

Faculty of Arts and Science
 Department of Political Science
 Fall-Winter terms 2025-26 (full year)

POL200Y1Y
Political Theory: Visions of the Just/Good Society
LEC5101

Tentative Syllabus, 29 August 2025

Course meets: Wednesdays, 5-7:00 p.m.

MC (**Mechanical Engineering Building**, 5 King's College Road) Room 102
 Plus a one-hour tutorial each week: **Students must sign up for a tutorial that corresponds to the lecture section in which they are enrolled (this one: 5101).**
 The class will meet in person. A hybrid option will not be offered.

Instructor:

Andrew Sabl (rhymes with “bauble”)

Professor of Political Science

andrew.sabl@utoronto.ca

(Emails will be answered within 24 hours. **Feel free to re-send if one is not.**)

3030 Sidney Smith Hall

Office hours (**that is, *student meeting hours* to talk about the material or for any other reason, whether or not you have a particular “problem” that needs addressing**):

Friday, 10 a.m.-noon, or by appointment

(but no office hours the first week of class or during reading weeks).

Please make appointments via Calendly app:

<https://calendly.com/andrew-sabl/office-hour-meeting>

Meetings at other times are also possible, including Zoom meetings if necessary: please email. However, please schedule a meeting for office hours if at all possible.

Teaching Assistants

Kelsey Gordon (Head TA; please contact for administrative questions, including tutorial enrollment): kelsey.gordon@mail.utoronto.ca

Colby Chubbs: colby.chubbs@mail.utoronto.ca

Gabriel Garber: gabriel.garber@mail.utoronto.ca

Max Morris: max.morris@mail.utoronto.ca

Quinton Peralta-Greenough: quinton.peraltagreenough@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Description

This course is an introduction to some of the major themes of political theory via classic texts. Despite the course subtitle (which was chosen long ago), the course will downplay ideal “visions”. It will focus instead on the fundamental political problems that every political order must address:

- the nature of real or potential political *conflict*, both in general and in a particular time and place;
- the political arrangements that can achieve *order* in the face of conflict;
- the way in which claims of *justice* can buttress or undermine the political order;

—the extent to which the political order can accommodate *diversity* or *pluralism* so as to satisfy enough political groups to forestall conflict.

This set of questions might suggest that political theory has much in common with political science, as it should. However, unlike the other areas of political science, political theory does not aspire to be value-free or strictly “empirical”. Politics always involves questions of value—of right and wrong, better and worse, fair and unfair. Political outcomes depend on what people come to believe on these questions: whose claims are valid (and who gets to make claims); the extent to which a given political order is, or would be, legitimate; which laws or practices are just or unjust; and how much diversity of opinion and behavior can and should be tolerated (or encouraged). Moreover, there are fundamental truths about politics that cannot be arrived at through mere “observation of facts”: which facts we notice and consider important depends on what we are looking for, and the right kind of observation requires thinking as well as looking.

In fancier words: political theory is a way of studying politics that explicitly and continually focuses on these and other *ontological* concerns.

The course method is interpretation and argument. You are expected to address difficult questions by reading the texts carefully, aiming to understand the arguments they present, discussing those arguments vigorously yet respectfully in tutorials, and formulating clear and convincing written arguments, with proper textual citations, regarding the claims they make.

Course Requirements

Two papers (one each during Fall and Winter terms)	
—First due on 30 November: maximum 1500 words.....	17%
—Second due on 5 April: maximum 1800 words.....	23%
Fall term exam (during exam period: date to be announced).....	25%
Final exam, focusing on material covered during Winter term, date TBA.....	25%
Attendance and quality of participation in tutorial.....	10%
	100%

Submission of Assignments

Papers must be turned in via Quercus: no hard copies will be accepted. The paper assignments will appear in Quercus under “Assignments”.

To avoid the risk of lost work, you should retain an electronic copy and a backup copy (hard copy, or an electronic copy stored in the cloud or somewhere other than the device where the original is) of all work submitted. You are strongly advised to retain the rough work, notes, and draft material that went into the essay or assignment in case there is any question regarding academic integrity (see below).

Quercus and Email

Course assignments and guidelines will be posted on the course webpage on Quercus. You *must* have a valid UTOR email and set it so that you will receive course announcements. You are expected to consult Quercus regularly and to enable prompt (same-day) Quercus announcements so that you will hear promptly about urgent matters.

Email protocol

—**Your first line of contact, whether about the material or about practical questions (e.g. assignments), should be your teaching assistant** (tutorial leader). TAs may set their own policies as to when, and how soon, they will answer emails, and those policies must be respected.

—If your TA cannot answer a question, the instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours whenever possible. In the rare case that a substantive question is not answered within that time, you should feel free to send it again and will never be penalized for (politely!) repeating your inquiry.

—Please leave adequate time for a response. For instance, do not assume that a request for more time to submit course work will be read and answered if submitted two hours before work is due.

—*Please consult the syllabus or Quercus before asking questions that are answered there.*

—Norms of politeness apply. While ordinary questions are welcome and requests for accommodations will always be considered carefully, hectoring or harassing emails are not appropriate and may incur consequences. It is a good practice to begin emailed requests with “Dear [TA’s first name]” or, for the instructor, “Dear Professor Sabl”.

Late Work Policy

Late papers and other assignments will be penalized three points on the 100-point U of T grading scale per day late or part thereof. Exceptions may be granted to students who have faced serious medical or other emergencies, and who have substantial and convincing documentation fully accounting for the length of delay. If you are facing such a situation, inform your TA as soon as possible; the TAs have the authority to grant extensions. **It is course policy to be understanding when you face difficult circumstances, but please contact your TA as far in advance as possible and provide as much detail as is consistent with university rules, medical privacy, etc.**

Smartphone and Laptop Policy

Laptops are allowed during class for note-taking purposes. You will learn less, and receive a lower mark, to the extent that you use them for any other purpose. (You are encouraged to explore apps that turn off internet access for a specified period, thus enabling you to devote your full attention to learning. The instructor recommends, but does not profit from, an app called Freedom, available for both Windows and Mac machines.)

Cellphones/smartphones should *not* be used during class, since there is no pedagogical reason for doing so. Those using smartphones during class, even quietly, may be asked to stop. Please contact the instructor for any exceptions (e.g. disability accommodations). In almost all cases, however, those can be accommodated through the use of laptops. Side conversations during class are distracting to others and are not permitted. Those awaiting urgent messages should seat themselves near an exit; put their phones on vibrate; and excuse themselves from the lecture hall if they receive an alert requiring the use of a phone.

****Academic Integrity Issues (Please read these paragraphs more than once)**

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship at UofT. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community is the only method of ensuring that you learn what you are expected to learn at university and that your degree will be valued accordingly.

The University of Toronto's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to read it and be familiar with it.

Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the instructor's permission
- Making up sources or facts
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment (this includes working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work, as *all* the assignments in the course are)

On tests and exams

- Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone.
- Looking at someone else's answers.
- Letting someone else look at your answers.
- Misrepresenting your identity.
- Submitting an altered test for re-grading.

Misrepresentation

- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact the instructor. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from me or other available campus resources like the [College Writing Centres](#), the [Academic Success Centre](#), or the [U of T Writing Website](#).

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

If you object to using the plagiarism detection tool, please contact your TA to establish alternative arrangements for submission of your written assignments.

Once again, you are strongly encouraged to retain an electronic file or other copy of each of your papers before submitting it to your TA, in case the submitted copy is lost.

The use of as Large Language Models (LLMs, so-called generative AI or simply AI) at any stage in the preparation of assignments (taking notes, outlining, drafting, revising), except for checking spelling, is prohibited. Such use will be considered a very serious violation of academic integrity, under the category of “unauthorized assistance” (see above). You should also be aware that LLMs do not, as a rule, write good answers to the kind of specific, analytic questions that will be assigned in this course. Using them will therefore expose you to extreme hazards for negligible benefit. In last year’s version of the course, approximately ten percent of students were brought up on charges for having LLMs write their papers; the vast majority were found culpable and heavily penalized.

Texts

The following are all available for purchase at the UofT bookstore. Used and electronic copies are also acceptable (and the ISBN-13 is provided to facilitate the former).

When noted below (with an asterisk *), specific translations are *required*, and you will be expected to refer these translations in course assignments. This is has several purposes: to avoid extra, unfair work for the TAs marking the papers, to allow everyone to refer to the same pages in discussion, and to make sure that you do not use inferior translations that may mislead.

Fall term

- *Plato. *The Republic [of Plato]*. Trans. Allan Bloom. With an Introduction by Adam Kirsch. New York: Basic Books, 2016. ISBN-13: 978-0-46509-408-0 . Older editions of the Bloom translation are fine, but *do use this translation*.
- *Aristotle. *The Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-22692-184-6. Older editions are fine, but *do use this translation*.
- *Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*. Trans. and Ed. Kate Langdon Forhan. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-521-42259-8.

Winter term

- *Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. Trans. Manuela Scarci, ed. Jason P. Blahuta. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2024. ISBN-13: 978-1-55481-360-5. *Please use this edition* because it contains invaluable supplementary material that will be assigned in class.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Ed. Edwin Curley. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company 1994. ISBN-13: 978-0-87220-177-4. You may use other editions, but this one has a big advantage: Curley modernizes Hobbes’ 17th-century spelling and punctuation, it’s much easier to read than other editions are.
- Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. Ed. C.B. Macpherson. Indianapolis: IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980. ISBN-13: 978-0-91514-486-0. Feel free to use another edition or to read the text online; Locke numbered his paragraphs for easy reference.
- Hume, David. *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Rev. ed. Edited Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987. ISBN-13: 978-0-86597-056-4

Class Schedule

You are expected to complete the readings assigned for each lecture and tutorial before that session takes place.

The lectures will not summarize the reading. On the contrary, they will assume that you have already done the reading. They will therefore analyze or explain the reading, or place it in a larger context. The papers as well as the end-of-year exam will be based on material covered in the readings *and* the lectures, as well as requiring independent thought.

FALL TERM

Introductory session: no reading 3 September
Some material from Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* will be displayed and discussed in lecture.

Tutorials will not meet the first week of class.

II. Plato: Order Through Justice?

A. What is Justice (and Why Should we Care)? 10 September
Plato, *Republic* Book I (327a-354c).

B. Justice as Order—In Cities and Souls 17 September and 24 September
Plato, *Republic* Books II-IV

C. The Costs of Order? Political Unity vs. Private Life 1 October
Republic Book V 449a-471b
Aristotle, *Politics* Book II, Chapters 1-5 (1260a27-1264b25)

D. Diversity as Pathology? 8 October
Republic Books VIII-IX

III. Aristotle: "Justice" as the Source of Conflict?

A. The Natural Order? Alleged Hierarchy and "Pre-Political" Domination 15 October
Aristotle, *Politics* Book I

B. Partiality, Conflict, and the Common Good (?) 22 October
Aristotle, *Politics* Book II Chapters 9-12 (1269a27-1274b28); Book III.

29 OCTOBER: READING WEEK—NO CLASS.**C. The Threat of Revolution and the Management of Conflict**5 November and
12 NovemberAristotle, *Politics* Books IV-VI.**IV. Christine de Pizan: Justice for Princes and Medieval Authority***The Book of the Body Politic*, selections to be announced.19 November and
26 November**Sunday, 30 November: Second paper due, 11:59 p.m., via Quercus****An in-person Fall term exam, two hours long, will take place during the Fall exam period. (The instructor does not know in advance the day and time of this exam and will find out when students do.)****WINTER TERM****IV. Machiavelli: Is Order Overrated?****A. Machiavelli: Scholar of Fortune****7 January**

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Broadview Press edition):
 —Introduction: “Florence During the Italian Renaissance”
 (actually a brief biography of Machiavelli himself)
 —Chapters 6-7, 25.
 —Appendix A (selections from *Discourses on Livy*):
 Second Book, Chapter XXIX
 —Appendix B (selections from “Tercets on Fortune”);
 —Appendix C (“On Opportunity”);
 —Appendix I selection (2): Machiavelli’s letter to Francesco Vittori, 10 December 1513.

B. Conflict, Order, and Human Agency**14 January**

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (BP edition):
 —Dedicatory Letter
 —Chapters 1-4, 9, 10-14, 22-3,
 —Appendix A (selections from *Discourses on Livy*):
 —First Book, Introduction Chapters IV-VI, IX, X,
 —Appendix D (selections from “Tercets on Ambition”);
 —Appendix E (selections from *The Golden Ass*), “From the Fifth Chapter [on the rise and fall of states]”

C. The Political Ethics of Power and “Necessity”**21 January**Machiavelli, *The Prince* (BP edition):

- Chapters 5, 8, 15-21
- Appendix A (selections from *Discourses on Livy*):
 - First Book, Chapter XXVI
 - Third Book, Chapter III
- Appendix F (selections from *Florentine Histories*) 5.8
“[Necessity...Justifies Violence]”

D. Politics and the Human Condition

28 January

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (BP edition):

- Chapters 24, 26.
- Appendix A (selections from *Discourses on Livy*):
 - First Book, Chapter II
 - Second Book, Introduction and Chapter II
 - Third Book, Chapter I

V. Hobbes: Order and Justice Through Sovereignty?

Note: Curley often pauses to translate parts of the Latin edition (where they differ from the English edition). He sometimes includes whole chapters like this, translated from the Latin, in addition to the English ones. *Please feel free to ignore these translations from the Latin.* Only the English text is assigned.

A. Conflict: Natural and Religious

4 February

Hobbes, *Leviathan*:

Skim Chapters 1-3, 8.

Read Introduction and Chapters 4-7, 9-13, 47.

B. Order through Covenant (or Conquest)

11 February

Leviathan Chapters 14-20, 29

18 FEBRUARY: READING WEEK—NO CLASS.

C. Justice through Sovereignty

25 February

Leviathan Chapters 26-28, 30

D. Diversity where the Law is Silent

4 March

Leviathan Chapters 21-24, “A Review and Conclusion.”

VI. Locke: “Natural” Justice and its Limits

A. Natural Justice, Irrational Conflict, and Government by Consent

11 March

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapters 1-5, 7-12
(paragraphs 1-51, 77-148, sometimes written §§1-51, 77-148).

C. Political Judgment and Moral Uniformity

18 March

Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapters 13-19 (§§149-243).

VII. Hume: Towards Modern Solutions (and Modern Problems)

25 March

David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*:

- "Of the Original Contract"
- "Of Passive Obedience"
- "Of the First Principles of Government"
- "Of the Origin of Government"
- "Of Refinement in the Arts"

VIII. Conclusion and Review

1 April

No additional reading

THIRD PAPER DUE SUNDAY, 5 APRIL, AT 11:59 P.M.

A in-person final exam, two hours long, focusing on material from the Winter term, will take place during the Winter exam period.