

# PSC 451-001:

Ancient and Medieval

Political Theory

Fall 2023 | TR 12:45 pm - 2:15 pm

Classroom: Brewer Hall 228

**Professor:** Dr. Benjamin Gross

**Office:** Brewer Hall 205D

**Office Hours:**

*Physical* – M/W: 1:00 – 2:45 pm

T/R: 2:15 – 3:00 pm

*Virtual* – M/W: 10:00 am – 12:30 pm

*Appointment* – contact for mutually agreed upon date and time

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“What is real? How do you define 'real'? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain”

-- Morpheus *The Matrix* (1999)

## Course Description & Rationale:

What is the purpose of studying political theory? We often make [philosophy](#) the subject of many [jokes](#). Furthermore, when was the last time a job application asked those applying what is justice? If political theory does not directly lead to a job, like engineering, nursing, or education majors, then why even study it?

These are questions a parent, legislature, or even you might ask concerning political theory. And these questions are worth asking. Yes, it is highly unlikely during a [job interview](#) that you will be asked to take and defend a position regarding justice. Your job, however, might require you to make decisions with regards to justice.

For example, if you can sell a product that will make you, your employees, and your shareholders rich, but it is dangerous for those who use it, should you sell it? While your interviewer may not ask what is justice, how you answer this question has implications and, perhaps, will inform you if you want to work for this employer.

Political theory is devoted to trying to answer questions regarding [human nature](#). What does it mean to be virtuous? What duties does a citizen owe to its city or homeland? Do citizens have rights and, if so, what are they? If what is good for you is not good for your homeland what should you do? To ask this in another way, does the good of the individual supersede the good of society or vice versa? These are only some of the questions political theory is devoted to examining.

The above quote, from [The Matrix](#), is built on an idea from antiquity – the [allegory of the cave](#). How do we know what is true? Prior to Socrates, a number of thinkers examine the natural world in an attempt to understand reality. At first, [Socrates](#) was like these natural philosophers. He, however, had a “second sailing” where he turned from studying the natural world to the social and political world. Through examining our opinions on what is the good, just, noble, beautiful, and more, Socrates focused on understanding the most important part of nature – human nature.

Socrates, however, never wrote a book. What we know of him comes from a poet, [Aristophanes](#), and two of his students – [Plato](#) and [Xenophon](#). In this course, we will study Plato and his student, [Aristotle](#), to better understand ancient political theory. We then turn to studying medieval political thought through Christian, Islamic, and Jewish thinkers. These thinkers engage and build off the work of the ancients, but also have to respond to the tension that exists between revealed religion, philosophy, and the political life; if God has revealed to us the truth, why do we need philosophy?

By examining these thinkers, we will come to have a better understanding of our contemporary situation. What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States? What does it mean to live in a just society? What makes a government good? What is the relationship between religion and our political lives? These are questions that those we study invite us to investigate to better understand ourselves and our world.

## Course Goals:

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Describe different conceptions of justice and the importance of these for political life.
- Clarify the relationship between family life and political life.
- Explain the differences between monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and polity as forms of governments.
- Recognize the argument that civic duty is necessary for living a complete life.
- Understand the relationship between political science and other types of sciences.
- Comprehend the place of religion in political life for the ancient and medieval thinkers.
- Acquire a greater appreciation for the relationship between ancient and medieval political thought for contemporary political life.
- Formulate and ask questions; and make, analyze, and criticize an argument.
- Clearly and concisely communicate arguments both verbally and written, which will develop and progress your critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

## Required Texts:

- \* Plato. 1991. *The Republic*. Trans. Allan Bloom. Basic Books: [978-0465069347](#).
- \* Aristotle. 2013. *The Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord. University of Chicago Press: [978-0226921846](#).
- \* Parnes, Joshua and Joseph C. Macfarland. 2011. *Medieval Political Philosophy*. Cornell University Press: [978-0801476815](#).

## Assignments & Grading:

Weekly Reading Quizzes	10%
Class Participation	10%
Professionalism	10%
Tocqueville Lectures	10%
Short Papers	10%
Best Government Paper	2.5%
Short Paper Calibration	2.5%
Interpretive Essay	15%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%

## Grading Scale:

A = 90-100%
B = 80-89%
C = 70-79%
D = 60-69%
F = <60%

## Assignment Details:

### Weekly Reading Quizzes:

To facilitate students with readings, there are weekly reading quizzes. These quizzes are five multiple choice questions. The intent of these quizzes is to guide your readings. They are not intended to be difficult if you have read the assigned readings.

Quizzes are administered via Canvas and are untimed. Quizzes are posted on Canvas by 5 pm on Thursday prior to the weekly readings. Quizzes are due by 8 am of the Thursday for that week's readings. Thus, the reading quiz for Week 5 is posted by 5 pm on the Thursday of Week 4 and is due by 8 am on the Thursday of Week 5. Each student has his/her the two lowest quiz grades dropped from his/her course grade.

*Rationale for this assessment:* Students are graded on the ability to read and comprehend foundational information from the text, as this is a necessary but not sufficient skill to successfully read complex writings. These quizzes help to ensure that students are achieving lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy as they prepare for class,

which will allow the class session to focus on developing the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

**Class Participation:**

We come to best understand political thought through examination, questions, and conversations. As such, this course demands active participation from all students. We all have some insights regarding questions of what democracy is, what is good, and what is justice. Reading, analyzing, and interpreting will not only show us how our authors understand these questions but also force us to confront our own understanding.

*Rationale for this assessment:* The professor includes this assessment to develop your critical thinking, communication skills, and confidence in public speaking. In previous semesters, I removed this assessment. Upon having discussions with individuals across multiple professional sectors, it has been stressed to me the need to develop this skill set. Thus, I have reintroduced this form of assessment into this course.

**Professionalism:**

All students begin the semester with 10% of their final grade completed. To keep this 10% of their grade, students must engage in professional behavior within class and class related activities. Students will lose points from their professionalism grade when they engage in unprofessional behaviors and activities. These behaviors and activities, as well as how many points are lost for engaging in them, can be found on Canvas.

*Rationale for this assessment:* Students are graded on professional behavior to prepare them for their future career. I have spoken with individuals in numerous sectors (e.g., accounting, mental health, logistics, construction, healthcare, and more). Consistently, these individuals inform me that recent college graduates either did not get a job offer or were fired quickly upon being hired due to unprofessional behaviors. The time to develop professionalism is now, not upon graduation.

**Tocqueville Lectures:**

Jacksonville State University is proud to host the Tocqueville Lectures Series. This series brings lectures to present on topics that foster the academic environment of the campus. These lectures relate to topics that are important with ideas in our course.

As a student in an upper-level political science course, these lectures are excellent an opportunity for exposure to new ideas, practicing engagement within the discipline, and developing a professional connection. All students are required to attend two Tocqueville Lectures. By attending a lecture, you earn 5% of your course grade.

These lectures will be presented via hybrid or virtual format. More information about the lecture modalities, dates, and registration process is shared during the course.

*Rationale for this assessment:* Students are graded on active participation in Tocqueville Lectures as this engagement demonstrates the ability to participate with the materials of this course in a professional setting. This will help to prepare students for how to engage with presentations in academic, business, and governmental settings.

### Short Papers:

During the semester, you will compose two short papers. These offer students low-stake assessments to develop their interpretation skills. Interpreting political thought is a different type of writing, which many students find unfamiliar. Instead of assigning multiple large papers, we will use these small papers as a way to practice, improve, and develop our skills of communicating our interpretations clearly and concisely.

To achieve this intent, the assessment is **limited to a one-page**, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, and one-sided document. Students will put their identification information in the header of their document. The professor will not grade any material going beyond one-page to maintain fairness for all students. Each short paper has a rubric explaining the grading criteria, which is on Canvas.

Below is information on the topic and dates for these assessments:

	Group Member A	Group Member B	Group Member C	Group Member D
Paper 1	Due 9/7	Due 9/14	Due 9/21	Due 10/5
Paper 2	Due 10/12	Due 10/26	Due 11/2	Due 11/16

*Rationale for this assessment:* The intent of this assessment is for students to gain practice composing interpretations of political thought. Interpreting political thought is a different type of writing, which many students are unfamiliar with. Instead of assigning multiple large papers, we use these small papers to practice, improve, and develop our skills of communicating our interpretations clearly, concisely, and coherently. Developing this writing ability is a cornerstone of a liberally educated individual and will be a worthwhile skill set for any future career path.

### Best Government Paper:

All students have a special one-page paper to complete prior to class on Thursday, August 24. Students will write a one-page paper answering the prompt: “What do you think is the best form of government?” Students should provide their own thoughts and reflections to answer this question. There should be **NO** outside reading, sourcing, or materials. The short paper is asking students to provide their opinion in response to the question through reflecting on their own observations, experiences, and ideas.

*Rationale for this assessment:* Students are being evaluated on this assignment because thinking about this question is necessary for evaluating the subject matter throughout the course. This assessment provides a low-stakes opportunity to engage in writing while also allowing the student to demonstrate their knowledge on course material prior to the beginning of the semester.

### Short Paper Calibration:

Prior to completing the first short paper, each student will independently complete a short paper calibration. The short paper calibration opens on Thursday, August 24 at 5:00 pm and is due by Wednesday, September 6 at 11:59 pm. Students must complete this calibration before they can submit future short papers.

Using a provided rubric, students will review four examples of short papers. Students are then asked to “grade” each example of a short paper.

If a student grades the response correctly, she earns 100% for that evaluation. If the student grades the response incorrectly but is adjacent to the correct answer, she earns 75% for that evaluation. If the student is two-degrees away from the correct

answer, she receives 33% for that evaluation. If the student grades the response incorrectly and is more than two-degrees away from the correct answer, she earns 0% for that evaluation. More information concerning this assessment exists on Canvas.

*Rationale for this assessment:* The short papers are designed to build your skills to successfully produce the larger interpretive essay. The intent of this calibration is to prepare you for how to compose a short paper. By reviewing examples of work, using the rubric to grade these examples, and then reflecting on your ability to use the rubric, you will be better prepared to complete your short papers and interpretive essay.

### **Interpretive Essay:**

Students will complete one 1,000-1,500-word essay. The interpretive essay is due Thursday, November 16. This is a longer version of a short paper. I will provide more information regarding the essay in a handout and rubric on Tuesday, October 17.

*Rationale for this assessment:* I evaluate students through this assessment to determine their ability to communicate complex information clearly, concisely, and coherently to other reasonable individuals. These abilities are the hallmark of a liberal education, which fosters your critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. This assessment demonstrates a student's competency with regards to evaluating and even creating knowledge as described within Bloom's taxonomy.

### **Exams:**

The midterm exam contains 20 multiple-choice questions. The final exam is comprehensive and contains 20 multiple-choice questions. These questions require students to remember, understand, apply, and analyze materials from the course.

The exams are open book. This only includes physical books (no eBooks). They are **not** open note or open technology exams. A study guide is not provided, as students in a 400-level course should have the skills to prepare for an exam without a guide.

**Once the first exam is submitted to the professor, a student cannot begin an exam.** Additional rules about the exam are included on the exams themselves. I will share more information about the exams during the semester.

*Rationale for this assessment:* Students are assessed on their ability to retain and apply important information from the course, as this demonstrates their competency of the course material. In addition, these exam questions prepare students for the types of questions they will encounter if they plan to take a test such as the LSAT.

### **Classroom Behavior:**

Courtesy and regard for one another will guide classroom behavior. Since this course concerns politics and human rights, discussion can be passionate at times. During class, we will treat everyone with respect; especially during dialogues. This means listening and letting a classmate finish their thought before responding, debating ideas (not people), speaking to each other in a civil tone, and refusing to engage in personal attacks. During our dialogues, I ask you all to respect the viewpoints of your fellow students. Viewpoints, however, should be challenged.

Students are expected to be attentive during all aspects of class. Students who sleep, read the newspaper, persistently talk with other students, text, use their cell phones, surf the internet, use computers for any other use than note taking (although due to [findings](#), I strongly suggest against this) or are otherwise inattentive/disruptive

in class will be asked to leave the class, lose professionalism points, and will be subject to being dismissed from the course at the professor's request.

## Other Policies:

### **Late Work:**

I only accept written assessments (short papers and the interpretive essay) after their due date. Every business day a written assessment is late, the assessment loses three-percentage points (e.g., 89% to 86%). One week after its due date, the professor will no longer accept late written assessments. Any student, who does not submit their written assessments on time, or within one week after its due date, will receive a zero for that assessment.

### **Make-up Quizzes & Exams:**

Since students drop their two lowest quiz scores, there are no make-up quizzes. Make-up exams are generally not provided.

In the most extreme emergencies (e.g., hospitalization, natural disaster, required university activities, or so forth), the professor may use discretion to offer a make-up assessment.

If such an emergency prevents you from completing an assessment, you need to notify the professor by email **prior to the** exam date and as soon as possible. This immediate communication initiates, but does not guarantee, a make-up assessment.

Upon your return the course, you must submit documentation of the emergency. If granted an extension/make-up, upon review of this documentation, the professor and student will mutually agree on a time to complete the assessment in question. Furthermore, the make-up midterm will differ from the in-class midterm to prevent sharing of information, as make-up exams are comprised of short answer and essay questions that evaluate students on the same material comprising the multiple-choice exam.

If you are unable to attend the final exam period due to extreme circumstances, please inform the professor and he will work with you to set forth the best course of action.

### **Attendance:**

You are allowed two excused absences that do not require documentation. To use these, you need to email the professor at least 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the class session you will miss. This email must also inform him why you are unable to attend class (e.g., sick, transportation issue, childcare was unavailable, and so forth).

You can also obtain excused absences with documentation. Not all forms of absences can be excusable. Unexpected events (e.g., illness) or required activities (e.g., NCAA athletic participation) are excusable. Vacations, musical festivals, and other such optional activities are not excusable.

Please use the policy of excused absences with documentation and excused absences without documentation wisely. There are no exceptions to this policy. Please also remember that while you may be excused from a class session, this does not excuse you from the material. Furthermore, depending on the nature of the absence, you may not be excused from an assessment (e.g., map quiz, case study, or exam).

**Religious Observances:**

If assigned work conflicts with your religious holidays, please tell me in advance so we can make alternative plans. Informing me of religious obligations after the fact, however, will not count as an excuse.

**Counseling Resources:**

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with academic performance and/or negatively impact daily life. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges, please contact Counseling Services at 256.782.5475 or visit <https://www.jsu.edu/ccservices/index.html> for more information or to request an appointment. Students may also stop by the Counseling Center at 147 Trustee Circle (located between Sparkman and Mason Halls) to request services. Additionally, the office offers self-help resources to explore ways students can independently support their mental health.

In the event of a crisis after hours, please contact the University Police Department at 256.782.5050 to be connected with the on-call counselor. The National Suicide Prevention hotline (988) is another resource and is available 24 hours a day. You may also reach out to Crisis Text by texting 741 741 where you will be connected to a trained responder.

**Academic Integrity:**

In a university community, true knowledge can be gained only through honest means. A Scholar's Code can be found in both the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs and the Student Handbook. Students who violate the Scholar's Code will be subject to disciplinary actions which could range from a zero on an assignment to failure of the course; repeated offenses can result in dismissal from the university. Records of academic dishonesty are kept in the Office of Community Standards and Student Ethics.

**Student Success Center:**

The Student Success Center provides an integrated network of support and meets students where they are while empowering and supporting lifelong learning. The Student Success Center is located on the Ground (Basement) Floor, 1st Floor, and 2nd floor of the Houston Cole Library and serves as your one-stop shop for student supports and services. Services include tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic and career support, success coaching, reasonable accommodations, leadership development, and peer mentoring through our Academic Support and Success, Academic and Career Advising, Learning Services and Analytics, First and Second Year Experiences, Disability Resources, and Student Athlete Development offices. To learn more about these services and supports and how to access them, visit <https://www.jsu.edu/studentsuccess/index.html>.

**Campus Resources for Writing:**

The Writing Center offers several free in-person and online services including writing and digital writing consultations, virtual presentation audiences, ESL conversation partners, and special-topics workshops for all JSU faculty, staff, and students. A team of undergraduate and graduate consultants are trained to assist with academic, personal, and professional writing. Appointments can be scheduled through the Navigate app. For more information, visit <https://www.jsu.edu/english/jsuwrites/index.html>.

**Disabilities Resources:**

Jacksonville State University is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you are currently experiencing or anticipate that you will have any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. It is my goal to create a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, that may have some impact on your work in this course and for which you may require academic adjustments or accommodations, please work with a staff member in Disability Resources so that accommodations can be considered. Students that receive accommodation letters, or Individualized Post-Secondary Plans (IPPs) should meet with me to discuss the provisions of your accommodations as early in the semester as possible. You can find more information about the Office of Disability Resources on the web or by visiting the Student Success Center on the 2nd Floor of the Houston Cole Library. You may also call (256) 782-8380 or email at [disabilityresources@jsu.edu](mailto:disabilityresources@jsu.edu). All discussions will remain confidential.

**Military-Connected Student Statement:**

The Office of Military & Post-Traditional Student Services serves all active duty, guard, reserve, veteran, and dependent students at JSU. If you have any questions, please contact (256) 782-8838, [veterans@jsu.edu](mailto:veterans@jsu.edu), or at the physical location in the basement of Dauge Hall. If you are a student currently serving in the military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserves) with the potential of being called to military service or training during the course of the semester, you are encouraged to contact your course instructor no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. The instructor may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

**Title IX:**

Jacksonville State University does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any educational programs or activities and is required, by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Department of Education, to uphold Title IX standards. This requirement to not discriminate in educational programs and activities extends to employment by and admission to the university. Prohibited activities include sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and other conduct that is addressed in our "Sex-Based Harassment and Misconduct Policy." Anyone with knowledge of this type of conduct is asked to immediately report such incidents to the University Police Department at (256) 782-5050 or the Title IX Coordinator at 256.782.5769 or [titleix@jsu.edu](mailto:titleix@jsu.edu). If an individual wishes to keep the information confidential, they should speak with a counselor at the Counseling Services office at (256) 782-5475 or a medical provider at JSU's Health Center (256) 782-5310. For more information about Title IX or to report a concern, please visit the JSU Title IX webpage at <https://www.jsu.edu/titleix>.

**Tutoring resources at JSU:**

All JSU students can access online tutoring assistance through [tutor.com](https://www.tutor.com). To access [tutor.com](https://www.tutor.com), log into Canvas and click the [tutor.com](https://www.tutor.com) link in the navigation pane. For more information about [tutor.com](https://www.tutor.com) contact Debra James at [dmjames@jsu.edu](mailto:dmjames@jsu.edu).

**Withdraws:**

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, November 10. There are other important dates regarding withdrawing from the course concerning refunding your tuition and if you receive an academic penalty, which you can find [here](#). If you choose to stop attending the course, it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. If you do not withdraw from the course, the professor will enter the grade you have earned as your final grade.

**Student Notifications:**

I post all notifications on Canvas via the Announcements section of our course. Be sure to check these for all notifications.

**E-mail Policy:**

I will do my best to respond to all e-mails within 36 hours. **All e-mails that can be answered via the syllabus will receive the response: “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Alf.**

To ensure you have read the syllabus prior to e-mailing me, the first e-mail you send me must include a picture of a **platypus**. If your first e-mail does not have a picture of a platypus, I will respond to your e-mail with: “Please review the syllabus.” This policy ensures you have helped yourself by using the tools I have provided you.

To help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take time to construct a formal e-mail with proper etiquette and language. **E-mails constructed in a manner like, “Yo, Mrs B i will b submitting the thing late 2day” or using emojis to represent words/ideas will receive the response, “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Godzilla.**

**How to be Successful in this Class:**

The best way to be successful is to be prepared. Being prepared means reading all of the assignment carefully and, most likely, rereading the assignment prior to class. By reading the assignments prior to class, you will be able to fully participate and get the most out of our classroom experience.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Take [physical notes](#). Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions being asked, and then the responses to these questions, are the most successful. If you only write down the answer the note is meaningless, as it lacks the context of the question.

After class, review your notes to see if they make sense. By reviewing them sooner than later you will be able to remember things from class to sort out any points of confusion in your notes.

Finally, get together with other students to form study groups. If you get together periodically and go over notes, you are more likely to have a complete set of notes. You will not only be able to go over your notes together to fill in the gaps, but by discussing with each other the topics of the class you might come to new insights.

**Tentative Class Schedule:**

<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Topic</u></b>	<b><u>Reading</u></b>
8/17	Introduction & Approach	<b>NO READING</b>

<b>Plato's Republic</b>		
8/22 & 24	Two Arguments of Justice	327a1-336a8
8/29 & 31	A Third Argument of Justice	336a9-354c3
9/5 & 7	Justice and the City	357a1-362c8, 367e5-370c6, 371e11-372e8, 373d4-373e9, 374b7-374e8, 375a2-376c6, 376d9-377c4, 379b1-379c8, 389b22-389b10, 398a1-398a6, & 412b2-417b9
9/12 & 14	Guardians, Noble lie, and the Three Waves	422e7-423b2, 425b1-425e7, 427c7-435d9, 438a1-438a5, 439a5-441b1, 442c1-444a5, 449a1-451b2, 452a11-453a6, 454c1-454e5, 457b7-457e1, 458d8-460d8, & 473c11-474a7
9/19, 21, & 26	The Philosopher-King, Cave, and Governments	484a1-489d6, 492e2-494b2, 514a1--521c9, 544d5-547c6, 550c4-552b4, 557a2-558c7, 561b9-561e2, 562c1-564a9, & 592b2-592b6
9/28	Catch-Up/Review	<b>NO READING</b>
<b>10/3</b>	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	<b>NO READING</b>
<b>Aristotle's The Politics</b>		
10/5 & 10	The Household & the City	Book I
10/12 & 17	The Study of Politics & Regimes	Book II: Ch. 1 - Ch. 8
10/19	Guest Lecture	<b>READING TBA</b>
10/24 & 26	Citizenship & the Regime	Book III
10/31 & 11/2	Types of Regimes	Book IV: Ch. 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, & 12 Book VI: Ch. 1, 2, 5, & 5 Book VII: Ch. 2
<b>Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Medieval Thought</b>		
11/7	al-Farabi	MPP: pp. 18-23, 56-71, 72-73
11/9	Guest Lecture	<b>READING TBA</b>
11/14	Alghazali & Averroes	MPP: pp. 89-96, 123-124, & 128-135
11/16	St. Thomas Aquinas	MPP: pp. 287-297
11/28	Maimonides	<i>The Guide of the Perplexed</i> (Canvas)
11/30	Catch-Up/Review/Reflect	<b>NO READING</b>
12/5	<b>Final Exam (1:00 pm)</b>	<b>NO READING</b>