

Political Theory 4013: Ancient Political Thought

Florida Atlantic University, Fall 2026

Course Credits: 3.000

Prerequisites/Corequisites: None

WF 12:30 – 1:50PM, General Classroom South Boca 107

Instructor: Dr. Rebecca LeMoine

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Office Location: Social Science 384C

Office Hours: Tues. 10:00AM-2:00PM,
or by appt.

“The beginning is the most important part of every work.”

–Socrates, Plato’s *Republic*, 377a-b

Course Description

Although we could point to many different “beginnings” to the study of politics, the origin of Western political thought is traced to the ancient Greeks—namely, the philosopher Socrates and his student Plato. In this course, we will examine this beginning to the study of politics by turning to one of the great books from classical antiquity: Plato’s *Republic*. Unlike a treatise in which the author directly communicates his ideas and views, the *Republic* takes the form of a particular genre of creative fiction: Socratic dialogue. Specifically, it depicts an imagined conversation between Socrates and several friends (“interlocutors”) concerning the nature of justice, the ideal political regime, and various forms of governance including democracy and tyranny. Understanding their conversation and what Plato may intend to convey through his depiction of it will require us to be close readers, attentive both to the dialogue’s literary elements and to the historical context in which it was written. Our goal will be to discover why, over two thousand years later, Plato’s magnum opus continues to provoke wonder and resonate with many students of politics.

Course Delivery Mode

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

Objectives

- 1) Become familiar with major questions, themes, and approaches in ancient political thought and their application to contemporary political life.
- 2) Learn to read and interpret political theory texts.
- 3) Improve ability to construct persuasive arguments, both verbal and written.
- 4) Practice a more contemplative and self-aware form of citizenship, and consider its effects on political life and personal fulfillment.

Classroom Expectations

This class adopts an unusual format. There is only one book for this course: Plato’s *Republic*. While you are asked to complete the assigned reading listed on the schedule at the end of this syllabus prior to coming to class (and, indeed, will be given quizzes at the beginning of class to test your reading comprehension), class sessions will be spent reading aloud as much of the assigned section as we can cover. Along the way, we will pause to ask questions, analyze and discuss what we are reading, and watch the occasional video clip or listen to a song to further our understanding. You should also expect me to call on you to ask for your knowledge of a particular

key concept/idea, which will be assigned to you during the previous class meeting. Aside from making a genuine effort to grapple with the assigned reading on your own before coming to class, doing research on this concept is your only required “homework.”

Due to the nature of this course, it is essential that all students attend regularly, bring their book (paper copies only, as electronic devices will generally not be allowed), and participate mindfully. If you cannot commit to spending 80 minutes of your time twice a week engaged in thoughtful conversation about a single book, with distractions such as your phone and laptop stowed away out of sight, then you will not do well in this course and should consider alternative options this semester. This course will require you to be present not only physically, but also psychologically. It will test like never before your skills at active listening, literary interpretation, analytical reasoning, verbal articulation of ideas, and engagement in civil dialogue. Moreover, we will work on written communication skills by devoting the final two weeks to an in-class essay.

A brief warning about the text: As you will discover, Plato’s *Republic* is a dense, philosophical text that requires focused attention. It is not possible to skim it and retain much understanding. Rather, you will need to set aside ample time *before* class to read the material listed on the syllabus for that day, as you will likely find that you need to *re-read* parts of the text. You should also be an active reader. As you read, write a few words summarizing major sections of the conversation in the margins, underline/highlight any phrases or passages that stand out to you, look up the definitions of unfamiliar words, write down any questions or reactions you have in response to the arguments a particular character is making, etc.

Finally, it is of the greatest importance that you do your best to practice “sympathetic” reading. While “critical thinking” is valuable, before we can think “critically” we need to ensure that we have understood the text properly and given the arguments fair consideration. The practice of “sympathetic” reading, which entails approaching the text as though it were a friend, will therefore be encouraged throughout the term. Each class session, I will push you to think “sympathetically” about the text by taking on the voice of the author in defense of the work. This means at times I may appear to adopt some unsavory positions. If you are uncomfortable with teachers who play “devil’s advocate,” or don’t like it when teachers withhold their own opinions in an effort to get you to think for yourself, then you probably will not enjoy this class.

Required Texts

There is only one book for this course, and it is **absolutely required**. If you do not show up to class each meeting with this exact translation/edition (a paper copy, not an electronic version), you will lose points off your grade.

Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, Trans. Allan Bloom, 3rd edition, Basic Books, 2016.
ISBN: 9780465094097

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 the instructor from your FAU email address or schedule an office hour appointment.

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

Every *Tuesday from 10:00AM – 2:00PM*, I will hold open office hours in my office, SO 384C. No appointment is necessary.

Course Requirements

Attendance:	10 points
Textbook Engagement:	10 points
Key Concepts:	10 points
Quizzes:	10 points
Participation:	15 points
Term paper:	45 points (Paper Proposal: 5 pts; Peer Draft: 5 pts; Peer Edit: 5pts; Final Paper: 30 points)

Attendance (10 points)

Attendance will be taken promptly at the start of each class meeting. More than the occasional late arrival or early departure will result in deductions to your attendance grade. Everyone is permitted *one unexcused absence* and *two excused absences*. **Excused absences require make up work, which is due within a week of the absence.** For an absence to be excused, you must clear it with me in advance or, in cases of illness or emergency, as soon as possible. The following generally count as *unexcused* absences: slept through alarm; need to study/work; need to finish an assignment; leaving early/arriving back late from vacation; bad hangover.

If you think you will miss more than three classes 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."

Textbook Engagement (10 points)

Excluding the first week of class, there are 24 class meetings in which we will either be discussing assigned reading from Plato's *Republic* or writing about the text, and on which you will need your book. On those dates (see syllabus schedule below), I will check to see if you have brought the correct book with you. Everyone will receive 4 "freebies." That means to receive a perfect score you will need to have your book with you for 20 out of the 24 class sessions. Each book check will count as 0.5 points, for a total of 10 points.

Key Concepts (10 points)

Ten times during the semester, you will be assigned one key concept to research related to the next assigned reading selection. You will write a short paragraph on that concept, which you will submit to Canvas before the next class meeting. Be prepared to discuss your concept in class. Each key concept is worth 1 point for a total of 10 points. You may consult internet sources when doing research on your concept, but you may not ask AI (e.g., ChatGPT) to produce an answer for you.

Quizzes (10 points)

A short quiz will be administered promptly at the beginning of class at least once per week. These quizzes will test how closely you read the text(s) assigned for that day. Please note: **if you do not do the reading, you will not pass the quiz.** As you will discover, the quizzes will ask about details not found on Sparknotes, Wikipedia, etc. It is therefore essential to do the readings in full. During the quiz, you may use notes you have handwritten on a separate sheet of paper or in a notebook created for this class. To ensure your grade is not adversely affected by a particularly difficult quiz, **I will drop your lowest three quiz scores.** The 10 quiz points will be determined by your average on the remaining quizzes. There are **no make-up quizzes.** If you walk into class after the quiz has already been collected, you will not be able to take it.

Participation (15 points)

Participation in classroom discussions is essential to this class. Participating entails listening attentively, not looking at electronic devices, reading aloud when asked, and contributing thoughtful questions and comments. Students who struggle with classroom participation should schedule a meeting with me during the first week of class to discuss strategies for increasing classroom participation. It is also possible to supplement one's participation grade with office hour visits, emails demonstrating engagement with the material, Canvas discussion board posts, etc. If, on the other hand, you do not struggle with public speaking, note that speaking frequently does not guarantee you a good participation grade. **I value quality of contributions over quantity.** You must be engaged with the text to earn a good participation grade.

Term Paper (45 points)

The major requirement for this course is an 8-10 page (double-spaced) term paper on a topic of political relevance in Plato's *Republic*. Don't let the (relatively short) length fool you. This paper is designed to help you become a better thinker and more persuasive writer, whether you consider yourself to be a "good" writer or not. This class will stress the link between clear, compelling writing and sound thinking. It will advance the view that writing *is* thinking and that one way to develop your thinking is to work on your writing (which is why relying on AI generated writing is so problematic...). As such, we will write, re-write, and re-write some more. The process will be grueling and, if done right, will throw you into existential perplexity (a rarely experienced feeling in our modern age of instantaneous "answers"). However, by breaking it down into smaller pieces

and teaching writing as a process at which anyone can excel, I hope you will find the assignment manageable and rewarding.

The first stage of this assignment will involve writing a paper proposal. For this assignment, you will come up with two different topics/ideas for the paper. You will then write two opening paragraphs, one for each potential topic/idea. I will provide feedback on your proposal, indicating which of these two ideas might be the more promising direction for your paper, or what opportunities and challenges each poses. The final two weeks of the semester will be devoted to working on the essay in class; you may also work on it outside of class, but you will be asked to submit your work at the end of each class session so that I can see your draft as it develops. You will then submit a Peer Draft (the first full, 8-10 page draft) and provide feedback on a peer's paper through the Peer Edit assignment. Based on your peer editor's feedback, you will craft the final version of your paper. By the end of the semester, you will have re-conceptualized and revised your paper numerous times, as well as received feedback from various sources. This is a paper you won't forget!

Grading Policies

- *Quizzes*: There are no make up quizzes. If you miss a quiz for an unexcused absence, that quiz will count as one of your 3 dropped scores. If you miss a quiz for an excused absence, then the number of points for that quiz will be subtracted from the total number of quiz points when calculating your quiz grade. In other words, if you miss a quiz for an excused absence, then the quiz simply won't count for or against you.
- *Papers*: Papers are due to the relevant Canvas folder at the beginning of class on the date listed. 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. Participation will be assessed by the beginning of section II.
- *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.
- *Extra Credit*: There will be an extra credit question on every quiz, allowing you to accumulate extra credit points throughout the semester. In addition, you can receive a 1% bump to your final course grade (which can mean the difference between an "A" and an "A-") by visiting me during office hours. To receive the extra credit, you must: (1) prepare a few questions or passages from the readings you want to discuss and (2) complete the visit **by the end of the designated final exam period for this class**. You can only receive the extra credit points once, though additional office hour visits can help to supplement your participation grade.

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 reported grade. 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.

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)*

AI Policy

The use of AI to assist in any work assigned in this specific course is **prohibited**. To clarify what I mean: you may use tools such as Microsoft Word’s spelling/grammar check or Grammarly’s proofreading and tone suggestions. You may not use AI to rewrite your work with the click of a button (such as with Grammarly’s “paragraph rewrite” function). Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are also strictly forbidden. If you are not sure whether a specific tool is allowed, ask me.

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/. 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: The Search for Justice

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
26-Aug	Introduction		

28-Aug		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book I, 327a-336a	
02-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book I, 336b-354c	
04-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book II, 357a-372e	
09-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book II, 372e-383c	
11-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book III, 386a-403c	
16-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book III, 403c-414b	
18-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book IV, 419a-435a	
23-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book IV, 435a-445e	

Section II: Politics and Philosophy

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
25-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book V, 449a-466d	
30-Sep		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book V, 466e-480a	
02-Oct		• Writing Day (in SO 200)	Paper Proposal due 11:59pm on Sunday, Oct. 4th
07-Oct		• <i>The Greeks</i> documentary	
09-Oct		• <i>The Greeks</i> documentary (Professor at professional conference)	
14-Oct		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book VI, 484a-497a	
16-Oct		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book VI, 497a-511e	
21-Oct		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book VII, 514a-527c	
23-Oct		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book VII, 527c-541b	

Section III: Political Regimes

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
28-Oct		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book VIII, 543a-555a	
30-Oct		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book VIII, 555b-569c	
04-Nov		• Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book IX, 571a-580d	

06-Nov		Plato's <i>Republic</i>, Book IX, 580d-592b	
11-Nov		Plato's <i>Republic</i>, Book X, 595a-608b	
13-Nov		Plato's <i>Republic</i>, Book X, 608b-621d	
18-Nov		Writing Day (in SO 200)	
20-Nov		Writing Day (in SO 200)	
25-Nov		<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	
27-Nov		<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	
02-Dec		Writing Day (in SO 200)	
04-Dec		Writing Day (in SO 200)	Peer Draft due 11:59pm on Sunday, Dec. 6th Peer Edit due 11:59pm on Tues., Dec. 8th
11-Dec, 10:30AM- 1:00PM	Concluding Remarks	Final Paper Due	Final Paper