

## **POLS 4010**

Spring 2025 | 9:35-10:50 a.m. T-Th | 104 Baldwin Hall

### **Instructor**

Dr. Ilya P. Winham

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## **POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY TO MACHIAVELLI**

*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 his friend, Francesco Vettori, 1513

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Step into the intellectual world of antiquity and engage with a selection of foundational thinkers of Western political philosophy. Inspired by Machiavelli's example, this course invites you to spend hours reading ancient Greek and Roman authors—and, most importantly, to discuss them in class. Together, we will explore their arguments, uncover their enduring wisdom, and consider how their ideas remain relevant to the political and moral challenges of our time. Entering the minds of long-dead authors is a challenging but profoundly rewarding endeavor. As C. S. Lewis observed in his 1941 sermon *The Weight of Glory*: “Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.” Leave behind the mud and dust of daily life and join us on this intellectual adventure. In this course, the wisdom of the ancients will not only sharpen your mind but nourish your soul as we examine questions of justice, power, and the human condition.

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<sup>1</sup> My office hours are “by appointment” because I spend most of my time in Brooks Hall advising students. I want all students to feel free to make an appointment to see me (in Baldwin or Brooks) or to email me. Email is preferred if you have a quick question about the class or a specific question about the reading or something covered in class.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Traditionally, this course has three goals: first, to provide an introduction to some of the most important political and ethical theories and texts produced in the western world prior to the 17th century; second, to examine the relationship between political ideas and theories and the historical contexts in which they were articulated and developed; and third, to explore the ways in which ideas articulated by previous figures and in prior historical periods can inform and enrich contemporary discussions. The three goals of this particular version of the course are as follows: first, to develop foundational knowledge and a critical understanding of the works of ancient political thinkers; second, to cultivate the ability to discuss concepts and arguments with clarity, patience, and respect for differing perspectives; and third, for students to recognize themselves as critical readers who actively construct the meaning of political texts.

## **COURSE FORMAT**

This course is an experiment in active learning, where your experience will be shaped by the effort and curiosity you bring to it. The basic idea is to read ancient political thought, to record your reflections, and to discuss the reading together in class.

There are no quizzes, tests, or papers—no pressure to memorize correct answers or cram for exams. Instead, the emphasis is on open discussion and intellectual exploration. This format allows us to focus on discussing complex ideas, sharing interpretations, and developing critical thinking skills in a collaborative environment. Our success depends on creating a space where everyone feels free to express themselves, to explore new ideas, to take chances, and to make mistakes. This is not a course where you consume lectures and PowerPoints; it is a space for active, in-class, text-based learning. The ultimate goal is to cultivate the habits of an educated person: reading deeply, thinking independently, and engaging thoughtfully with challenging texts and ideas.

## **CLASS DISCUSSIONS**

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 questions and 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.

Each discussion day, the designated **Discussion Director(s)** will take the lead in starting and gently guiding the discussion. Students will sign up for this role on January 7. If a student is absent on that day, the instructor will assign a discussion date on their behalf. The Discussion Director is free to approach this role creatively but should aim to spark meaningful discussion of the assigned reading. A good starting point is to pose open-ended questions that invite exploration rather than simple answers. It is a good idea to have some questions ready that ask about specific passages in the text.

This approach allows us to collectively unpack the complexities of ancient political thought, ensuring that our discussions are rich, dynamic, and thought-provoking.

## NOTEBOOKS DUE BEFORE EVERY CLASS DISCUSSION

Before every class discussion everyone is required to complete a notebook entry on the assigned reading and upload it to eLC. Notebook entries are due by midnight the night before the discussion (e.g. Monday by midnight for our discussion on Tuesday). Late notebooks will be penalized one (1) point. I will not accept notebook entries more than one week late.

The purpose of your notebook is to be prepared to engage in a text-based in-class discussion. You are required to come to class having already noted and uploaded the following:

### 1. A new or strange understanding.

Reflect on the reading and identify a new or strange way of understanding something. Explain this new or strange way of thinking you found in the reading. The point of doing this is to push against your tendency to look for familiar ideas in what you read.

### 2. A quote from the text that resonated or needs unpacking.

Copy down a passage that either made a strong impression on you or one that you found particularly challenging or ambiguous. Be ready to explain why you chose this passage and discuss its significance or complexities with the class. You must type 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. The point of doing this is to engage in intense textual interpretation.

### 3. A question that will help us wrestle with the meaning of the text and/or the implications of the text.

Develop an open-ended question that invites thoughtful discussion about the text's core ideas, themes, or arguments. The point of doing this is to have a question ready that should encourage the class to analyze and interpret the text's meaning.

Notebook entries should be dated and the assigned reading for the day should be clearly indicated at the top (i.e., author, title, pages). 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. **Note:** AI assistance or use in any amount or form (e.g. Grammarly, ChatGPT, or other tools) is strictly and absolutely prohibited and will be reported as a violation of academic honesty.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

The books in this course are physical prerequisites for effective reading and lively discussion. Please rent or purchase only the 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 they will not be permitted. All other readings will be available on eLC, and you are required to *print out* the assigned pages ahead of time. **Note:** We need to be literally on the same page, so you must *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.

- [Plato, \*Gorgias\*, trans. R. Waterfield \(Oxford\)](#) (used: \$2-3 + shipping)
- [Cicero, \*On Obligations\*, trans. P. G. Walsh \(Oxford\)](#) (used: \$4-5 + shipping)
- [Lucretius, \*The Nature of Things\*, trans. A. E. Stallings \(Penguin\)](#) (used: \$3-4 + shipping)
- [Guicciardini, \*Maxims and Reflections\*, trans. M. Domandi \(UPenn\)](#) (used \$7-8 + shipping)
- [Machiavelli, \*The Prince\*, trans. P. Constantine \(Modern Library\)](#) (used: \$2-3 + shipping)

## **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, prolix 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 books 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 not get distracted.

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 commonplaces of the day but to challenge 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.

## **TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

This course is intentionally designed to create a learning environment free from the distractions of modern technology. Phones, tablets, and computers are not permitted during class. While these devices can be useful in other contexts, they have no legitimate use in our discussions. Instead, we aim to engage directly with the readings and with each other, without any intermediaries. By removing screens from the classroom, we prioritize active engagement with the texts, thoughtful conversation, and genuine connection. This means no PowerPoint slides, no digital note-taking, no videos and no lectures. The absence of technology encourages deep focus, allowing us to better wrestle with the ideas and arguments of the ancients in their original form. I understand that this policy may feel challenging, but it is a deliberate choice to cultivate a rare and meaningful intellectual space. Please bring the assigned reading to class and come prepared to discuss and think critically without the aid of screens and lectures.

## **GRADING**

The grading scheme is designed to reward consistent attendance and preparation for class discussions. Everyone begins the semester with 100 points (A+). You can only lose points.

You lose points when:

1. You are absent from class without an acceptable excuse. For each unexcused absence your final grade will be reduced by 4%. So, this is not the class to take if attendance is low on your priorities. If you miss class you miss everything; missed classes cannot be made up.

The instructor is the sole and final judge of whether an absence is excused or not. If you know you will be absent this semester it is essential to inform the instructor by email as soon as possible. Generally speaking, excused absences are absences due to illness (where a doctor's note may need to be produced), severe accidents, participation in an official UGA Athletic Association competition, funerals, weddings, LSAT test-taking, interviews or similar un-reschedulable commitments. Unexcused absences typically include absences due to skipping class, vacations, leisure travel, routine check-ups, and reschedulable appointments. When in doubt, ask.

2. Notebook entries are evaluated on a simple rubric:

-0: Excellent. Keep up the good work.

-0.5: Good, with minor improvements needed.

-1: Adequate, but the entry is lacking in one or more areas.

-1.5: Poor. Significant improvement needed.

-2: Bad/failing. No evident effort was put into the assignment.

-2.5: Not submitted or missing.

This system emphasizes the importance of preparation and attendance, ensuring a rewarding experience for those who are fully present and active in the course.

## **EXTRA CREDIT**

You have the option of earning up to 5 extra credit points by writing a 5+ page paper on a topic of your choosing, which must be pre-approved by the instructor no later than April 1.

## **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](http://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.

January 7- Syllabus and Sign-up Day

January 9 – Discussion on Gorgias’s *Encomium of Helen*

January 14 – Voyage of Discovery: Thucydides’s *Peloponnesian War*

January 16 – Voyage of Discovery: Thucydides’s *Peloponnesian War*

January 21 – Discussion on the Corcyraean Conflict (1.24-1.55)

January 23 – Discussion on Athens and Sparta (the rest of Book I)

January 28 – Voyage of Discovery: Pericles’s Funeral Oration (2.34-2.46)

January 30 – Discussion on Pericles and the Plague (Book II)

February 4 – Voyage of Discovery: Plato’s *Gorgias*

February 6 – Discussion on Plato’s *Gorgias*, pp. 3-26 (Socrates’s conversation with Gorgias)

February 11 – Discussion on Plato’s *Gorgias*, pp. 27-62 (Socrates’s conversation with Polus)

February 13 – Discussion on Plato’s *Gorgias*, pp. 63-135 (Socrates’s conversation with Callicles)

February 18 – Voyage of Discovery: Lucretius’s *The Nature of Things*

February 20 – Discussion on Lucretius’s *The Nature of Things* (Books I and II)

February 25 – Discussion on Lucretius’s *The Nature of Things* (Book III)

February 27 – NO CLASS. I’ll be moderating a panel at the Active Learning Summit on campus.

March 4 – NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK!

March 6 – NO CLASS. STILL SPRING BREAK!

March 11 – Voyage of Discovery: Cicero’s *Obligations*

March 13 – Discussion on Cicero’s *Obligations*, Bk. I

March 18 – Discussion on Cicero’s *Obligations*, Bk. II

March 20 – Discussion on Cicero’s *Obligations*, Bk. III

March 25 – Voyage of Discovery: Augustine’s *City of God*

March 27 – Voyage of Discovery: Augustine’s *City of God*

April 1 – Discussion on Augustine’s *City of God*, Book I

April 3 – Discussion on Augustine’s *City of God*, Book II

April 8 – Discussion on Augustine’s *City of God*, Book XIX

April 10 – Discussion on Augustine’s *City of God*, Book XIX

April 15 – Voyage of Discovery: Guicciardini’s *Maxims and Reflections*, Series C

April 17 – Discussion on Guicciardini’s *Maxims and Reflections*, Series C

April 22 – Voyage of Discovery: Machiavelli’s *Prince*

April 24 – Discussion on Machiavelli’s *Prince*