

POLS 4010
Spring 2024 | MWF 11:30-12:20 | 301 Baldwin Hall

Instructor
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Political Philosophy to Machiavelli: Masterpieces of Greece and Rome

“When evening comes I return home and go into my study.
At the door I take off my everyday clothes, covered with mud and dirt,
and don garments of court and palace. Now garbed fittingly I step into the ancient courts
of men of antiquity, where, received kindly, I partake of food that is for me alone and for which I was
born, where I am not ashamed to converse with them and ask them the reasons for their actions. And they
in their full humanity answer me. For four hours I feel no tedium and forget every anguish, not afraid of
poverty, not terrified by death. I lose myself in them entirely.”
—Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, 1513

“I would read with pleasure around 4 am, with my drugs and whisky in cheap motels,
savoring the clash of beliefs, personalities and values, played out on antiquity’s stage [...]
I urge anyone who wants life on earth to really come alive for them to enjoy
the beautiful ancestral ancient world.”
—Iggy Pop, “Caesar Lives,” 1995

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Machiavelli’s imaginative mind was formed, in part, by reading. He would spend hours each night reading ancient Greek and Roman authors, his attention absolutely absorbed by their moral and political wisdom. Like Machiavelli (and Iggy Pop), we are going to read masterpieces of Greek and Roman thought. But we will also converse with *each other* regularly about the readings, deciding together the interest that they hold for us. Though difficult, the project of entering into the thoughts of long dead authors and rethinking them for our own purposes is at once possible, useful, and enjoyable. The readings in this course address the concerns of politically-minded young men and women who seek worldly power and glory. All the authors we are studying seek to instill in their readers the superior dignity of a just and virtuous life, compared with the most successful achievements of the life of mere power and ambition, in which no moral obligations are regarded in practice, or even recognized. The authors we are studying wrote in response to the moral crisis of their time, which still mirrors a significant moral crisis today: the collision of immoral power with powerless morality.

¹ I want all students to make use of my office hours or email (iwinham@uga.edu) if you have questions or confusions about anything pertaining to the course. Since I spend most of my time in Brooks Hall, please email me to set up a time to meet in my Baldwin Hall office. Email is preferred if you have a quick question about the class or a specific question about the reading or something covered in class.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 1) Basic knowledge and critical understanding of the work of ancient thinkers.
- 2) The ability to discuss ideas in a pair or group with clarity, patience, and sensitivity to the views of others.
- 3) The ability to see themselves as critical readers and to realize that the meaning of a work of political thought is something they themselves construct.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The books in this course are physical prerequisites for effective reading and lively discussion. Please rent or purchase only the hyperlinked texts listed below. You must purchase ONLY these specific editions and translations. Different translations of these texts will create difficulties for reading and discussing them, so we all must have the same editions. The texts that are not hyperlinked will be available on eLC, and you should *print them out* well ahead of time. **Note:** We need to be literally on the same page, so I expect you to *bring the assigned reading to class*. Please do NOT use ebooks. It is well established that students absorb much less from electronic books compared to print books.

- Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, trans. Gagarin/Woodruff (Cambridge)
- Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Martin Hammond (Oxford)
- Plato, *Apology*, trans. Grube/Cooper, 3rd edition (Hackett)
- [Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Robin Waterfield \(Oxford\)](#)
- Plato, *Republic*, Books I and II, trans. Grube/Reeve, 2nd edition (Hackett)
- [Cicero, *On Obligations*, trans. P. G. Walsh \(Oxford\)](#)
- [Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson \(Penguin\)](#)
- [Machiavelli, *The Essential Writings of Machiavelli*, trans. Peter Constantine \(Modern Library\)](#)

SOME ADVICE ON READING

Let's be honest: since smartphones have colonized our minds and trained us to skim and scroll through social media, it has become very difficult to read a sequence of printed pages and to follow long, drawn-out, nuanced arguments. The slow, cognitively intense interpretation of a book demands all your attention and focus. You can't read a book like a magazine or newspaper, reading a little bit here, a little bit there. You must sit still, in silence, focusing your attention on a single, static object, turning the pages one by one. But when you look at your phone, even for a second, you are drawn out of the flow of reading, and to get back into it you have to restart the sentence or paragraph. The more time you spend reading in this distracted way, the less progress you make. When you attempt to read while constantly checking your phone you almost experience reading backwards—as constant regress. You never experience the great joy of reading—the total immersion in the world of the author's ideas.

One student in POLS 4010 explained his difficulty with doing the reading this way:

Sometimes when a work does not seem connected to the modern era, it can be hard to feel locked in or engaged with it. As a result, it can have a hard time keeping the attention of the students reading the work and have a negative effect on the absorption and understanding of the text. If that were to happen then it would not be good for learning.

Notice how the student puts the blame on the works themselves for not holding his attention, as if it is the book's job to keep the attention of the reader and not the reader's job to pay attention to the book! The readings in this course cannot compete against the fire hose of notifications on your phone. It's your job to pay attention to what you are reading, and to resist the modern distractions of the internet.

Furthermore, it's a good thing to shake ourselves out of the idea that the "modern era" is the only one that matters. Human experience is so much bigger than here and now. The value of reading old books is precisely that they are weird and unfamiliar. We read ancient texts not to confirm the beliefs and prejudices of the day but because they offer a different perspective from our own, and a different vantage-point from which to review, and recognize the extent and nature of, our assumptions and beliefs. If the readings do not seem connected to the modern era this is a good thing! We need to resist the urge to translate unfamiliar and threatening ideas into ones with which we are familiar. We need to retain our sense of how odd they often are—and discuss this oddness.

COURSE FORMAT

This course is an experiment in active learning. You will not be reading ancient works and then learning from the professor that you've read them all wrong. The point of this course is not to learn the instructor's interpretation of the assigned texts, and it is not organized around some definite "content" to be covered in class by lectures and passively received by students. You will not be quizzed on any information, there are no tests or exams, and there is no specific content you need to master. Without the pressure of having to know correct answers or cram for a quiz, the focus of this course shifts towards open discussion, exploration of ideas, and critical thinking.

The basic idea of this course is to read ancient political thought, to make some record of our reading, and to discuss the reading together in class in a relaxed and exploratory learning environment. The point of this course is to create meaning, not merely to receive or reproduce it. The point is to foster your own ideas, not to adopt somebody else's. The point is to create, in our own minds, a personal synthesis of the ideas and information passed down through the writings of ancient thinkers. We'll do this in our discovery days (6 classes), in our deep-reading activities (6 classes), and in our open discussions (16 classes). The other classes will consist of lectures (6 lectures) and videos (3 videos).

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND CONDUCT

Please keep in mind some simple, commonsense elements of being a member of this small, discussion-based, book-club-like class.

- First, *timing*. Please arrive on time and remain for the entire class session. Late arrivals and early departures are extremely disruptive for everyone. If you think this will become habitual, don't take the class.
- Second, *diversions* and *distractions*. While your phones must be silenced and put away for the entire class, computers/tablets are allowed if you cannot live without them. However, it is important to remember that the use of computers/tablets in class should be focused on academic purposes only. This means that while you may use your computer to take notes and to access your notebook, you should not use it to access social media, email, chat, or engage in any other non-academic activities. It is important to be respectful of your classmates and the instructor by paying attention and participating in class, rather than being distracted by your devices.
- Finally, and most importantly, *class attendance*. It is essential that you come to class; class does not exist without your attendance and participation. Since **50% of your grade is based on your attendance and participation in class**, this is *not* the course you want to take if coming to class is low on your agenda. Since we will be devoting most of our classroom time to discussing the reading, enacting rather than rehearsing their study, any class you miss means you missed it forever. It is impossible to make it up.

DISCUSSION DAYS AND NOTEBOOKS

This course is organized around in-class open discussions of the assigned reading. The aim in our discussions is to allow great latitude for the agenda of topics to be explored. Class discussions will be constructed and directed entirely from topics and questions initiated by students, so that the instructor becomes in fact a real fellow-student, and the fellow-students are in fact teachers.

On discussion days, three students will take on the specific roles listed below. Every student will perform all roles once. Sign-ups for these roles will be on January 10. If a student is absent that day, the instructor will assign their role for them.

Discussion Director: The role of a discussion director is to arrive to class with at least three questions about the assigned reading, and to lead the class discussion. Don't worry about the small details. Your task is to help lead a discussion of the big ideas in the reading. The best discussion questions do not usually have one right or obvious answer. It is a good idea to have some questions that ask about a specific passage in the text. Please note the page number so the class can easily and quickly find the passage during the discussion.

Literary Luminary: Your job is to pick out sections of the text that are especially *difficult*. The idea is to identify a passage or paragraph that is challenging, strange, weird, tricky, confusing, or obscure, but which you think is important for us to unpack together. During the discussion, share your reason for choosing the passage and read it out loud. Please note the page number so the class can easily and quickly find the passage during the discussion.

Concept Captain: Your job is to share observations and questions you have about a key concept in the reading, supporting your selection with evidence from the text. Please note the page number so the class can easily and quickly find the evidence during the discussion.

BEFORE EVERY DISCUSSION DAY, ALL STUDENTS WILL COMPLETE ALL THREE ROLES IN THEIR PERSONAL NOTEBOOKS.

On every discussion day, everyone should have completed their notebook entry, and everyone will upload their notebook entry to eLC by 8 p.m. Your notebook entries should be dated and the assigned reading for the day should be clearly indicated at the top (i.e., author, title, pages). Your entries should be organized as follows:

- At the top list 3 possible discussion questions or topics for the day. Number your list. Include passages and page numbers and your own commentary as you see fit. You may be called on in class by the discussion director (or professor) to read one of your discussion questions or topics and explain it.
- Next, write down the passage in the text that you found especially difficult (but also important or interesting) and explain the reason you chose it. You must write out the entire passage and your explanation of its difficulty and importance should be more than a sentence or two and should get into the details of the passage itself, connecting it to the reading as a whole.
- Finally, share observations and questions you have about a key concept in the reading, supporting your selection with evidence from the text.

I expect your notebook entries to be *more than 500 words*. In general, the more you write the better. If you turn in less than 500 words the entry will be considered incomplete and graded accordingly. Depth of reflection, however, matters more than quantity of words.

GRADES AND EXTRA CREDIT

Your final grade will be based on 100 points. 50 points will be based on your attendance/participation. 50 points will be based on your notebook. You have the option of earning up to 10 extra credit points by writing a 5+ page paper on a topic of your choosing, which must be approved by the instructor before you write it.

You will upload your notebook entry to eLC by 8 p.m. every discussion day.

The rubric for each notebook entry (16 total) is as follows:

1 point: The student did not complete the assignment.

2 points: The student completed the specific roles, but not to the best of their ability.

3 points: The student completed the specific roles to the best of their ability.

Each unexcused absence will result in a reduction of your attendance/participation grade by 4 points.

You are not required to speak during every discussion to earn full participation points. It's fine to listen, and to speak when you have something to add to the discussion.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Accommodations

Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in order to participate in course activities or meet course requirements should contact the DRC and the instructor.

Academic Honesty

The University's Academic Honesty Policy ("A Culture of Honesty," available at honesty.uga.edu) defines scholastic honesty as "the performance of all academic work without cheating, lying, stealing, or receiving assistance from any other person or using any source of information not appropriately authorized or attributed." Academic honesty is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, will result in disciplinary action.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

This schedule is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary and are considered further elaborations of the original course. Remaining in this course after reading this syllabus will signal that you accept the possibility of changes and responsibility for being aware of them.

Monday, January 8 – First Day of Class (Syllabus Day)

Wednesday, January 10 – Name Day and Sign-up Day

Friday, January 12 – Bettany Hughes, "Helen of Troy: Goddess, Princess, Seductress"

Monday, January 15 – **NO CLASS. MLK, JR. DAY**

([Martin Luther King, Jr., taught a seminar on political philosophy in 1961 at Morehouse](#))

Wednesday, January 17 – Deep-Reading Exercise on Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen*

Friday, January 19 – Discussion on Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen*

Monday, January 22 – Voyage of Discovery: Plato's *Apology*

Wednesday, January 24 – Discussion on Plato’s *Apology*

Friday, January 26 – Lecture on Socrates and the Sophists

Monday, January 29 – Voyage of Discovery: Thucydides’s *Peloponnesian War*, Bk. I

Wednesday, January 31 – Voyage of Discovery continued: Thucydides’s *Peloponnesian War*, Bk. I

Friday, February 2 – Lecture on Thucydides

Monday, February 5 – Deep-Reading Exercise on the Corcyraean Conflict (1.24-55)

Wednesday, February 7 – Discussion on the Corcyraean Conflict (1.24-55)

Friday, February 9 - Edith Hall, “The Greatest Speech of All Time: Pericles’ Funeral Oration”

Monday, February 12 – Discussion on Pericles and the plague. Read Thucydides’s *Peloponnesian War*, Bk. II (focus on the plague (2.47-54) and the three speeches by Pericles (1.139-44, 2.34-46, 2.59-65))

Wednesday, February 14 – Lecture on Thucydides

Friday, February 16 – Danielle Allen, “What to Do with Sound-Bites: On Politics and Propaganda in the 21st Century”

Monday, February 19 – Discussion on the Melian Dialogue (5.84-116)

Wednesday, February 21 – Deep-Reading Exercise on Plato’s *Gorgias*, pp. 3-26

Friday, February 23 – **NO CLASS.** Read Plato’s *Gorgias*, pp. 3-62

Monday, February 26 – Discussion on Plato’s *Gorgias*, pp. 3-26 (Socrates’s conversation w/Gorgias)

Wednesday, February 28 – Discussion on Plato’s *Gorgias*, pp. 27-62 (Socrates’s conversation w/Polus)

Friday, March 1-11 – **NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK**

Wednesday, March 13 – Discussion on Plato’s *Gorgias*, pp. 63-135 (Socrates’s conversation w/Callicles)

Friday, March 15 – Lecture on Plato’s *Gorgias*

Monday, March 18 – Discussion on Plato’s *Republic*, Bk. I (focus on Socrates’s conversation with Thrasymachus)

Wednesday, March 20 – Voyage of Discovery: Plato’s *Republic*, Bk. II (Socrates’s conversation with Plato’s brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus)

Friday, March 22 – Discussion on Plato’s *Republic*, Bk. II

Monday, March 25 – Voyage of Discovery: Cicero’s *Obligations*, Bk. I

Wednesday, March 27 – Discussion on Cicero’s *Obligations*, Bk. I (all)

Friday, March 29 – **NO CLASS**. Read Cicero's *Obligations*, Bk. II (all)

Monday, April 1 – Discussion on Cicero's *Obligations*, Bk. II (all)

Wednesday, April 3 – Lecture on St. Augustine

Friday, April 5 – Deep-Reading Exercise on Augustine's *City of God*, Bk. I (all)

Monday, April 8 – Lecture on Augustine's *City of God*, Books I, II (chs. 1-4, 6-7, 11-14, 16-23) and III (chs. 1, 9-14, 20-21, 31)

Wednesday, April 10 – Discussion on Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. IV (chs. 1-4, 6-8, 12, 15, 18-23, 25-26, 28-30, 33), and Book V (chs. 1, 8-19, 21, 24-26)

Friday, April 12 – **NO CLASS**. Read Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XIX

Monday, April 15 – Discussion on Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XIX

Wednesday, April 17 – Voyage of Discovery: Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, Bk. I

Friday, April 19 – Deep-Reading Exercise on Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, Bk. I

Monday, April 22 - Discussion on Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, Bk. I (Dedicatory letter, Preface, chs. 1-13, 16-18, 24-27, 29-30, 32-34, 38, 41-43, 46, 50-51, 53-55, 58)

Wednesday, April 24 – Deep-Reading Exercise on Machiavelli's *Prince*, chs. 15-25

Friday, April 26 – Discussion on Machiavelli's *Prince*, chs. 15-25