

Political Philosophy
(Spring 2025)

This is a draft syllabus and is subject to change

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Class: MWF 9:20am-10:30am (MSC 124)
Student Hours: MWF 3:45pm-5:00pm, Th 2:45pm-5:00pm

Department Mission Statement:

The mission of the Department of Politics and International Relations is to equip students with knowledge about politics and government, with methods for analyzing political actors and institutions, and with the ability to apply biblical and theological perspectives to public life.

i. Course Overview and Objectives

What is politics? How does it relate to human nature and human flourishing? What is legitimate political and non-political (i.e. familial, religious, etc.) authority? What is the relationship between politics, freedom, and justice? Under what circumstances can political systems be challenged, reformed, or overthrown, altogether? In this course, we will seriously consider—from a distinctly Christian perspective—how key authors like Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Rousseau, DuBois, and Gandhi, among others, answered these questions and the degree to which we might find these arguments persuasive (or not) as they bear on both Christian faith and practice in the world. Some key themes we will explore include human nature, virtue, faith, sovereignty, equality, representation, revolution, and liberty. Through dialogue and writing, students will develop their ability to (1) assess the claims of central texts in the history of political thought in a charitable, yet critical, manner and (2) develop nuanced political arguments through dialogue and writing. In so doing, students will develop a nuanced view of the history of political thought—both within and outside of the global church.

Additionally, this course aims to improve your ability to:

- **Interpret** significant primary philosophical texts subtly and critically, with sensitivity to their logical structure and role in a tradition of thought (PI)
- **Communicate** cogent arguments in defense of philosophical positions, including examining and responding to potential objections (PI)
- **Assess** the merits of varied answers to perennial philosophical questions, recognizing their implications for Christian faith and practice (PI)
- **Demonstrate** understanding of the concepts, theories, and methods employed by political theorists to document and interpret patterns of social phenomena and human behavior (SI)
- **Analyze** social phenomena and human behavior using relevant concepts, theories, and methods of theoretical analysis (SI)
- **Articulate** how analyses of social phenomena and human behavior can shape and be shaped by Christian faith and practice (SI)

ii. Required Texts

Physical copies of the following texts will be available for purchase via the bookstore. Please use these editions of the texts. If you have issues obtaining these texts, please contact me as soon as possible. I will upload the other readings to Canvas.

- Plato, *The Republic*, ed. Bloom (Basic Books)
- Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Gourevitch (Cambridge)
- Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings*, ed. Dalton (Hackett)

iii. Assignments and Grading

Attendance and Participation 25 %
 Regular class attendance and active participation facilitate both course learning objectives: critically (though charitably) assessing and formulating original arguments concerning themes within these texts. Thus, on-time, in-person attendance and participation in class is mandatory. Absences due to personal emergencies, illness, or other legitimate causes will be excused with advanced notice and proper documentation (e.g. a letter or email from your doctor), where applicable. All students must submit discussion posts to Canvas which are comprised of (1) a perplexing/intriguing/thought-provoking/debatable quote from the reading (~50-75 words) and (2) an analysis (i.e. brief interpretation + personal reflection) of that quote (~100-150 words) by 8am (CST) the day of our class session. Good participation reflects quantity *and* quality of in-class comments and discussion posts. Students are expected to come to class with texts readily available, having done the reading, posted a relevant quotation/analysis on the discussion board beforehand, and prepared for respectful and substantive discussion. Laptops and accommodation technology are allowed only for course-related activities; other observed activities will result in a grade reduction. I am available for any student (or group of students) wishing to discuss methods for engaging more effectively in class discussion. Students can sign up for student hours with me by clicking on the “Student Hours” link on the first page of the syllabus. Be advised: you must sign up 24 hours in advance for student hours.

Attendance – 10%

In-Class Discussion – 5%

Discussion Posts – 10%

Exams 75 %

Exams serve as a brief written means for students to demonstrate their ability to recall class content and assess arguments about class texts. They are also intended to help students develop their writing skills through the essays. There will be three exams this term administered in-person with ascending weight in grading. Exams will involve two parts and are open book (i.e. the readings). *A word of advice: when reading, you should physically take notes on your readings in preparation for class discussion and exams. If this is cost-prohibitive or will place undue financial pressure on you in any way, please come see me in student (office) hours to discuss a strategy to ensure your access to the course readings.* The first part consists of five in-class short-answer questions (100 words max each) that require recalling previous course content. Because students will need to use textual support for these short answers, they are expected to bring the relevant texts to class for that period. I will provide “blue books” for students to write their answers. Exam answers must be original work from the student; plagiarism is not tolerated under any circumstance and will result in failure on the assignment and possibly failure in the course or further College sanctions. If students are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism, they should consult the Student Handbook and Community Covenant. The second part is an in-class essay. I will send a list of potential prompts in advance and students are welcome to prepare/test out provisional arguments, evidence, and counterarguments in advance (a) with or without the help of generative AI and (b) in dialogue with fellow students. However, on the in-class essay day, only the *physical* (i.e. non-digital) texts/course readings are allowed—no other preparation material (digital or physical) will be permitted. In the essays, students must argue a position based on the prompt. Essays must include a clear argument (i.e. the position the student will take) in the first sentence, substantial evidence (i.e. textual citations to support one’s argument throughout the essay), and engagement with at least one counterargument (i.e. an opposite position to one’s own/a different way of reading the text[s]) based in the text(s). I will not read drafts of essays, but I am available to discuss essay ideas before the essay portion of the exam. The essay should be roughly 1000 words in length, written *legibly*, and will be due **at the end of the class period**. Percentages for each of these components will vary with each exam. Late exams will be reduced by one-third a letter grade (e.g. from a B+ to a B) for every day past the due date and I will not accept exams after three days without a legitimate cause substantiated by advanced notice and proper documentation (e.g. a letter or email from your advisor), where applicable.

Exam 1 – 15% (5% short answer, 10% essay)

Exam 2 – 25% (10% short answer, 15% essay)

Exam 3 – 35% (15% short answer, 20% essay)

Grading Range

_____	A: 100-94	A-: 93-90
B+: 89-87	B: 86-84	B-: 83-80
C+: 79-77	C: 76-74	C-: 73-70
D+: 69-67	D: 66-64	F: 63-0

iv. General Policies and Information

Academic Integrity

The Wheaton College Community Covenant, which all members of our academic community affirm, states that, “According to the Scriptures, followers of Jesus Christ will...be people of integrity whose word can be fully trusted (Psalm 15:4; Matt. 5:33-37).” It is expected that Wheaton College students, faculty and staff understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and take full personal responsibility and accountability for their work. Wheaton College considers violations of academic integrity a serious offense against the basic meaning of an academic community and against the standards of excellence, integrity, and behavior expected of members of our academic community. Violations of academic integrity break the trust that exists among members of the learning community at Wheaton and degrade the College’s educational and research mission.

Classroom Demeanor

Appropriate classroom demeanor is expected of all students. A faculty member may remove any student from a class if the student exhibits uncivil conduct, which includes behavior that is disinterested, disengaged, disrespectful, disruptive, defiant, or disturbing.

Equity and Title IX

Wheaton College instructors help create a safe learning environment on our campus. The College requires employees to report incidents of discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinators/Equity Officers. When they learn of an incident that may be a crime or may be a violation of the College Nondiscrimination Policies, instructors at the college have a duty to report and are required to share all relevant information with the College. Confidential resources available to students include [Confidential Advisors](#), the Counseling Center, Student Health Services, and the Chaplain’s Office. More information on these resources and [College Policies](#) is available <http://www.wheaton.edu/equityandtitleIX>.

Gender Inclusive Language

Please be aware of [Wheaton College's policy](#) (scroll or keyword search “gender”) on inclusive language, “For academic discourse, spoken and written, the faculty expects students to use gender inclusive language for human beings.”

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Intellectual honesty is vital to our academic community and for my fair evaluation of your work. All work submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the Student Handbook and Community Covenant. You may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or make use of generative AI tools or software. Any failure to uphold this will result in a zero on the assignment.

Learning and Accessibility Services

Wheaton College believes that disability is an indispensable part of the diversity of God’s Kingdom. We work to provide equal access to College programs and activities as well as spaces of belonging for students with disabilities. Students are encouraged to discuss with their professors if they foresee any disability-related barriers in a course. Students who need accommodations in order to fully access this course’s content or any part of the learning experience should connect with Learning and Accessibility Services (LAS) as soon as possible to request accommodations <http://wheaton.edu/las> (Student Services Building - Suite

209, las@wheaton.edu, phone 630.752.5615). The accommodations process is dynamic, interactive, and completely free and confidential. Do not hesitate to reach out or ask any questions.

Writing Center

The [Writing Center](#) is a free resource that equips undergraduate and graduate students across the disciplines to develop effective writing skills and processes. This academic year, the Writing Center is offering in-person consultations in our Center in Buswell Library, as well as synchronous video consultations online. Make a one-on-one appointment with a writing consultant [here](#).

v. Tips for Success

In my experience, students who follow these tips tend to do well. I encourage you to heed them.

- *Finish the reading at least 24 hours before it is due.* For example, finish Wednesday's class reading by Tuesday morning. This will require time management, but it allows more time for reflection.
- *Take notes as you read, in the text.* This will allow you to track your reactions to the readings and think (ahead of class) about intriguing or puzzling passages.
- *Come to student (office) hours.* I do not bite. I am invested in you succeeding in this course.
- *Talk with your peers about the readings outside of class.* It helps you process and vocalize your views on the text(s) in preparation for class discussion and after.
- *Map out the "A-L-E" (Argument-Logic-Evidence) of the text before, during, and after class.* Your reproduction of the "A-L-E" of class texts helps enrich both our class discussion and your written assignments.
- [For any writing assignment] *Outline your argument—section by section, paragraph by paragraph.* If you cannot justify why a section or paragraph should be included in the writing assignment, do not include it.

vi. Reading Schedule

Assignments listed under each day are due for that day.

	[Pages of Reading]
<u>Week One</u>	
M (1/13): Introduction	
Extra Credit Pre-Assessment Surveys Due by 11:59pm (upload to Canvas)	
W (1/15): Plato, <i>Republic</i> Book I (327a-354c)	[~32]
F (1/17): Plato, <i>Republic</i> Books IV (440e-444e), V (449a-471c)	[~31]
<u>Week Two</u>	
M (1/20): NO CLASS (MLK DAY)	
W (1/22): Plato, <i>Republic</i> Books VIII (543a-569c), IX (587a-592b)	[~36]
F (1/24): Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> Books I.I-II.V	[~35]
<u>Week Three</u>	
M (1/27): Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> Book III	[~36]
W (1/29): Cicero, <i>On the Commonwealth</i> Book I.26-71, Book III.42-48	[~25]
F (1/31): Cicero, <i>On the Law</i> Book I.17-62	[~18]
<u>Week Four</u>	
M (2/3): Augustine, <i>City of God</i> Book XI.1, Book XVIII.41, Book XIX.4, 12-17, 21, 24-28	[~35]

W (2/5): Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics* [~20]
 I-II 91.A.1-A.3, A.5; 94.A.3., A.6; 95.A.1-A.2; 97.A.1-A.2

F (2/7): Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics* II-II 58.A.1-A.12 [~19]
Exam 1, Part 2 Prompts Out

Week Five
 M (2/10): Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics* II-II 40.A.1, 64.A.7, 104.A.5-A.6, 42.A.2 [~16]
 10.A.11, 11.A.3; CS II D44, IV D37

W (2/12): ****EXAM 1, PART 1: ANCIENT/MEDIEVAL SHORT ANSWER****

F (2/14): ****EXAM 1, PART 2: ANCIENT/MEDIEVAL ESSAY****

Week Six
M (2/17): NO CLASS (PRESIDENT'S DAY)

W (2/19): Machiavelli, *The Prince* Preface, Dedicatory Letter, chs. I-VIII [~35]

F (2/21): Machiavelli, *The Prince* chs. XX-XXVI [~28]

Week Seven
 M (2/24): Luther, *On Secular Authority* pp. 6-13, 15, 18-43 [~35]

W (2/26): Calvin, *On Civil Government* (*Institutes* Book IV ch. 20, sections 1-3, 8-9, 17-32) [~25]

F (2/28): Hobbes, *Leviathan* chs. XII-XIV [~26]

Week Eight
 M (3/3): Hobbes, *Leviathan* chs. XVI-XVIII, XXI [~28]

W (3/5): Hobbes, *Leviathan* chs. XXIX-XXX [~24]
MID COURSE REVIEW (LIU)

F (3/7): Locke, *Second Treatise* chs. I-V [~37]
END OF A-QUAD

Week Nine
M (3/10): NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

W (3/12): **NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)**

F (3/14): **NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)**

Week Ten
 M (3/17): Locke, *Second Treatise* chs. IX-X, XIX [~29]

W (3/19): Rousseau, *Second Discourse* pt. II & Notes [~34]

F (3/21): Rousseau, *Social Contract* Book I (chs. iv, vi-viii) & Book II (chs. iii-iv, vii, xi) [~23]
Exam 2, Part 2 Prompts Out

Week ElevenM (3/24): Rousseau, *Social Contract* Book III (chs. i, iii, xv), Book IV (ch. viii)

[~19]

W (3/26): ****EXAM 2, PART 1: EARLY MODERN SHORT ANSWER****F (3/28): ****EXAM 2, PART 2: EARLY MODERN ESSAY****Week TwelveM (3/31): Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

[~44]

I.ii.6-7 (pp. 277-285), I.ii.8 (pp. 301-318), I.ii.9 (pp. 331-347)

W (4/2): Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

[~43]

II. Preface, II.i.1-2, II.ii.4-5 (pp. 590-599), II.ii.8-10, II.ii.13, II.iv.6 (pp. 816-821)

F (4/4): Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

[~39]

I.ii.10 (pp. 365-369, 372-376, 388-391, 395-405)
II.iii.8-10 (pp. 685-697), II.iii.12 (pp. 705-708)Week ThirteenM (4/7): Mill, *On Liberty* ch. I (p. 13), ch. II

[~37]

W (4/9): Mill, *On Liberty* chs. III-IV (pp. 63-79, 88, 90), ch. V (pp. 94, 96-97, 104-108)

[~21]

F (4/11): Mill, *The Subjection of Women* chs. I-II (pp. 122-135, 137-149, 156-158, 163-165)

[~32]

Week Fourteen

M (4/14): Marx, “Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts” (pp. 66, 74-76, 92-105)

[~17]

W (4/16): Marx, “Communist Manifesto” pp. 469, 473-491

[~19]

F (4/18): **NO CLASS (GOOD FRIDAY)**Week FifteenM (4/21): Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* Forethought, chs. I, III, VI

[~34]

W (4/23): Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* chs. IX-XI

[~31]

F (4/25): Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings* pp. 50-59, 73-79, 83-91

[~24]

Exam 3, Part 2 Prompts OutWeek SixteenM (4/28): Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings* pp. 98-106, 114-117, 122-124, 131-133, 139-151

[~28]

W (4/30): ****EXAM 3, PART 1: MODERN/CONTEMPORARY SHORT ANSWER****F (5/2): ****EXAM 3, PART 2: MODERN/CONTEMPORARY ESSAY*******Extra Credit Post-Assessment Surveys Due by 11:59pm (upload to Canvas)***