

GOVT 1800: Elements of Political Theory

Summer 2023, Second Session

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Office hours after class, by appointment.

Welcome to Elements of Political Theory! This course seeks to introduce students to the field of political theory through a survey of classic texts in the history of political thought. Our readings will be structured around four thematic units: 1) *the political community*, which considers the origin, forms, and purpose of political life; 2) *virtue and statecraft*, which explores competing ethical claims concerning virtue, necessity, cruelty, and expedience in politics; 3) *sovereignty and the state*, which considers modern theories of sovereignty, legitimacy, power, and authority; and 4) *capitalism, colonialism, and liberation*, which provides a critical perspective on the rise of modern capitalism, colonialism and decolonization, as well as the persistence of informal empire.

Classes will meet Monday through Thursday each week from 10:50 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. In general, they will consist of 1) an interactive lecture and 2) a discussion section, with a break in between. I'll hold office hours each day after class: if you have a regular conflict that makes it impossible to stop by office hours, feel free to email me concerning an alternate time to meet. Due to the compressed nature of the course, I've sought to keep the readings brief and have included an approximate page count in the class schedule. A few days have somewhat lengthier readings than others; please review the schedule *at the beginning of the term* and develop your own strategy for completing all assignments by the time that we discuss them.

Class Schedule

The Political Community

Jul 10: Intro: What is Political Theory?

Jul 11: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book V.1–4, pgs. 77–84; *Politics*, Book I, pgs. 1–25 (33 pages)

Jul 12: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, pgs. 65–100 (36 pages)

Virtue and Statecraft

Jul 13: Seneca, *On Mercy*, Book I, pgs. 128–157 (30 pages)

Jul 17: Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, I.1–2, 6–7, 9–11, 14–23, 31, 33; III.1, 10–11 (43 pages); Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* ([Painting, Visual Study](#))

Jul 18: Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter, I–IX, pgs. 3–41 (39 pages)

Jul 19: Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XV–XXVI, pgs. 61–106 (46 pages)

Jul 20: Michael Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands,” pgs. 160–180 (21 pages)

Sovereignty and the State

Jul 24: Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, I.8, pgs. 1–15, 23–24; I.10 [excerpts]; II.1, pgs. 89–92, 103–109 (38 pages).

Jul 25: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Dedicatory Letter, Introduction, I.1, 11, 13–16 (46 pages)

Jul 26: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II.17, 19, 21, 29–30 (49 pages)

Jul 27: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Preface, Discourse, & First Part (33 pages)

Jul 31: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Second Part (28 pages)

Aug 1: Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?* I–III, pgs. 43–54; V, pgs. 87–97 (23 pages).

Capitalism, Colonialism, and Liberation

Aug 2: Karl Marx, “Estranged Labor,” from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pgs. 70–81 (12 pages); *Capital, Vol. 1* (handout).

Aug 3: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, pgs. 473–500 (28 pages)

Aug 7: Frantz Fanon, “On Violence” and “Conclusion” from *The Wretched of the Earth*, pgs. 35–95, 311–316 (67 pages)

Aug 8: Kwame Nkrumah, “Introduction” and “Neo-colonialism in Africa,” from *Africa Must Unite*, pgs. ix–xvii, 173–193 (30 pages)

Aug 9: Charles Mills, “Overview” from *The Racial Contract*, pgs. 9–40 (32 pages)

Aug 10: Final Exam

Recommended for Purchase

Aristotle. *Politics*. Translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Hackett Publishing, 1998 or 2017.

Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Translated by Harvey Mansfield. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Hackett Publishing, 1994.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Translated by John T. Scott. University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract. 25th Anniversary Edition*. Cornell University Press, 2022.

Course readings are available on Canvas, the above list is provided for those who wish to purchase books

Assignments and Participation

Students will be graded on the basis of *attendance/in-class participation* (30%) and the completion of three major assignments: *a reading/commonplace journal* (25%), which students will compile over the course of the term; *one discussion paper* (25%), which students will present to their classmates; and *a final exam* (20%), taken on the last day of class.

Reading/Commonplace Journal, 25%. Commonplace books ([link](#)) had their roots in medieval *florilegia* and the *loci communes* of the Renaissance, where they provided a space for readers to organize textual extracts and marginalia. Throughout the class, students will compile a reading journal with elements borrowed from the practice of commonplacing, which will serve as the basis of study for the final exam. By the evening before each class day, students should add an entry to their journal containing 250 words or more of their own reflective writing (*excluding* quotations from the text). Each entry should include at least the following elements:

1. A summary of the author's main argument (or at least one of the main arguments), along with 1–2 supporting arguments.
2. At least one quotation from the text that stood out to the reader.
3. A reflection or annotation of your chosen quotation(s). The format is open-ended, but might include a note on a) how the quotation helped to illumine the author's broader argument or themes, b) a problem that it raised in the text, c) a cross-reference to another work in the course, or d) a challenge the quotation posed to your way of thinking about politics

Reading/commonplace journals may be either physical or digital. Students are encouraged to build on this basic framework in a way that helps them to organize the material for the class, which may involve: a) introducing a coding system for sorting information topically, or to cross-reference themes from one author to another, b) including additional quotations either from the day's author or from other texts, along with brief annotations, or c) incorporating notes taken during lecture and class time (though, *nota bene*, notes taken during lecture and discussion should *not* count towards the daily word count).

Each evening before class, students will, via Canvas, fill out a daily attestation that they have completed their journaling. Students will also check in with the instructor concerning journal progress at the midpoint and end of the class.

Discussion Paper & Presentation, 25%. To facilitate class discussion, each student will sign up to write and present one (1) discussion paper during the term. The purpose of the discussion paper is to

make sense of the reading for your colleagues, ensuring that everyone present has a clear understanding of the work before we begin the discussion portion of the class. The discussion paper should be 750 to 1000 words in length and should consist of a clear and focused exposition of the author's central argument or themes. In addition to the essay, students should also formulate two (2) discussion questions to pose to the class, which will structure our discussion.

The discussant should upload a copy of the paper and discussion questions to Canvas by 8:00 p.m. the evening before discussion. Each of our discussions will begin with our discussant reading their paper aloud and posing two questions to their colleagues. Fellow students should take notes on the discussant's paper. Don't worry too much about the presentation; except in irregular cases, grading will be based exclusively on the discussant's written work.

Attendance and In-Class Participation, 30%. Because this class is compressed, cumulative, and participation-intensive, regular attendance is vital for success in the course. Students are permitted two (2) unexcused absences. If additional absences are necessary, consult with the instructor *in advance* to establish a strategy for making up missed participation. Unless alternate arrangements have been made with the instructor, additional absences will result in a grade penalty; in cases of consistent and unexcused absence, the instructor may decline to award a passing grade for the course.

Students may fulfill participation requirements by contributing thoughtfully to class discussions and by asking or responding to questions during lecture. Some degree of participation in class discussions will be necessary to perform well in the class.

Final Exam, 20%. The final exam will cover material from the entirety of the course. Additional information on exam format will be announced the week before the exam.

Grading Scale

Before assigning a final letter grade for the course, grades will be rounded to the nearest tenth of a point (*e.g.*, a cumulative grade of 89.95 will result in a 90 or A-, while an 89.94 will result in an 89.9 or B+).

A	94 and above	C+	77–79.9
A-	90–93.9	C	74–76.9
B+	87–89.9	C-	70–73.9
B	84–86.9	D	60–69.9
B-	80–83.9	F	Below 60

Course Policies & Resources

Charitable and Critical Dialogue. Students are expected to conduct all class activities on the basis of mutual respect, understanding, and constructive critique. Although this course will approach our subject a degree removed from immediate political contexts, the discussion of politics is inherently controversial. Accurate and sympathetic reconstruction must always precede incisive critique. This course will support robust and charitable disagreement based on sympathetic construal and the presumption that our colleagues are acting in good faith. This presumption of good faith, however, requires that we always *act* in good faith, especially when exploring topics that carry enormous consequences for us and for our colleagues.

Academic Honesty and Integrity. Students are expected to conduct themselves according to the highest standards of academic integrity and to follow the guidance of Georgetown's honor code with regard to both written assignments and in-class behavior. Please familiarize yourself with the university's honor system at: <https://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/>. Faculty have the obligation to report academic misconduct to the Honor Council.

New technologies occasionally emerge more quickly than the honor code may be updated. In general, all work completed for the course must be your own; any engagement with another's work must be properly attributed and cited. In addition to their current tendency to generate false information and ghost citations, AI language models such as ChatGPT raise two major academic integrity issues: 1) they are designed to generate content based on the aggregation of massive amounts of text without attribution, and 2) they produce ideas and work that are not the student's own. For these reasons, the use of AI language models or other forms of machine learning is prohibited and will be treated as an academic integrity violation.

COVID-19 Policies. Our classes will be governed by university guidelines concerning the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. You are expected to maintain familiarity with university protocols as the term progresses and to abide by them. In case of absence due to COVID-19 isolation, please notify the instructor as soon as possible to formulate a strategy for fulfilling course requirements.

Keeping up in Class. A certain amount of intrinsic motivation is necessary to keep pace in this class, but education during a global pandemic carries its own set of challenges. Many of you will feel an immense pressure to project an image of tranquility and competence during the term. Remember, you are not the only one; many of your peers feel the same way. If you find yourself falling behind, please reach out. There is no penalty for asking for help. Please don't hesitate to take advantage of the institutional

resources that Georgetown has to offer, such as [CAPS](#) for counseling and psychiatric services, the [ARC](#) for improving your study methods, the [Writing Center](#) for improving writing in general, or [Title IX Resources](#).

Editions Used

Aristotle. *Politics*. Translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Hackett Publishing, 1998.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Hackett Publishing, 2014.

Seneca. *Moral and Political Essays*. Translated by John M. Cooper. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the Body Politic*. Translated by Kate Langdon Forhan. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Niccolo Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Translated by Harvey Mansfield. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Michael Walzer. "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2:2 (1973): 160–180.

Jean Bodin. *On Sovereignty*. Translated by Julian Franklin. Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Hackett Publishing, 1994.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Translated by John T. Scott. University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès. *The Essential Political Writings*. Edited by Oliver Lembcke and Florian Weber. Brill, 2014.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd Edition. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. W.W. Norton, 1978.

Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. Grove Press, 1963.

Kwame Nkrumah. *Africa Must Unite*. Frederick Praeger, 1963.

Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract. 25th Anniversary Edition*. Cornell University Press, 2022.

Appendix A: Additional Resources

What is Political Theory?

Sheldon Wolin. "Political Theory as a Vocation." *The American Political Science Review* 63:4 (1969): 1062–1082

Amia Srinivasan. "Genealogy, Epistemology, and Worldmaking." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 119:2 (2019): 127–156.

Aristotle I

Cary Nederman. "The Puzzle of the Political Animal: Nature and Artifice in Aristotle's Political Theory." *The Review of Politics* 56:2 (1994): 283–304.

Anthony Pagden. "The Theory of Natural Slavery" in *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnography*. Cambridge University Press, 1986. 27–56.

Aristotle II

Richard Boyd. "Boundaries, Birthright, and Belonging: Aristotle on the Distribution of Citizenship." *The Good Society* 22:2 (2013): 215–235.

Seneca

Peter Stacey. "The Roman Theory of Monarchy" in *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince*. Cambridge University Press, 2007. 23–72.

Christine de Pizan

Cary Nederman. "Christine de Pizan's Expanding Body Politic" in *Lineages of European Political Thought: Explorations along the Medieval/Modern Divide from John of Salisbury to Hegel*. Catholic University of America Press, 2009. 248–258.

Niccolò Machiavelli I

Quentin Skinner. "Machiavelli on Misunderstanding Princely *Virtù*" in *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 2019. 45–62.

Niccolò Machiavelli II

Hanna Pitkin. "Autonomy—Personal and Political" in *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli*. University of Chicago Press, 1984. 3–22.

Michael Walzer

Max Weber. "Politics as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. Oxford University Press, 1946. 77–128.

Jean Bodin

Daniel Lee. "Introduction" in *The Right of Sovereignty: Jean Bodin on the Sovereign State and the Law of Nations*. Oxford University Press, 2021. 1–31.

Thomas Hobbes I

Kinch Hoekstra. "Hobbes on the Natural Condition of Mankind" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*. Edited by Patricia Springborg. Cambridge University Press, 2007. 109–127.

Thomas Hobbes II

Noel Malcolm. "Thomas Hobbes: Liberal Illiberal." *Journal of the British Academy* 4 (2016): 113–136.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Frederick Neuhouser. "Rousseau's Critique of Economic Inequality." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 41:3 (2013): 193–225.

Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès

Bronislaw Baczko. "The Social Contract of the French: Sieyès and Rousseau." *The Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988): S98–S125.

Karl Marx I

Rahel Jaeggi. "A Stranger in the World That He Himself Has Made': The Concept and Phenomenon of Alienation" and "Marx and Heidegger: Two Versions of the Alienation Critique" in *Alienation*. Translated by Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith. Columbia University Press, 2014. 3–21 (esp. 3–16).

Karl Marx II

Jürgen Herres. "Rhineland Radicals and the '48ers" in *The Cambridge Companion to The Communist Manifesto*. Edited by Terrell Carver and James Farr. Cambridge University Press, 2015. 15–31

Frantz Fanon

Lewis R. Gordon & Cihan Aksan. "Revisiting Frantz Fanon's *The Damned of the Earth*: A Conversation with Lewis R. Gordon." *Verso Blog*, May 1, 2018 ([link](#)).

Lewis R. Gordon. "Writing through the Zone of Non-being" from *What Fanon Said: An Introduction to His Life and Thought*. Fordham University Press, 2015. 19–46.

Kwame Nkrumah

Adom Getachew. "Securing Postcolonial Independence: Kwame Nkrumah and the Federal Idea in the Age of Decolonization." *Ab Imperio* 3 (2018): 89–113.

Charles Mills

Charles Mills. "Black Radical Kantianism." *Res Philosophica* 95:1 (2018): 1–33.

Appendix B: Daily Attestation

Attestation:

1) Did you complete the daily journaling/commonplace assignment? (note: exclude the quotation from your word count).

- Yes, fully (>250 words).
- Yes, partially (100–250 words).
- Yes, briefly (50–100 words).
- No (<50 words).

2) Did your assignment include 1) a good faith attempt to summarize the author's argument, 2) a quotation from the text, and 3) a reflection/annotation on the quotation?

- Argument Summary
- Quotation
- Reflection/Annotation

3) Was the assignment completed on time? (i.e. before, *not during*, the class period in which the text was discussed?)

- Yes (full credit).
- No (partial credit).

4) Waiver (Optional): I will present my discussion paper tomorrow, which takes the place of my daily journaling assignment.

- Yes