

## Political Science 6934: Ancient Political Thought

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Florida Atlantic University, Spring 2026

Course Credits: 3.000

Prerequisites/Corequisites: None

F 11:00AM – 1:50PM, Social Science Boca 377

**Professor:** Dr. Rebecca LeMoine

**Office Location:** (561) 287-3691

**Contact:** rlemoine@fau.edu or (561) 287-3691

**Office Hours:** Tues./Thurs. 1:00-3:00PM,  
or by appt.

### Course Description

This course examines the political thought of one of the most important thinkers in the ancient world: Plato. While the subject of ancient political thought spans an array of thinkers from Greek and Roman antiquity, as well as works outside the Western tradition, there is good reason to focus on Plato. As Alfred North Whitehead once quipped, “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” Engaging in an in-depth study of Plato’s political thought will thus position us to better understand the political theories of other thinkers, both ancient and modern. In other words, although this course focuses on Plato, it aspires to provide students with a foundation for reading other works of political theory in subsequent courses or through their own studies. Given that Plato’s influence extends beyond political theory (and, indeed, beyond the Western tradition), the course will also provide deeper insight into contemporary political life and culture.

In part, our task will be an interpretive endeavor. As we will see, Plato’s choice to write dialogues rather than treatises poses difficulties for distilling “Plato’s political thought” from his writings. Throughout the semester, we will become familiar with core interpretive debates and consider the strengths and weaknesses of different interpretive approaches, namely the analytical, Straussian, and Cambridge school approaches. Along the way, we will engage with the questions and ideas related to political life that Plato poses for us. Among other inquiries, we will explore the nature of justice, the different forms of government, the characteristics of ideal rulers and polities, the role of education and law in cultivating virtuous citizens and rulers, the origin of political corruption and tyranny, and the best approach to foreign relations.

### Objectives

- 1) Become familiar with the ideas, concepts, and questions central to Plato’s philosophy, and explore their relevance to Plato’s political thought.
- 2) Learn about Plato’s life and study his historical and cultural context to gain a deeper understanding of his work.
- 3) Improve ability to read works in political theory through close reading of several Platonic dialogues.
- 4) Develop an understanding of core interpretive problems and major scholarly approaches to interpreting Plato’s dialogues, and consider the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.
- 5) Further develop your own theories of politics through engagement with key inquiries raised in Plato’s dialogues.

### Course Delivery Mode

This class is designated as an “**In-Person**” course. Attendance on campus is required.

### Required Texts

The following books are available for purchase at the FAU Bookstore. While electronic versions are allowed, **I highly recommend that you purchase paper copies of these exact editions.** Throughout each class session, you will be asked to turn to specific pages in the book. If you do not have the same edition/translation or cannot easily turn to a given page, you will be lost and unable to contribute as effectively. Moreover, students often find it helpful to be able to write directly in the margins of the book.

- 1) Plato and Aristophanes. *Four Texts on Socrates: Plato's Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito and Aristophanes' Clouds*. Revised ed. Trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Cornell University Press. 1998. ISBN: 9780801485749
- 2) Plato. *The Laws of Plato*. Trans. Thomas Pangle. University of Chicago Press. 1988. ISBN: 9780226671109
- 3) Plato. *Phaedrus*. Ed. Albert Keith Whitaker. Trans. Stephen Scully. Focus Philosophical Library. 2003. ISBN: 9780941051545
- 4) Plato. *Plato: Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras*. Ed. Malcolm Schofield. Trans. Tom Griffith. Cambridge University Press. 2009. ISBN: 9780521546003
- 5) Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Allan Bloom. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Basic Books, 2016. ISBN: 9780465094097
- 6) Plato. *Symposium*. Trans. Seth Benardete. University of Chicago Press. 2001. ISBN: 9780226042756

### Instructor Availability

It is important to me to be accessible to students throughout the semester. Below are the ways you can contact me:

### FAQ Discussion Board

You should ask general, course-related questions in the FAQ discussion board on Canvas, which will be active throughout the semester. If you have questions of a personal nature, you should email me from your FAU email address or visit during office hours.

### Email

Except for weekends and holidays, I will typically respond to email within 48 hours. **Please use your FAU email address rather than the Canvas inbox system.** Follow basic norms of professionalism (don't start an email with “hey”). If you have questions about what is appropriate, this is a helpful resource <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>

## Office Hours

On the day(s)/time(s) indicated at the top of this syllabus, I will hold office hours. Office hours are first-come, first-serve. No appointment is necessary. Office hours are an excellent opportunity for extended discussion of the material, assignments, and your academic aspirations. They also give me a chance to get to know you better, which helps with requests for letters of recommendation. I encourage each student to attend office hours at least once during the semester.

## Course Requirements

Participation:	20%
Oral Report:	10%
Research Paper:	50%
Presentation:	20%

## Participation (20%)

This class will be conducted as a graduate-level seminar. The success of the course therefore depends on each student maintaining regular attendance and active participation. I will take attendance each class. Excessive tardiness or absenteeism (*i.e.* more than one late/missed class, except in approved cases) will result in substantial grade deductions. If you think you will miss more than one class due to University-approved activities, please see me at the start of the semester. Please note I will abide by *FAU's official attendance policy*: "Students are expected to attend all of their scheduled University classes and to satisfy all academic objectives as outlined by the instructor. The effect of absences upon grades is determined by the instructor, and the University reserves the right to deal at any time with individual cases of non-attendance. Students are responsible for arranging to make up work missed because of legitimate class absence, such as illness, family emergencies, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations or participation in University-approved activities. Examples of University-approved reasons for absences include participating on an athletic or scholastic team, musical and theatrical performances and debate activities. It is the student's responsibility to give the instructor notice prior to any anticipated absences and within a reasonable amount of time after an unanticipated absence, ordinarily by the next scheduled class meeting. Instructors must allow each student who is absent for a University-approved reason the opportunity to make up work missed without any reduction in the student's final course grade as a direct result of such absence."

In addition to attending regularly, students are expected to come to class having read the assigned material carefully and prepared to discuss it. At the graduate level, informed and insightful contributions to class discussions are mandatory for earning a good participation grade. That does not mean you have to "know it all"; it means, simply, that you have made a good effort to grasp the meaning of the text and are speaking from a place of careful reflection. Furthermore, I expect you to give the conversation your full attention and to make a presence for yourself in the classroom as a helpful and respectful contributor.

To facilitate discussion, you will be required to post two thoughtful discussion questions (of approximately 100-250 words) on each week's assigned readings on the Canvas discussion board **by 11:00PM the night before class**. Your questions should not be simple reading comprehension questions (e.g., "What does Plato say about democracy?"). Rather, they should require an answer that *goes beyond* mere summary of the text. In other words, assume that everyone has read the text and basically understands it; ask questions that provoke us to analyze the text more deeply (e.g., a potential contradiction you're grappling with; a concept used in the text or assumptions in the argument that you want us to examine more closely; interesting connections between parts of the text or to other texts; additional support for or challenges to ideas presented in the text, etc.).

### Oral Report (10%)

While the required reading in this course will be largely limited to the works of Plato, the oral report assignment gives you the opportunity to go beyond Plato by reading (and delivering an oral report in class on) either a relevant primary text in ancient political thought or a work of secondary Platonic scholarship.

A list of potential recommended readings for each class date will be distributed early in the semester; students may read a work not included on this list with instructor approval. If multiple students are signed up for the same day, each should choose a different text to read and report on. The oral report should be well prepared and delivered, and should make use of a handout (max. 2 pages) that you have created and submitted to the Canvas assignment page at least two hours prior to the start of class. Further instructions will be discussed in class.

### Research paper (50%)

The major assignment for this course is a journal article-length (approx. 20-30 pages, double-spaced) research paper. The goal is to develop a paper that you can present at a professional conference or submit for publication in an academic journal. Your paper should aim to make an original contribution to a substantive area of research in the field of Platonic scholarship, though I am open to papers on other thinkers/texts in ancient political thought. Your topic will be developed in consultation with me. Keep in mind that the best political theory papers typically bring a major work of political theory to bear on a contemporary problem and/or address a significant gap in the scholarly literature.

As a starting point, I encourage you to focus on a specific topic (e.g., justice, war, religion, gender, political economy, etc.) within one of the texts read in the course (e.g., *The Republic*). A plethora of secondary literature exists on each Platonic dialogue, so if this is your first exposure to political theory and/or Plato, you will probably have your hands full with examining the scholarship on just one dialogue. If you are more experienced in political theory or feeling ambitious, you might productively compare two dialogues (or compare Platonic political thought to the political thought of another ancient thinker), but I generally would advise against this for beginning students, and I would not advise *anyone* to try to analyze more than 2-3 texts in a short paper.

Your paper should include the following:

- (1) An attention-grabbing explanation of your research question and its significance.
- (2) A clear, concise statement of your argument and how it makes an original contribution to political theory scholarship.
- (3) A literature review that engages at least **fifteen MAJOR works of secondary scholarship** pertaining to the major political theory text(s) examined in your paper.
- (4) A well-conducted analysis of the political theory text(s) you have chosen, as related to your chosen topic.
- (5) A conclusion that ties the paper together and reminds the reader of your contribution and its importance, without repeating verbatim earlier parts of the paper.

Given the demanding nature of this assignment, you should begin thinking about this paper early in the semester and managing your time such that you can do the necessary research and writing (while still keeping up with the assigned course readings). To help you stay on track, at crucial points in the term you will be required to submit: (1) a 1-2 page (double-spaced) paper proposal in

which you explain your research question and provide a separate list of 10-20 scholarly books/articles related to your topic; and (2) an outline of your paper, including how and where you plan to incorporate at least 15 major works of secondary scholarship. I am happy to help you navigate these assignments, and highly recommend that you visit during office hours to discuss the paper with me as you make progress on it.

### **Presentation (20%)**

At the end of the semester, students will give short, conference-style presentations of their original research. Your presentation should be well-rehearsed and within the specified time limit (TBD based on the number of students; typically, each student has about 8-10 minutes). It is not customary in political theory to give a PowerPoint presentation or to distribute handouts. You may use notes and you may even read from prepared remarks, though you should do your best to be engaging and make eye contact with the audience. After a set number of presentations, we will take a break to open the floor to any questions or suggestions. The idea is that the presentation will provide a final opportunity for you to receive some feedback from your peers and me before submitting the final paper a few days later.

### **Grading Policies**

- *Presentation*: Late presentations will be accepted only for university-approved absences (see attendance policy above), and in all but the most extraordinary of circumstances must be delivered within 48 hours of the original presentation time.
- *Papers*: Late papers will be penalized 5% if less than an hour late. Beyond an hour late (even by a single minute), papers will be penalized 10% per every 24-hour period late. This means that your paper will not be accepted for any credit if it is 10 or more days late. The best way to avoid a late penalty is to make sure to submit your work well ahead of the deadline. **Note that copy-editing and revision are integral parts of the writing process. Papers that show an unacceptably high level of error or carelessness (for instance, five or more errors in a paragraph) will be returned for you to proofread before resubmitting them. You will have five business days to edit the paper and to resubmit it with an automatic penalty of 10%. After five days, the grade on the paper will automatically drop to an F.**
- *Assignment Feedback Policy*: I will provide feedback on all submitted assignments within two weeks of the submission date. If an assignment requires a longer review period, I will communicate that to you.
- *Graded Work*: I will not discuss grades on any assignments for 24 hours after they have been returned. If, after 24 hours reflection, you do not understand why you received a particular grade, send me a written memo via email and I will respond as soon as possible.

### **Grading Scale**

A = 94-100	A- = 91-93.99	B+ = 87-90.99	B = 83-86.99
B- = 80-82.99	C+ = 77-79.99	C = 73-76.99	C- = 70-72.99
D+ = 67-69.99	D = 63-66.99	D- = 60-62.99	F = below 60

***Please be aware that you can track grades for individual assignments on the Canvas 'gradebook' but do not rely on the Canvas grade total. The percentages do not calculate correctly and many assignments cannot be inputted correctly into the interface. Throughout the semester, if you have any concerns you can ask me for an update on your grade.***

### **Honor Code Violations**

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see [http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg\\_4.001\\_5-26-10\\_FINAL.pdf](http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf).

Please note that I take plagiarism very seriously. If I catch you plagiarizing on an assignment, you will receive an automatic “F” in the course and will be reported to the university, which will likely result in a permanent honor violation notation on your transcript. So that we are all on the same page, here is the university’s definition of plagiarism (found in the document linked above):

- “1. The presentation of words from any other source or another person as one’s own without proper quotation and citation.*
- 2. Putting someone else’s ideas or facts into your own words (paraphrasing) without proper citation.*
- 3. Turning in someone else’s work as one’s own, including the buying and selling of term papers or assignments.” (FAU Code of Academic Integrity, 2.B)*

Please note that ***the use of AI to assist in any work assigned in this course is prohibited.*** Unauthorized use of AI will be treated as a violation of the honor code.

### **Disabilities**

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and follow all SAS procedures. SAS has offices across three of FAU’s campuses – Boca Raton, Davie and Jupiter – however disability services are available for students on all campuses. For more information, please visit the SAS website at [www.fau.edu/sas/](http://www.fau.edu/sas/). If you require a special accommodation, please make an appointment at the beginning of the semester to discuss the accommodation with me.

### **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAP) Center**

Life as a university student can be challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. Students who find stress negatively affecting their ability to achieve academic or personal goals may wish to consider utilizing FAU’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center. CAPS provides FAU students a range of services – individual counseling, support meetings, and psychiatric

services, to name a few – offered to help improve and maintain emotional well-being. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/counseling/>.

### **Policy on the Recording of Lectures**

Students enrolled in this course may record video or audio of class lectures for their own personal educational use. A class lecture is defined as a formal or methodical oral presentation as part of a university course intended to present information or teach students about a particular subject. Recording class activities other than class lectures, including but not limited to student presentations (whether individually or as part of a group), class discussion (except when incidental to and incorporated within a class lecture), labs, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving student participation, test or examination administrations, field trips, and private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the lecturer, is prohibited. Recordings may not be used as a substitute for class participation or class attendance and may not be published or shared without the written consent of the faculty member. Failure to adhere to these requirements may constitute a violation of the University's Student Code of Conduct and/or the Code of Academic Integrity.

It should also be noted that one of the objectives of this course is to facilitate critical thinking and debate around topics, theories, and concepts where disagreement is not only anticipated, but encouraged. The ability to think critically, express your ideas clearly, and respond to the professor and other students civilly are the keystones of the academic experience. In this course, the professor will provide instruction in an objective manner and will remain open to a wide variety of viewpoints, so long as those viewpoints are evidence-based and presented in a respectful way. During class, the professor may take positions and make statements for the sole purpose of accomplishing an academic objective or enhancing the learning environment. Additionally, the adoption of class materials for this course does not imply an endorsement of the full content of those materials or the positions of the authors of those materials. Often the professor will provide materials as a point of departure for critical thinking and debate. Students should keep in mind that the ideas presented or discussed during class may not necessarily reflect the professor's personal beliefs or opinions on the subject matter.

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Section I: What Is Justice?**

##### **January 16: Introduction to Course**

**\*\*\*Zoom meeting – Professor at SPSA Conference\*\*\***

-Plato's *Republic*, Book I

##### **January 23:**

-Plato's *Republic*, Books II-IV

##### **January 30:**

-Plato's *Republic*, Books V-VII

**February 6:**

-Plato's *Republic*, Books VIII-X

**Section II: The Political Lessons of Sophistry, Statesmanship, Poetry, and Philosophy**

**February 13:**

-Plato's *Gorgias*

**February 20:**

-Plato's *Menexenus*

-Plato's *Protagoras*

**February 27:**

-Plato's *Symposium*

**\*\*\*FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27<sup>th</sup>, 11:59PM: PAPER PROPOSAL DUE ON CANVAS\*\*\***

**March 6:**

-Plato's *Ion* (<https://classics.mit.edu/Plato/ion.html>)

-Plato's *Phaedrus*

**March 13: Spring Break**

**Section III: Plato and the Laws**

**March 20:**

-Plato's *Apology*

-Plato's *Crito*

**March 27:**

-Plato's *Laws*, Books I-III

**April 3:**

-Plato's *Laws*, Books IV-VI

**\*\*\*FRIDAY, APRIL 3<sup>rd</sup>, 11:59PM: OUTLINE DUE ON CANVAS\*\*\***

**April 10:**

-Plato's *Laws*, Books VII-IX

**April 17:**

-Plato's *Laws*, Books X-XII

**April 24:**

-Research Presentations

**\*\*\*FRIDAY, MAY 1<sup>st</sup>, 11:59PM: RESEARCH PAPERS DUE ON CANVAS\*\*\***