

POLS 4010

Spring 2026 | 11:35 a.m.-12:55 p.m. T-Th | 104 Baldwin Hall

Instructor

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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

Inspired by Machiavelli's study of the ancients, this course invites you to think with ancient Greek and Roman authors and to discuss them in class. We will explore political philosophy deeply by reading such writers as Gorgias, Thucydides, Plato, Lucretius, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Guicciardini and Machiavelli. The writings of these authors are truly valuable insofar as they enable us to see with the eyes, hear with the ears, and think with the minds of the ancients. The give-and-take of class discussion, of communal inquiry, is the substance of our class for the weeks we are together. There is no better way to escape from the tyranny of modern fashions and beliefs than to stumble through ideas, emotions, and modes of expression foreign to the age in which we live.

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. There are no quizzes, tests, or papers—no pressure to memorize facts or cram for exams. Instead, the emphasis is on discussion and intellectual exploration. 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 ancient texts and ideas.

¹ 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

You are probably never again going to be regularly spending undistracted blocks of time in a room with other people who have all read the same thing and are committed to getting meaning from it, so we should treat our time together like the special occasion it is. This course has three goals: 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.

CLASS DISCUSSIONS

This is a discussion-only course. The aim for our discussions is to allow great latitude for the questions, ideas, 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 fellow-students are in fact teachers. Overcoming an aversion to speaking in class can be life-altering—academically, socially, emotionally. If you aspire to be a lawyer, politician, teacher, or some other profession, speaking up is what you *do*.

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 13. 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 prepare questions that ask about specific passages in the text.

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. The purpose of your notebook is to be prepared to participate in our discussions. Instructions for each notebook assignment will be posted on 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.

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 missing and graded accordingly.

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/missing.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The books in this course are required for effective reading and lively, technology-free, in-class discussion. Please purchase only the specific texts listed below. Different translations are not permitted. Ebooks are not permitted. **Note:** We need to be literally on the same page, so you must *bring the assigned reading to class*. I also request that you not rent your books. Students who rent books are too afraid to use them and choose instead to sacrifice their learning for the sake of a small sum of money.

- [Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. M. Hammond \(Oxford\)](#) (used: \$12/new: \$15)
- [Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. R. Waterfield \(Oxford\)](#) (used: \$2/new: \$7-8)
- [Cicero, *On Obligations*, trans. P. G. Walsh \(Oxford\)](#) (used: \$3/new: \$12)
- [Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, trans. A. E. Stallings \(Penguin\)](#) (used: \$5/new: \$12)
- [Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. M. Hammond \(Penguin\)](#) (used: \$7/new: \$7)
- [Guicciardini, *Maxims and Reflections*, trans. M. Domandi \(UPenn\)](#) (used: \$5/new: \$20)
- [Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. P. Constantine \(Modern Library\)](#) (used: \$2/new: \$14)

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 difficult to read a sequence of printed pages and to follow long, complex writing. 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, alone, 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 thoughts and ideas. The readings in this course cannot compete against the firehose of notifications on your phone. It's your job to pay attention to what you are reading and not get distracted.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

This course is intentionally designed to create a learning environment free from the distractions of modern technology. So all technology is banned. Phones, tablets, and laptops are not permitted during class. While these devices can be useful in other contexts, they have no legitimate use in our classroom. 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, no recordings, and no lectures. I understand that this policy may feel challenging, but it is a deliberate choice to cultivate a 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.

We will take a 10-minute break every class. During the break you can scroll and text all you want.

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. Your notebook entry is judged to be lacking or needing improvement. See the rubric above.
2. You forget to bring the assigned reading to class. If you are in class without the reading we are discussing that day your final grade will be reduced by **1%**.
3. You are absent from class. For each unexcused absence your final grade will be reduced by **4%**. 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.

Attendance Policy: Consistent with the instructor's own educational philosophy and the rules and regulations of the University of Georgia, attendance, regular and prompt, and for the entire duration of the class sessions, is **required**. Unexcused absences are penalized 4%. The instructor is the sole and final judge of whether an absence is excused or unexcused. An excused absence is one for which a student has written proof, if at all attainable, that one's absence was necessitated by a valid cause, e.g., LSAT exam, GRE, job or internship interview, incapacitating illness, death in one's immediate or close family or of someone close to the student, emergency surgery. Sleeping late and studying for exams, for example, are not accepted as excused absences. Various kinds of medical appointments and participation in extra-curricular UGA activities may or may not be excusable. Consult the instructor prior to the absence, if at all possible. If prior consultation is not possible, then contact the instructor as soon as possible after the fact. Attendance at weddings, baptisms, bar or bat mitzvahs, etc. are not normally excusable absences. But, again, discuss the matter with the instructor. Unexcused absences generally include absences due to skipping class, vacations, leisure travel, routine check-ups, and reschedulable appointments. When in doubt, ask. Six or more absences, for any reason (excused or unexcused), will result in a final grade of 'F'.

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.

Extra credit: There are no planned opportunities for earning extra credit. But I am open to suggestions and proposals.

Generative AI tools and LLMs: UGA's Academic Honesty Policy states that use of technology, including generative AI tools, is unacceptable unless otherwise authorized by the instructor of record. Let me be clear: Any use of Large Language Models (LLMs) or Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), including but not limited to ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Grok, Grammarly, etc., is **expressly prohibited**. This means that LLM use for grammar and clarity, or for making anything smoother and friendlier, is **banned**. LLM use constitutes a violation of academic integrity. Don't use it for academic work. Don't spend your time at UGA feeding AI the readings you should be doing. You go to college to develop a better version of yourself, not to use the latest version of ChatGPT.

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.

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/>.

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

Tuesday, Jan. 13 – Syllabus and Discussion Director Sign-up Day

Thursday, Jan. 15 – Discussion on Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen*

Tuesday, Jan. 20 – Voyage of Discovery: Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War*

Thursday, Jan. 22 – Voyage of Discovery: Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War*

Tuesday, Jan. 27 – Discussion on the Corcyraean Conflict (1.24-1.55)

Thursday, Jan. 29 – Discussion on the Power of Thucydides's Speeches (Book I)

Tuesday, Feb. 3 – Voyage of Discovery: Pericles's Funeral Oration (2.34-2.46)

Thursday, Feb. 5 – Discussion on Pericles and the Plague (Book II)

Tuesday, Feb. 10 – Voyage of Discovery: The Melian Dialogue (5.84-5.116)

Thursday, Feb. 12 – NO CLASS

Tuesday, Feb. 17 – Discussion on Plato's *Gorgias*, pp. 3-26 (Socrates's conversation with Gorgias)

Thursday, Feb. 19 – Discussion on Plato's *Gorgias*, pp. 27-62 (Socrates's conversation with Polus)

Tuesday, Feb. 24 – Voyage of Discovery: Socrates's conversation with Callicles (*Gorgias*, pp. 63-135)

Thursday, Feb. 26 – Discussion on Plato's *Gorgias*, pp. 63-135 (Socrates's conversation with Callicles)

Tuesday, March 3 – Voyage of Discovery: Lucretius's *The Nature of Things*

Thursday, March 5 – NO CLASS

March 10 & 12 – NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK!

Tuesday, March 17 – Discussion on Lucretius's *The Nature of Things*, Books I and II (pp. 3-71)

Thursday, March 19 – Discussion on Lucretius's *The Nature of Things*, Book III (pp. 72-105)

Tuesday, March 24 – Voyage of Discovery: Cicero's *Obligations*

Thursday, March 26 – Discussion on Cicero's *Obligations*, Book I (pp. 3-54)

Tuesday, March 31 – Discussion on Cicero's *Obligations*, Book II (pp. 55-85)

Thursday, April 2 – Discussion on Cicero's *Obligations*, Book III (pp. 86-126)

Tuesday, April 7 – Voyage of Discovery: Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*

Thursday, April 9 – Discussion on Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, Books 1-6 (pp. 3-57)

Tuesday, April 14 – Discussion on Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, Books 7-12 (pp. 58-122)

Thursday, April 16 – Voyage of Discovery: Guicciardini's *Maxims and Reflections*, Series C

Tuesday, April 21 – Discussion on Guicciardini's *Maxims and Reflections*, Series C

Thursday, April 23 – Discussion on Guicciardini and Machiavelli's *Prince* (chs. 3, 6-8, 13-18, 21, 24-25)