

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY

POLS 3000 | Fall 2026

MWF 12:00-12:55 | Baldwin 301

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Ever since the days of Aristotle, the study of politics has oscillated between the extremes of pure description and political ethics, between a panorama of the Constitution of Athens, and a discussion of justice and the good life. Since both these topics are of perennial interest to expert and general public alike, they have flourished and contributed their share to the betterment of human understanding of the nature and conditions of our living together—as well as our inability to live together.

—Carl J. Friedrich (1937)

The nature and conditions of our living together and our inability to live together—that's the subject matter of political theory. 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. The reading and study of political theory is also at the heart of the very idea of the university as a place to make capable and cultivated human beings. The principal aim of this course is to offer a detailed treatment 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*; King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*; and Arendt's *On Violence*. 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 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.

TEXTS FOR STUDY:

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

- Aristotle, *Politics: A New Translation*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett)
- Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Harvest)
- Plato, *Republic*, trans. C. Rowe (Penguin Classics)
- J. S. Mill, *On Liberty and other writings*, ed. S. Collini (Cambridge)
- Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. P. Constantine (Modern Library)

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 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)
- * Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (Penguin Modern Classics)
- *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 all phones and laptops must be put away. I strongly recommend that you not use tablets to take notes, since 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 tablet to take notes you may not use it for anything else and it must remain flat on the table in front of you.

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 7 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 about 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.¹

Date	Quiz	Points
Aug. 26	<i>Apology</i>	10
Sept. 2	<i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i>	10
Oct. 9	<i>Politics</i>	10
Oct. 19	<i>The Prince</i>	10
Nov. 2	<i>On Liberty</i>	10
Nov. 11	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i>	10
Nov. 18	<i>On Violence</i>	10
		Total: 70

GRADED PAPER:

You will write one paper this semester, 5-6 pages, worth 30 points. Instructions will be posted on eLC.

Date	Paper	Points
Sep. 25	Plato	30
		Total: 30

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 **November 20** 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 is worth 3 extra credit points; 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.

¹ 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.

AI/Large Language Models: AI use is unacceptable. Period. UGA's Academic Honesty Policy states that use of technology, including generative AI tools, is unacceptable unless otherwise authorized by the instructor of record. I consider the use of AI not only unacceptable but also dishonest and dishonorable. And nothing dishonorable is beneficial to you because it means you must leave integrity behind, deceive others, and seek out the secrecy of walls and drapes. I speak with the voice of students when I note that when other students use AI they use it in secret because they know it is shameful. Good students aspire to honorable work and avoid all shameful actions, even in secret. AI use, however much concealed, is not in any way honest according to UGA's Academic Honesty Policy. What benefit could AI ever give you if it causes you to lose your integrity and robs you of the title of an honest and trustworthy person? The very act of thinking that AI is useful for your learning is itself disastrous for your education, for the value of this course lies in the labor of reading, thinking, and writing. I expect you to learn all you can by your mental effort and hard work.

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

Mon., Aug. 17 – Syllabus Day

Wed., Aug. 19 – Name Day

Fri., Aug. 21 – Read Plato's *Apology* (pp. 20-42)

Mon., Aug. 24 – Review or reread Plato's *Apology*

Wed., Aug. 26 – In-class quiz on Plato's *Apology*

Fri., Aug. 28 – NO CLASS

Mon., Aug. 31 – Read Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (pp. 1-30)

Wed., Sept. 2 – In-class quiz on King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*

Fri., Sept. 4 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book I (pp. 1-31)

Mon., Sept. 7 – NO CLASS. LABOR DAY.

Wed., Sept. 9 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book II (pp. 32-59)

Fri., Sept. 11 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book III (pp. 60-93)

Mon., Sept. 14 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book IV (pp. 94-121)

Wed., Sept. 16 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book V (pp. 122-156)

Fri., Sept. 18 – Read Plato's *Republic*, Book VI (pp. 157-185)

Mon., Sept. 21 – Read Plato's *Republic*, VII (pp. 186-212)

Wed., Sept. 23 – NO CLASS

Fri., Sept. 25 – NO CLASS. **Plato paper due by midnight EST. Upload it to eLC**

Mon., Sept. 28 – Introduction to Aristotle. No reading assignment

Wed., Sept. 30 – Read Aristotle's *Politics*, Book I (pp. 2-21)

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

Mon., Oct. 5 – Read Aristotle's *Politics*, Book II (pp. 22-51)

Wed., Oct. 7 – Read Aristotle's *Politics*, Book III (pp. 52-82)

Fri., Oct. 9 – In-class quiz on Aristotle's *Politics*

Mon., Oct. 12 – Introduction to Machiavelli. Start reading Machiavelli's *Prince*

Wed., Oct. 14 – Finish reading Machiavelli's *Prince*

Fri., Oct. 16 - Quentin Skinner on Machiavelli (video).

Mon., Oct. 19 - In-class quiz on *The Prince*

Wed., Oct. 21 – Introduction to J. S. Mill

Fri., Oct. 23 – Read Mill's *On Liberty*, ch. 1 (pp. 5-18)

Mon., Oct. 26 – Read Mill's *On Liberty*, ch. 2 (pp. 19-55)

Wed., Oct. 28 – Read Mill's *On Liberty*, ch. 3 (pp. 56-74)

Fri., Oct. 30 – NO CLASS. FALL BREAK.

Mon., Nov. 2 – In-class quiz on *On Liberty*

Wed., Nov. 4 – Read part I of *The Communist Manifesto* (pp. 73-84)

Fri., Nov. 6 – Read part II of *The Communist Manifesto* (pp. 84-92)

Mon., Nov. 9 – Read parts III and IV of *The Communist Manifesto* (pp. 92-102)

Wed., Nov. 11 – In-class quiz on *The Communist Manifesto*

Fri., Nov. 13 – Introduction to Hannah Arendt. Read *On Violence*, part I.

Mon., Nov. 16 – Read *On Violence*, part II.

Wed., Nov. 18 – In-class quiz on *On Violence*

Fri., Nov. 20 – In-class Extra Credit Factoid Quiz