – Oct 16	Holiday or Break (Thanksgiving, Study Week) – No Class	
October 19	Assignment Due	Critical Engagement Assignment
October 22	Marx	
October 29	Marx (II)	
November 5	Marx (III)	
November 6	Last Day to drop classes without Academic Penalty	
November 12	Nietzsche	
November 19	Heidegger	
November 26	Heidegger (II)	
December 3	Heidegger (III)	

December 4	Assignment Due	Create a Meme/Poster Assignment due
Dec 9 – Dec 10	Fall exam study break no classes	
TBD	Exam period	Take Home Exam

Topics and Reading Schedule

Week 1 – September 10th

Introduction and go over course syllabus

Week 2 – September 17th

Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 1-4; pp. 21-34; pp. 47-63.

(*The Prince*, Letter to Vettori; Chapters 7-9; Chapters 15-19)

Week 3 – September 24th

Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 81-102; pp. 154-158.

(*The Discourses*, Dedication, Book 1, Preface, Chapters 1-6 & 58)

Week 4 – October 1st

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, pp. 31-38; pp. 43-55; pp. 68-93.

(Chapters 2-3; 5; 7-9)

Week 5 – October 8th

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 49-85.

(Preface, First Section, half of Second Section)

Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784),” pp. 119-127.

Week 6 – October 22nd

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, pp. 1-26.

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, pp. 27-39.

Week 7 – October 29th

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, pp. 102-157.

Week 8 – November 5th

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, pp. 157-187.

Week 9 – November 12th

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Selections on Desire2Learn).

Week 10 – November 19th

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings, Being and Time: Introduction*, pp. 37-89.

Week 11 – November 26th

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings, The Question Concerning Technology*, pp. 307-343.

Week 12 – December 3rd

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings, Letter on Humanism*, pp. 213-267.

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings, The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, pp. 431-449.

Email Policy

Please put in the subject line concerning any email communication about this course with POLI3517.

Late Assignments

Late Assignments submitted past the due date will lose 3%/day, including weekends and holidays, of overall grade for that assignment. Unless otherwise stated, granted accommodation, or worked out with the instructor, an assignment is considered late after 11:59 p.m. of the day of the specified due date.

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 Integrity

A breach of Academic Integrity is a serious offence. The principle of Academic Integrity, particularly of doing one's own work, documenting properly (including use of quotation marks, appropriate paraphrasing, and referencing/citation), collaborating appropriately, and avoiding misrepresentation, is a core principle in university study. Students are strongly advised to familiarize themselves with the Student Code of Conduct - Academic Integrity ("The Code") - and, in particular, sections 26 and 83 through 85. Non-compliance with the Code will NOT be tolerated in this course and the Code will be adhered to in terms of disciplinary action. The Code provides a full description of academic offences, procedures when Academic Integrity breaches are suspected and sanctions for breaches of Academic Integrity.

Lakehead's Accommodation Statement

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>

Intellectual Property

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).