

SYC 501E Political Philosophy

Spring 2025-2026 Monday 9:30-12:30 FEB ITB Seminar Hall

Office: # B4-320 Dept. Humanities and Social Sciences, FEB

Office Hours: Wednesday 13.00-15.00 Phone: 285 7277, email: kocan@itu.edu.tr

Course Description

This course offers a critical introduction to the foundational texts and debates of political philosophy in the Western tradition, spanning from ancient Greece to modernity. We will engage with major thinkers—Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Mill, and others—examining their arguments on justice, freedom, equality, authority, and the nature of political community. Through close reading, discussion, and analysis, students will explore how these ideas emerged in their historical contexts and how they continue to shape contemporary political thought and practice. The course emphasizes both conceptual understanding and critical engagement, encouraging students to interrogate enduring questions such as:

- What is justice, and what makes a society just?
- How should we live together, and what is the role of the state?
- What justifies political authority and obedience?
- How should we balance freedom, equality, and order?
- What is the relationship between ethics and politics?

Instruction combines lectures with seminar-style discussions. Students will be expected to read primary texts carefully, compare competing perspectives, and apply theoretical insights to current political issues.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- **Identify and explain** key concepts, arguments, and historical developments in political philosophy.
- **Analyze and compare** major theories of justice, liberty, equality, democracy, and rights.
- **Interpret primary texts** with attention to philosophical reasoning and historical context.
- **Critically evaluate** normative arguments and their implications for contemporary politics.
- **Develop and defend** reasoned positions in oral and written form, demonstrating clarity, rigor, and engagement with the literature.
- **Reflect on assumptions** underlying political concepts and their changing meanings over time.

Course Requirements

Attendance

Regular attendance and active participation are essential for success in this course. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class—please ensure your presence is recorded.

- You may miss **up to two classes** without penalty.
- Missing more than two classes **without an approved excuse** will result in an **automatic failing grade (FF)**.
- Excused absences require **official documentation** (e.g., medical certificate).
- If you anticipate extended absences due to chronic illness or personal circumstances, you should **withdraw and retake the course** when you can meet the requirements.

Participation

This is a discussion-driven course. To participate effectively, you must:

- **Complete all assigned readings before class.**
- Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully to discussions.
- Engage with peers' ideas and connect readings to broader themes.

Participation will be assessed based on **quality of contributions**, not just frequency.

Oral Presentation

Each student will deliver a presentation on assigned readings. Presentations should:

- Go beyond summary—**analyze key arguments and concepts**.
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, and implications of the text.
- Compare with other perspectives where relevant.
- Pose **critical questions** to stimulate discussion.

Structure:

1. **Overview** of main arguments and relevance to course themes.
2. **Critical analysis** of reasoning and assumptions.
3. **Discussion questions** for the class.

Presentations should be **clear, concise, and respectful of diverse viewpoints**.

Book Review

- **Length:** max. 2,500 words, double-spaced, 12-point font, APA style.
- **Book:** Must not be on the required reading list.
- **Purpose:** Provide a **summary and critical analysis** of a single work.
- **Structure:**
 - **Introduction:** Author background, context, purpose, thesis.
 - **Summary:** Main arguments and evidence.
 - **Analysis:** Methodology, key concepts, strengths/weaknesses.
 - **Evaluation:** Contribution to political philosophy, originality, clarity.
 - **Conclusion:** Overall assessment and implications.

The review should rely **only on the chosen text** (no secondary sources).

Term Paper

- **Length:** 5,000–6,000 words, double-spaced, 12-point font, APA style.
 - **Topic:** Any theme relevant to political philosophy or course content.
 - **Requirements:**
 - Conduct a **literature review** of at least 10 scholarly sources.
 - Develop an **original thesis** supported by rigorous argumentation.
 - Demonstrate **critical engagement** with primary and secondary texts.
 - Ensure clarity, coherence, and proper citation.
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Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic standards. It includes:

- Copying text or ideas without citation.
- Paraphrasing without acknowledgment.
- Submitting another student's work as your own.

Policy: Zero tolerance. Any plagiarism will result in a **VF (Fail)** and full university penalties.

All written work must be submitted via **Turnitin** through the ITU course site.

Evaluation Profile

- **Term Paper:** 50%
 - **Presentation:** 20%
 - **Book Review:** 20%
 - **Class Participation:** 10%
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Supplementary Resources for Political Philosophy

I. Introductory Textbooks

These works provide accessible overviews of key concepts, thinkers, and debates:

- **Wolff, J. (2006).** *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
A widely used, clear introduction to core themes such as authority, liberty, and justice.
 - **Kymlicka, W. (2001).** *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
Comprehensive survey of modern debates, including liberalism, communitarianism, and multiculturalism.
 - **Miller, D. (2002).** *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
Concise and engaging—ideal for beginners seeking a quick conceptual map.
 - **Christman, J. (2002).** *Social and Political Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge.
Focuses on contemporary issues and normative frameworks.
 - **Swift, A. (2006).** *Political Philosophy: A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians*. Polity.
Accessible and practical, with real-world applications.
 - **Brown, A. (1986).** *Modern Political Philosophy*. Penguin.
Classic introduction to modern political thought.
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II. Comprehensive Histories of Political Thought

For historical context and intellectual development:

- **McClelland, J.S. (1996).** *A History of Western Political Thought*. Routledge.
 - **Hampsher-Monk, I. (1992).** *A History of Modern Political Thought*. Blackwell.
 - **Sabine, G.H. (2018).** *A History of Political Theory*. Oxford and IBH Publishers.
 - **Wolin, S. (2004).** *Politics and Vision*, 2nd ed. Princeton University Press.
A classic work on the evolution of political theory and its conceptual frameworks.
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III. Anthologies & Collections

Essential for primary texts and thematic debates:

- **Morgan, M.L., ed.** *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*. Hackett.
 - **Cahn, S.M., ed.** *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*. Oxford University Press.
 - **Goodin, R.E. & Pettit, P., eds. (1997).** *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*. Blackwell.
 - **Forsyth, M. & Keens-Soper, M., eds. (1988).** *A Guide to the Political Classics: Plato to Rousseau*. Oxford.
 - **Simon, R.L., ed. (2002).** *The Blackwell Guide to Social and Political Philosophy*. Blackwell.
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IV. Handbooks & Reference Works

For advanced research and comprehensive coverage:

- Dryzek, J., Honig, B., & Phillips, A., eds. (2006). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Gaus, G. & Kukathas, C., eds. (2004). *Handbook of Political Theory*. Sage.
- Goodin, R. & Pettit, P., eds. (1993). *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*. Blackwell.
- *Encyclopedia of Political Theory* (3 vols., Sage).
- *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig.
- *The Wiley Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, ed. Michael T. Gibbons.

V. Specialized Studies & Thematic Works

For deeper engagement with specific traditions or issues:

- Boucher, D. & Kelly, P. (2009). *Political Thinkers from Socrates to the Present*. Oxford University Press.
- Boucher, D. & Kelly, P., eds. (1991). *The Social Contract from Hobbes to Rawls*. Routledge.
- Geuss, R. (2010). *History and Illusion in Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Coole, D. (1993). *Women in Political Theory*, 2nd ed. Harvester-Wheatsheaf.
- Edwards, J. (2007). *The Radical Attitude and Modern Political Theory*. Palgrave.
- Farrelly, C. (2004). *Introduction to Contemporary Political Theory*. Sage.
- Gaus, G. (2000). *Political Concepts and Political Theories*. Westview Press.

VI. Background & Research Tools

- **The Cambridge Companion series** (e.g., *Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, *Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*).
- **The Oxford Classical Dictionary** (for ancient political thought).
- **The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, ed. Edward Craig.

Main Texts

Primary readings will be drawn from:

- *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, edited by Michael L. Morgan (New York: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006)
- *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*, edited by Steven M. Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Additional selections from primary sources will be provided in a course packet.

Annotated Editions & Translation Recommendations

To ensure textual accuracy and interpretive depth, the following editions are recommended:

- **Plato:** *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett) – reliable translations with scholarly notes.
- **Aristotle:** *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago); *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett).
- **Epicurus:** *The Epicurus Reader*, ed. Inwood & Gerson (Hackett).
- **Cicero:** *On the Republic and On the Laws*, trans. Zetzel (Cambridge).
- **Augustine:** *City of God*, trans. Dyson (Cambridge).
- **Aquinas:** *Political Writings*, ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge).
- **Machiavelli:** *The Prince*, trans. Mansfield (Chicago); *Discourses*, trans. Mansfield & Tarcov (Chicago).
- **Hobbes:** *Leviathan*, ed. Curley (Hackett).
- **Spinoza:** *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Shirley (Hackett).

- **Locke:** *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Laslett (Cambridge).
- **Federalist Papers:** ed. Clinton Rossiter (Signet Classics).
- **Hume:** *Political Essays*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge).
- **Smith:** *Theory of Moral Sentiments & Wealth of Nations*, ed. Raphael & Macfie (Liberty Fund).
- **Rousseau:** *The Social Contract and Other Political Writings*, ed. Gourevitch (Cambridge).
- **Kant:** *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Gregor (Cambridge).
- **Bentham & Mill:** *Collected Works*, ed. Burns & Hart (Oxford).
- **Marx & Engels:** *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker (Norton).
- **Nietzsche:** *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge)

Course Schedule, Readings, and Learning Objectives

Week 1 – Introduction: What is Political Philosophy?

Readings:

- Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*
- James Tully, “Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity,” *Political Theory* 30(4), 2002, pp. 533–556

Objectives:

- Define political philosophy and distinguish it from political science and political theory.
 - Understand Weber’s conception of politics and the state.
 - Explore Tully’s argument on political philosophy as a critical and interpretive practice.
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Week 2 – Plato

Readings:

- *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*

Objectives:

- Analyze Plato’s conception of justice and the ideal state.
 - Examine the relationship between ethics and politics in Socratic dialogues.
 - Understand the role of philosopher-kings and the theory of forms in political thought.
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Week 3 – Aristotle

Readings:

- *Nicomachean Ethics*
- *Politics* (Book I; Book II: 1–5, 9; Book III; Book IV: 1–15, 16; Book VII: 1–3, 13)

Objectives:

- Explain Aristotle’s teleological approach to ethics and politics.
 - Understand the concept of the polis and its role in human flourishing.
 - Compare Aristotle’s view of citizenship and constitutions with Plato’s idealism.
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Week 4 – Epicurus and Cicero

Readings:

- Epicurus: *Letter to Menoeceus*; *Principal Doctrines*
- Cicero: *On the Republic* (Books I–II); *On the Laws* (Book I)

Objectives:

- Explore Epicurean ethics and its implications for political life.
 - Understand Cicero’s conception of natural law and republican virtue.
 - Assess the tension between pleasure, virtue, and civic duty.
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Week 5 – Augustine and Aquinas

Readings:

- Augustine: *The City of God* (Book XIX, abridged)
- Aquinas: *On Kingship*; *Summa Theologica* (selected questions); *Disputed Questions on Virtue*

Objectives:

- Analyze Augustine’s distinction between the City of God and the earthly city.
- Understand Aquinas’s synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology.
- Examine medieval conceptions of law, virtue, and political authority.

Week 6 – Niccolò Machiavelli I

Readings:

- *Letter to Francesco Vettori; The Prince; Discourses* (selected chapters)

Learning Objectives:

- Understand Machiavelli's realist approach to politics.
- Analyze the concepts of virtù, fortuna, and necessity in political leadership.
- Compare Machiavelli's republican and princely writings.

Week 7 – Hobbes and Spinoza

Readings:

- Hobbes: *Leviathan* (Introduction; Parts I–II; Review and Conclusion)
- Spinoza: *Theologico-Political Treatise* (Chapters XVI, XX)

Objectives:

- Explain Hobbes's social contract theory and his justification of absolute sovereignty.
- Understand Spinoza's defense of freedom of thought and expression.
- Compare Hobbes and Spinoza on the foundations of political authority.

Week 8 – Locke, The Federalists, and Lincoln

Readings:

- Locke: *Second Treatise of Government; Letter Concerning Toleration*
- Hamilton & Madison: *The Federalist Papers* (selections)
- Lincoln: *Gettysburg Address; Second Inaugural Address*

Objectives:

- Analyze Locke's theory of natural rights, property, and limited government.
- Understand the Federalist defense of constitutionalism and separation of powers.
- Reflect on Lincoln's conception of equality and democratic ideals.

Book Review Paper Due

Week 9 – Hume and Smith

Readings:

- Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature* (selected sections); "Of Parties in General"; "Of the Original Contract"
- Smith: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Part IV); *The Wealth of Nations* (selections)

Objectives:

- Examine Hume's critique of the social contract and his theory of conventions.
- Understand Smith's moral psychology and economic theory.
- Explore the relationship between commerce, virtue, and political order.

Week 10 – Rousseau

Readings:

- *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality; Of the Social Contract*

Objectives:

- Analyze Rousseau's critique of inequality and modern society.
 - Understand the concept of the general will and popular sovereignty.
 - Assess Rousseau's influence on democratic and revolutionary thought.
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Week 11 – Kant

Readings:

- *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals; To Perpetual Peace*

Objectives:

- Understand Kant's moral philosophy and its political implications.
 - Explore Kant's vision of cosmopolitanism and perpetual peace.
 - Compare Kantian autonomy with earlier conceptions of freedom.
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Week 12 – Bentham and Mill

Readings:

- Bentham: *Principles of Legislation*
- Mill: *Utilitarianism; On Liberty; The Subjection of Women*

Objectives:

- Explain the principles of utilitarian ethics and their application to law and policy.
 - Analyze Mill's defense of liberty and individuality.
 - Discuss Mill's arguments for gender equality.
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Week 13 – Marx and Engels

Readings:

- Selected writings: "On the Jewish Question," "Alienated Labor," *The German Ideology*, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, etc.

Objectives:

- Understand Marx's critique of capitalism and historical materialism.
 - Analyze concepts of alienation, class struggle, and ideology.
 - Explore the normative foundations of Marxist political theory.
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Week 14 – Nietzsche

Readings:

- *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life; On the Genealogy of Morality*

Objectives:

- Examine Nietzsche's critique of morality and its political implications.
- Understand the concepts of resentment, will to power, and genealogy.
- Reflect on Nietzsche's challenge to Enlightenment rationalism and egalitarianism.

Term Paper Due