

**POLS 3321 - 600: Ancient Political Theory**  
Texas A&M University – San Antonio  
Fall 2025

Time: OLC-Asynchronous

Instructor:  
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Is political freedom about doing what you want, sharing power, or actively participating in political life? Is freedom an inherently individual practice or a necessarily collective one? Is it a personal or public matter? What secures freedom and what erodes it? What is the relationship of political freedom to power, equality, community, and identity? What government is and how it is practiced relies on a whole host of assumptions, some of which must be clearly agreed upon at the outset. For instance, how groups will organize themselves – will they have representatives or not? How will those representatives be elected? How will they decide policy? How will they enforce it? etc. – requires consent to legitimate governing bodies. Answers to such questions as “What is justice? (Or freedom? Or equality?)” “Who is a good citizen and why?” “What is a good state?” and “What should my obligations be?” remain under continual debate, even as they paradoxically determine much of the world we live in and share with others. This course is an introduction to ancient political theory and the field of study that helps us develop working answers to those more contentious questions surrounding the ways in which we live our political and social lives.

**Digital Office Hours:**

Time: T/Th 11:00 am — 12:00 pm or by appointment.

[Schedule Office Hours meeting](#)

I will be holding office hours via Microsoft Teams every Tuesday and Thursday from 11 am to 12 pm. You are highly encouraged to make use of my office hours throughout the semester to discuss any ideas you have – big or small – pertaining to this course or your general course of study. If you cannot make the designated time, please do not hesitate to email me to set up an appointment. Click the link above to schedule a meeting.

**Course Meetings:**

As this is an asynchronous course, there will be no mandatory scheduled meeting times. THIS COURSE WILL BE A SELF-PACED PROGRAM. This means that you will be given assignments at the beginning of the week that you complete on your own schedule before the due dates at the end of the week. I encourage the use of my weekly office hours if you are interested in a Q&A or a general discussion of the weekly topics and/or assignments.

**Class Resources:**

- [GroupMe](#): Everyone in the class is welcome to join the GroupMe chat for informal discussion, asking questions, and/or general ranting about the course. I will be in the chat to answer any questions that come up about course materials or assignments. Since this is an online course and we do not have the benefit of in-class discussion, this is a great

place to ‘think out loud’ and get feedback. This has been a great resource and I highly encourage everyone to join.

### **Grading**

Your grade for this course will be based on the following: Writing Assignments (30%), Critical Reflections (30%), midterm paper (20%), and term paper (20%). Submissions with vague and generic language that omit the specific issues/questions raised in the assignment prompt will get a maximum grade of 49%. To receive full credit for the course, your participation must be made and your work submitted by the stated deadlines. No late submissions will be accepted for the Midterm and Final Papers; late work will be accepted for all other assignments, with 5% being taken off for each day passed the assignment deadline. No assignments will be accepted more than one week late.

Grade breakdown:

30% Writing Assignments

30% Critical Reflections

20% Midterm Paper

20% Term Paper

### **Course Requirements**

- *BlackBoard*: Each student will be expected to sign onto Blackboard regularly. It is the student’s responsibility to make sure they have regular access to a computer that can access the Internet. I will use Blackboard for official class announcements so check your Blackboard e-mail and website regularly.
- *Readings*: All assigned materials are required reading and integral to your success in this course. Details and nuance matter in political theory, and the details are found in the text.
- *Critical Reflections*: Critical Reflection assignments are posted at the beginning of the week and due on the date assigned in the syllabus (no later than 11:59 pm). Critical Reflections must follow the provided guidelines and be at least 500 words to be considered for full credit. Guidelines for Critical Reflection submissions can be found in the “Syllabus” folder in BlackBoard. Critical Reflections will be graded in accordance with the rubric posted on BlackBoard.
- *Writing Assignments*: Writing Assignments are posted at the beginning of the week and due on the date assigned in the syllabus (no later than 11:59 pm). Writing assignments should be double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, and at least 750 words. Take time to carefully consider your responses, address all issues raised in the assignment prompt, and proofread each submission. Writing Assignments will be graded in accordance with the rubric posted on BlackBoard.
- *Midterm Paper*: Midterm paper assignment will be a reflection and critical engagement piece, responding to questions raised by texts we have read so far.
- *Term Paper*: Term paper assignment will be issued approximately two weeks before the due date. The assignment will be a reflection and critical engagement piece, responding to questions raised by texts we have read after the midterm.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- analyze and evaluate foundational texts in ancient political theory, identify central arguments and underlying assumptions, and assess their relevance to contemporary political and ethical issues (Critical Thinking).
- effectively communicate complex interpretations of ancient political theory in clear, well-organized writing that uses appropriate academic conventions and textual evidence from primary sources (Effective Communication).
- articulate how ancient political theories relate to their own beliefs, ethical frameworks, and decision-making processes as a member of a political community (Personal Responsibility).
- explain how ancient political thinkers understood justice, power, and civic engagement, and assess how those ideas can inform responsible participation in modern democratic societies (Social Responsibility).

### **Course Materials**

Acquire your books **early** in the semester. If you prefer a physical copy, students with the use of a credit/debit card can also obtain these books at on-line merchants (e.g. amazon.com, bn.com, half.com, powells.com, abe.com). I suggest buying used, if available, for a lower priced text. **There are also versions of the required texts available online that can be found with a Google search.** Alternate editions/versions/formats are permissible for this course.

### **Required Books:**

Tannenbaum, Donald, *Inventors of Ideas: Introduction to Western Political Philosophy*, ISBN-13: 978-0495908241

### **Recommended Books:**

Plato, *Republic*, Grube translation, ISBN-10: 0872201368

Plato, *Five Dialogues*, Grube translation, ISBN-10: 0872206335

Aristotle, *Politics*, edited by R. F. Stalley, ISBN-10: 0199538735

### **Course Schedule and Readings**

**Classes begin August 25<sup>th</sup>.**

#### **Week 1 (August 25 – 31):**

- Read the syllabus thoroughly and familiarize yourself with the course in BlackBoard.
- Watch *Why Study Political Philosophy?* clip (located in Course Content folder).
- Reading Assignment from *Inventors of Ideas*:
  - “Political Philosophy: Introducing the Challenge” (**handout**)
- Critical Reflection #1 due Sunday, Aug 31

#### **Week 2 (Sep 1 – 7):**

- Reading assignments:
  - Barthes, “Death of the Author” (**handout**)
  - Foucault, “What is an Author” (**handout**)
- Critical Reflection #2 due Sunday, Sep 7

#### **Week 3 (Sep 8 – 14):**

- Reading assignment:
  - *Inventors of Ideas*, “Plato: Advocating Justice” (**handout**)
  - Plato, *Five Dialogues*, “Euthyphro”
- Writing Assignment #1 due Sunday, September 14

#### **Week 4 (Sep 15 – 21):**

- Reading assignments:
  - Plato, *Five Dialogues*, “Apology;”
  - Plato, *Five Dialogues*, “Crito;”
  - Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (**handout**)
- Writing Assignment #2 due Sunday, September 21

#### **Week 5 (Sep 22 – 28):**

- Reading assignments:
  - Plato, *The Republic*, Books I & II
- Critical Reflection #3 due Sunday, Sep 28

#### **Week 6 (Sep 29 – Oct 5):**

- Reading assignments:
  - Plato, *The Republic*, Books III –V
- Writing Assignment #3 due Sunday, Oct 5

#### **Week 7 (Oct 6 – 12):**

- Reading assignments:
  - Plato, *The Republic*, Books VI-VIII
- Review midterm assignment prompt.

#### **Week 8 (Oct 13 – 19): Midterm Assignment Due**

- Reading assignment: None
- **MIDTERM PAPER DUE Sunday, October 19**

#### **Week 9 (Oct 20 – 26):**

- Reading assignments:
  - *Inventors of Ideas*, “Aristotle: Endorsing Community”
  - “[Tyranny, Democracy, and the Polity: Aristotle’s Politics](#)” (blog)
- Viewing assignments:
  - Melissa Schwartzberg, “[What did democracy really mean in Athens?](#)” (YouTube)
  - Historia Civilis, “[The Constitution of Athens](#)” (YouTube)
- Critical Reflection #4 due Sunday, October 26

#### **Week 10 (Oct 27 – Nov 2):**

- Reading assignments:
  - Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book I
- Writing Assignment #4 due Sunday, November 2

#### **Week 11 (Nov 3 – 9):**

- Reading assignment: Aristotle’s *Politics*, Book III: chapters 1-13, and Book IV: chapters 2-3, 8-9, 11-12, and 15
- Critical Reflection #5 due Sunday, November 9

**Week 12 (Nov 10 – 16):**

- Reading assignments:
  - *Inventors of Ideas*, “Cicero: Enlarging Citizenship”
  - Cicero, “On the Republic” and “On the Laws” (**handout**)
- Writing Assignment #5 due Sunday, November 16

**Week 13 (Nov 17 – 23):**

- Reading assignments:
  - *Inventors of Ideas*, “Augustine: Diminishing Politics”
  - Augustine, “The City of God” (**handout**)
- Critical Reflection #6 due Sunday, November 23

**Week 14 (Nov 24 – 30): NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**

- No assignments
- Final Paper assignment prompt available

**Week 15 (Dec 1 – 7): LAST WEEK OF CLASSES**

- Reading assignment: None
- Writing Assignment: Work on Final Paper

**Week 16 (Dec 8 – 14): FINALS WEEK**

- Reading assignment: None
- Writing Assignment: Work on Final Paper

**FINAL PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 10<sup>th</sup> @ 11:59 pm.**