

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY

POLS 3000 | Fall 2025

MWF 11:30-12:20 | Baldwin 301

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*To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle.*¹
—George Orwell

Political theory is both a specialized field of inquiry within political science and a cognitive enterprise that we all engage in whenever we reflect on and attempt to navigate the course of human events. As an academic field of study, political theory is at the core of an education in political science, for the only way to think intelligently about politics is to learn to think one's way through the works of the great writers on the subject. Political theory is also at the heart of the very idea of a university, which was created to foster reflection and conversations on the fundamental questions of life.

The principal aim of this course is to offer a detailed examination of some of the classic texts of the Western tradition of political thought: Plato's *Apology* and *Republic*; Aristotle's *Politics*; Machiavelli's *Prince*; Marx's *Communist Manifesto*; Mill's *On Liberty*; Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*; and King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. We will approach these works with the three-fold aim of: entering into the thought-world of the text in order to understand the aims of its author on his or her own terms; feeling the force of the problems that the author took himself or herself to be confronting; and assessing the promise (and difficulties) of his or her strategies for confronting them. Once we have a sense of what an author is doing we will be in a better position to appreciate the material as a cognitive resource by which we can equip ourselves with concepts and perspectives to help us think about what is really happening in our society.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

My objectives for this course are open-ended. While I hope you acquire knowledge from the readings and lectures, the ultimate payoff is learning how to read and interpret challenging texts and to think critically. By taking this course you will:

- Develop skills of careful and thoughtful reading of political thought.
- Develop a sense of history which is necessary for an adequate understanding of political life.
- Develop the ability to think analytically, critically, and creatively about political concepts and ideas.
- Consider how the problems, concepts, and arguments examined might be of significance today and challenge our own way of thinking about politics.

COURSE FORMAT:

This is a text-based lecture course. Given the number of students in the course and setup of the classroom, class time will be devoted to lectures. I expect you to come to class on time, regularly, and to listen and take notes. I expect you to have read the assigned material for each class session *before* coming to class and to be prepared to participate during breaks in the lectures for questions, discussion, the airing of different points of view, and so on. The point of the lectures is not to give you the “correct” interpretation of the material, but to give you resources with which you can work out a more satisfying interpretation yourself.

¹ Quotation and citation practices are important. Make sure you've copied down the quotation correctly and cite your source: George Orwell, “In Front of Your Nose,” *Tribune*, 22 March 1946, in *Essays*, selected and introduced by John Carey, edited by Peter Davidson (New York: Everyman's Library, 2002), p. 1043.

TEXTS FOR STUDY:

The following books are **required** and available in the campus bookstore for purchase:

- Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism*. Part Three of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harvest)
- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (Penguin Modern Classics)
- Plato, *Republic*, 2nd edition, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett)
- J. S. Mill, *On Liberty and other writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge)
- Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Constantine (Modern Library)
- George Orwell, *1984* (Signet Classics)

Buy or rent these physical books, new or used, at the campus bookstore or order them online. You may not use a different edition or translation of these books. You may not use electronic editions either. I want you to learn how to interact with printed texts, not your devices. My role in this class is to help you learn, and I cannot do that if you are not on the same page reading the same words. We will often be trying to make sense of specific passages in these texts; by using the same edition, we can literally all be on the same page.

The following texts will be made available on eLC, and you do not need to purchase them:

- *Plato, “Apology,” in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, 3rd edition, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. J. M. Cooper (Hackett)
- *Aristotle, *Politics*, Books I, II, and III, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett)
- *Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. J. Isaac (Yale)

Although these are pdfs, you should **print them out** so you can write on them and bring them to class.

Note: It is essential to keep up with the reading. The reading is to be completed by the date listed on the syllabus. Always bring the assigned reading to class. The texts for this class are not “quick reads”; nor can you simply read the first few pages or glance over their paragraphs quickly to catch their leading ideas. You must reserve enough time to read the assigned texts slowly, carefully, and completely.

Classroom rules and conduct: The classroom is a learning environment first and foremost, and everyone is responsible for making certain that the classroom remains an environment conducive to learning. Therefore phones must be silenced and put away. I strongly recommend that you not use laptops or tablets to take notes, since recent research suggests that taking notes by hand rather than on a screen is more effective for you and, more importantly, less distracting to those around you. If you must use a device to take notes you may not use it for anything else; please disable your wireless if you can’t resist.

Accommodations: If you plan to request accommodations for a disability, please register with the Accessibility & Testing. They can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting <https://accessibility.uga.edu/>.

GRADED IN-CLASS QUIZZES:

We will take 6 in-class, closed-note, closed-book quizzes this semester. The quizzes consist of true/false, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and very-short-answer questions. I will post a study guide for each quiz on eLC. The quizzes typically take less than ten minutes to complete, but you'll have the entire class period. The purpose of the quizzes is to hold you accountable for the reading and for what is covered in class. They are designed to reward students who do the reading and attend class.²

Date	Quiz	Points
Aug. 22	<i>Apology</i>	10
Aug. 27	<i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i>	10
Oct. 3	<i>Politics</i>	10
Oct. 13	<i>The Prince</i>	10
Oct. 24	<i>On Liberty</i>	10
Nov. 5	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i>	10
		Total: 60

GRADED PAPERS:

You will write two longer papers this semester, 5-6 pages, each worth 20 points. Instructions for each paper will be posted on eLC.

Date	Paper	Points
Sep. 19	Plato	20
Nov. 21	Orwell and Arendt	20
		Total: 40

Grading scale: A 94-100 A- 90-93 B+ 87-89 B 83-86 B- 80-82 C+ 77-79 C 73-76 C- 70-72.

Late assignments: No late assignments will be accepted unless you have received written permission (i.e., an email) from me giving you an extension of time on the assignment. I will grant extensions for a reasonable amount of time (usually a few days) for legitimate reasons (e.g. cases of illness or emergency).

Extra credit: You will have one opportunity to earn extra credit this semester. In our last class session on **Monday, December 1**, you will be given an exam of about 40 questions that require short answers to some basic matters of 'fact' that pertain to the study of the various theorists and texts read in this course. We will grade this exam together in class. A good score on this exam may well boost your final grade in the course; but a not so good score will not hurt you.

Academic honesty: The University's Academic Honesty Policy ("A Culture of Honesty," available at <http://honesty.uga.edu/index.html>) 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.

² Scholars have found that class attendance is a better predictor of college grades than any other known predictor of academic performance, including scores on standardized admissions tests such as the SAT, high school GPA, study habits and study skills.

ChatGPT and other Large Language Models: UGA's Academic Honesty Policy states that use of technology, including generative AI tools, is unacceptable unless otherwise authorized by the instructor of record. In this class AI generated or enhanced writing will not be permitted. I consider the use of ChatGPT, Grok, and other LLMs a blatant violation of academic honesty. College is a place where you are free to think and to engage with ideas yourself. To have a chatbot think and generate text for you defeats the entire purpose of college. AI is bad for your intellectual development, and none of the institutions making money off of AI care that it is bad for you. But I care, which is why I'm telling you not to use it. You go to college to develop a better version of yourself, not to use the latest version of ChatGPT. As John Stuart Mill so wisely wrote in *On Liberty*: "Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think" (36). In other words, it's better for you and for society to think for yourself and to fall into error, than to seek to avoid errors by avoiding the trouble of thinking for yourself. AI allows any of us to feel like an expert, but it is risk, doubt, and failure that make us human.

UGA Well-being Resources: UGA Well-being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy, and engaged student community.

Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care & Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit sco.uga.edu. Student Care & Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services. They also administer the Embark@UGA program which supports students experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity.

UGA provides both clinical and non-clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus, or studying from home or abroad, UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.

- Well-being Resources: well-being.uga.edu
- Student Care and Outreach: sco.uga.edu
- University Health Center: healthcenter.uga.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: caps.uga.edu or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: healthpromotion.uga.edu
- Accessibility & Testing: accessibility.uga.edu

Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting well-being.uga.edu.

Disclaimer:

The course syllabus 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.

Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Assignments

Wed., Aug. 13 – Syllabus Day

Fri., Aug. 15 – Name Day

Mon., Aug. 18 – Read Plato's *Apology* (pp. 20-42)

Wed., Aug. 20 – Review or reread Plato's *Apology*

Fri., Aug. 22 – In-class quiz on Plato's *Apology*

Mon., Aug. 25 – Read Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (pp. 1-30)

Wed., Aug. 27 – In-class quiz on King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*

Fri., Aug. 29 – NO CLASS

Mon., Sept. 1 – NO CLASS

Wed., Sept. 3 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book I (pp. 1-31)

Fri., Sept. 5 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book II (pp. 32-59)

Mon., Sept. 8 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book III (pp. 60-93)

Wed., Sept. 10 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book IV (pp. 94-121)

Fri., Sept. 12 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book V (pp. 122-156)

Mon., Sept. 16 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book VI (pp. 157-185)

Wed., Sept. 17 – Read Plato's *Republic*, VII (pp. 186-212)

Fri., Sept. 19 – NO CLASS. **Paper on Plato's *Republic* due by Midnight EST. Upload it to eLC**

Mon., Sept. 22 – Introduction to Aristotle. No reading assignment

Wed., Sept. 24 – Read Aristotle's *Politics*, Book I (pp. 2-21)

Fri., Sept. 26 – Read or review Aristotle's *Politics*, Book I (pp. 2-21)

Mon., Sept. 29 – Read Aristotle's *Politics*, Book II (pp. 22-51)

Wed., Oct. 1 – Read Aristotle's *Politics*, Book III (pp. 52-82)

Fri., Oct. 3 – In-class quiz on Aristotle's *Politics*

Mon., Oct. 6 – Introduction to Machiavelli. Start reading Machiavelli's *Prince*

Wed., Oct. 8 – Quentin Skinner on Machiavelli (video). Keep reading Machiavelli's *Prince*

Fri., Oct. 10 - Finish reading Machiavelli's *Prince*

Mon., Oct. 13 - In-class quiz on *The Prince*

Wed., Oct. 15 – Introduction to J. S. Mill

Fri., Oct. 17 – Read Mill's *On Liberty*, ch. 1 (pp. 5-18)

Mon., Oct. 20 – Read Mill's *On Liberty*, ch. 2 (pp. 19-55)

Wed., Oct. 22 – Read Mill's *On Liberty*, ch. 3 (pp. 56-74)

Fri., Oct. 24 – In-class quiz on *On Liberty*

Mon., Oct. 27 – Read part I of *The Communist Manifesto* (pp. 73-84)

Wed., Oct. 29 – Read part II of *The Communist Manifesto* (pp. 84-92)

Fri., Oct. 31 – NO CLASS. FALL BREAK

Mon., Nov. 3 – Read parts III and IV of *The Communist Manifesto* (pp. 92-102)

Wed., Nov. 5 – In-class quiz on *The Communist Manifesto*

Fri., Nov. 7 – Introduction to George Orwell. Start reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Mon., Nov. 10 – Continue reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Wed., Nov. 12 – Finish reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Fri., Nov. 14 – Introduction to Hannah Arendt. Start reading “Totalitarianism in Power” (pp. 87-157)

Mon., Nov. 17 – Finish reading “Totalitarianism in Power” (pp. 87-157)

Wed., Nov. 19 – Read “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government” (pp. 158-178)

Fri., Nov. 21 – NO CLASS. **Paper on Orwell and Arendt due by Midnight EST. Upload it to eLC**

Nov. 24-28 – NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon., Dec. 1 – In-class Extra Credit Factoid Quiz