

WESTMONT COLLEGE, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

POL-030: POLITICAL THEORY AND IDEOLOGY
FALL 2025—8:00-10:50AM (T/TH)

Instructor: Jesse Covington

Classroom: Adams Center 219

Office Hours: Mondays 8:00-10:30am, Fridays 1:00-3:30pm, and by appointment (Deane Hall 215)

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Course Description

Welcome to Political Theory and Ideology! This course offers an introduction to the project of political theory, locating this study within a broader intellectual framework of Christian thought and the liberal arts. It introduces political thinking by critically exploring the key features and philosophical underpinnings of ideological approaches to politics.

The course begins by introducing the scope and methods of political philosophy in relation to the liberal arts and a Christian understanding of the world. The second segment of the course considers major ideologies of liberalism, conservatism, socialism, anarchism, nationalism, fascism, and democracy. Section three turns to developments in ideological thinking, exploring ideologies involving gender and sexuality, racial identity, the environment, Islam, and multiculturalism. The fourth and final section returns to Christian approaches to political thinking.

Course Objectives: What to Expect

This course offers three primary opportunities to students who choose to enroll:

1. An introduction to the project of political theory, addressing what it is, why it is important, how it is done, how it relates to political science, its place in the liberal arts, and how much fun it can be. This will involve several components, including:
 - a) Developing our abilities to read diverse texts, identifying and distilling their basic assumptions about reality.
 - b) Exploring a variety of perspectives on metaphysical questions about true reality, particularly the nature of human beings, God, government, and including consideration of how epistemological assumptions and problems impact such conclusions.
 - c) Engaging perennial ethical questions driving political thought, including who should rule, how they should rule, what goals and scope are appropriate to government, what role coercion should play in politics, and how these relate to ethical questions more broadly.
 - d) Introducing the liberal arts, with special focus on the interrelation of political theory with other disciplines.
 - e) Exploring diverse ideas and beliefs that may extend beyond participants' own experiences, reflecting critically on these, on our own views, and how the two interact.
 - f) Developing the skills for doing political philosophy, including critical and evaluative thinking. Special attention is given to students' abilities to communicate analytical thought through writing and by participating in philosophical dialogue.
 - g) Laying groundwork for those who will pursue further study in politics.
2. An orientation to major recent and contemporary political ideologies, particularly how each treats core concepts in political theory, including, equality, liberty, human nature, happiness, virtue, obligation, citizenship, law, religion, and others. This orientation includes exploring connections between theory and political practice.
3. An exploration of the far-reaching implications of Christian faith, with particular attention to developing our abilities to sympathetically and critically apply Christian belief to a wide variety of perspectives on political philosophy.

Course Learning Outcomes: What You Will be Able to Do

- Students will be able to articulate major philosophical ideas (in the context of political theory) and describe their bearing on the Christian liberal arts (discussion, short papers, exams).
- Students will identify and distinguish between the arguments of major ideological thinkers (exams, short papers).
- Students will critically analyze political ideologies for internal coherence and validity (short papers, exams)
- Students will analyze issues of justice and injustice involving race and racism in the United States in biblically and theologically grounded ways (discussion, short paper, exams).
- Students will identify Christian responsibilities to pursue justice and reconciliation in diverse relationships, practices, and structures according to the character of God’s loving reign expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (discussion, exams).

Role in the General Education Curriculum:

- #1: This course satisfies the *Common Contexts: Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts: Philosophical Reflections on Reality, Knowledge, and Value* requirement in the G.E. Curriculum. This aspect of the GE curriculum seeks to orient students to foundational questions of philosophy as part of a distinctively Christian approach to the liberal arts and all of life.
 - The General Education Certification Criteria for this area (adopted May 2024) stipulates that students in such courses will:
 - 1. understand / be able to explain the importance the bearing of metaphysical assumptions on more specific matters;
 - 2. recognize / discuss how assumptions about knowledge affect such pursuits as science, mathematics, theology, and self-understanding;
 - 3. recognize / discuss the import of competing value claims;
 - 4. practice identifying and assessing arguments when a thesis is proposed;
 - 5. emerge with a sense of how to think Christianly about various worldviews.
 - Doing political theory requires engaging a wide range of philosophical and theological concerns—even those that do not obviously pertain directly to politics. In order to answer questions about what defines government, who should govern, why, to what ends, and with what methods, answers to many fundamental questions about knowledge, reality, and value must first be established or assumed. This course examines political ideologies with the goal of distilling and analyzing their basic assumptions about reality and their ethical commitments. Thus, central emphases of the course include:
 - *Metaphysical assumptions about the nature of reality* (particularly human nature—social or solitary; equal or unequal; etc.—per #1, above),
 - *value judgments / ethics* (what government, citizens, and other actors ought to pursue and avoid and why, per #3, above) and, to a lesser extent,
 - *epistemology* (how such knowledge is attained—especially how different approaches to knowledge shape ideas relevant to politics, per #2, above).
 - Throughout the course, the variety of answers explored will be critically analyzed in relation to Christian perspectives, per #4 and #5, above.
 - Westmont College’s liberal arts curriculum is designed to foster “intellectual vitality, expansive sympathies, Christian character and commitment to service that will last a lifetime.”¹ Whether students aspire to full-time involvement with politics or will go no further than the basic responsibilities of citizenship, we all live in and relate to a political world. As our conduct should be well-considered, careful thinking about politics is important. “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the

¹ Westmont College General Education Combined Document, May 2024.
https://www.westmont.edu/sites/default/files/users/user2641/GE%20Combined%20Document%20UPDATED_May_2024-3.pdf

way” (Proverbs 19:2). Cultivating a philosophical understanding of politics will promote students’ development into thinking and serving people who understand politics within a comprehensive Christian understanding of the world.

- #2: This course satisfies the *Common Skills and Emphases: Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity on Biblical and Theological Grounds* requirement in the GE curriculum. Courses in this area seek to “...equip students to recognize personal, interpersonal, communal, institutional, and systemic expressions of sin, rebellion, brokenness, and injustice...”, to interpret these in light of scriptural truth, and will “...will help students to see their responsibility to promote justice and reconciliation in their own communities...”²
 - The General Education Certification Criteria for this area (adopted May 2024) stipulates that students in such courses will:
 - 1. develop biblically and theologically grounded understandings of justice, reconciliation, and diversity. These will enable students to understand justice and reconciliation in terms of the gospel and appropriate disciplinary frameworks, recognize sin, rebellion, and brokenness as such, and discern their responsibility in the work of justice and reconciliation within their own local context;
 - 2. examine personal actions, social norms, and systemic practices involving race and racism in the United States as they relate to historic and contemporary patterns of belonging and exclusion, attending to how historical particularities and differences in power shape the responsibilities different parties have in the work of justice and reconciliation in light of God’s kingdom;
 - 3. model Christlike dialogue reflecting God’s desire for justice and reconciled relationships among all image-bearers, especially when confronting challenging or sensitive issues.
 - Per certification criterion #1, this course devotes significant attention in readings and class discussions to biblical and theological approaches that inform how to understand justice, injustice, redemptive work, and diversity. The doctrines of Creation, Fall, and Redemption provide the foundation for the Christian liberal arts and the central interpretive framework for these categories.
 - Per certification criterion #2, specific ideologies addressing racism, sexism, sexual identity, religious identity, and multiculturalism are key components of the course. These include, though are not limited to, the context of the United States.
 - Per certification criterion #3, a primary theological model for discerning what even erroneous ideologies correctly perceive equips students to look for goodness and truth even in the context of ideas and actions corrupted by sin and that need significant redirection for redemptive purposes. This approach opens doors for constructively exploring even very controversial topics, and for thinking critically about apparently less controversial ones.

Commented [JDC1]: JRD Rationale.

² Westmont College General Education Combined Document, May 2024.
https://www.westmont.edu/sites/default/files/users/user2641/GE%20Combined%20Document%20UPDATED_May_2024-3.pdf

Course Requirements: What You Commit To

Citizenship (Preparation, Presence, Participation, & Propriety)—20%

Preparation: Minimal preparation entails reading all of the assigned materials prior to class and completing any assignments due. Full preparation entails also taking notes on the reading and thoughtfully considering the content of the reading. I reserve the right to evaluate preparation in a number of ways, including homework assignments, quizzes, etc. You must bring all relevant readings with you to class.

Presence: You should attend every class meeting (I will take attendance) and give it your full attention (don't multitask, etc.). Please let me know ahead of time via e-mail if you need to miss class and why. Each student may miss two class sessions without a penalty on his or her grade. These two class sessions include excused absences, so they should not be thought of as "freebies." Save them for when you really need them—e.g., sickness, emergency, a field trip for another class, etc. If a student misses a third class session his or her grade will be penalized (except in extraordinary circumstances). If you have reason to anticipate excessive absences (more than two), please contact me about this as soon as possible. Your attendance should include arriving to class with sufficient time to be ready for class to begin on time (habitual tardiness will affect your attendance grade).

Participation: Simply being present does not contribute to the education of your classmates, nor does it develop your own ability to distill your thoughts into communicable language. I encourage all students to take responsible care in their participation, ensuring that they speak in ways that help others learn and help others participate as well. For those who are not outspoken, this requires an effort to speak up. For those who are more outspoken, restraint will at times be necessary. Regardless, asking questions is a wonderful way to participate. In fact, a thoughtful, probing question often contributes more to the class' learning than many statements. I may call on students rather than waiting for them to volunteer, so students should be prepared for this.

Participation extra credit: Students who follow a major daily newspaper (New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal) may identify and share examples of political controversies that turn on a theoretical issue we are exploring as a class. Students can share such an example up to three times, provided they submit a typed articulation of the political controversy, how it relates to political theory, which side they think is right, and a link to the article (in no more than 100 words).

Classroom Decorum:

- *Turn cellular telephones off and keep them out of sight until after the end of class (including breaks). If your phone rings during class, I get to answer it.*
- *Please do not use anything with a screen during class—computers, tablets, etc. These tend to be distracting and to inhibit learning. Notes should be taken by writing on paper.*
- *Please come to class dressed in appropriate attire—whether in person, or via videoconference. This means dressing as someone who respects your fellow students and wishes to be taken seriously as a participant in meaningful intellectual inquiry (e.g., no pajamas, remove hats indoors, etc.)*
- *Avoid anything that tends to distract you or others from full participation. Examples include arriving late, noisy snacks, private conversations during class, text-messaging, surfing the internet, etc. Such practices are likely to disrupt your own learning and that of your peers.*
- *Come to class ready to learn for the whole class period. This means that you should not excuse yourself from the classroom unless there is an emergency.*

Short Papers—20%

*Each student will write four short papers during the course of the term. These papers are designed to help you learn to read philosophical texts carefully and critically and to help you express complex ideas precisely, clearly, and concisely. Significantly, writing well does not come naturally to any of us; only with practice and instruction can we cultivate this skill. I will distribute and review a handout giving more detailed guidelines for the short papers. These papers will be two pages in length (word count 600-700—this maximum is **absolute**). Please use double-spacing with 1-inch margins and a 12-point font. Your name should be on every page. The first page should also include the date of submission and a **word-count**. These papers are due at the beginning of class on the date they are due and **cannot be turned in late**.*

Group Video Project—5%

Late in the semester, each student will take part in a group project making a five-minute video analyzing one of the ideologies we read together as a class. (See handout for details.)

Midterm Examination—25% (Tuesday, October 19th)

Final Examination—30% (Wednesday, December 15th)

Grading Scale—A= 93-100; A- = 90-92; B+ = 88-89; B = 83-87; B- = 80-82; C+ = 78-79; C = 73-77; C- = 70-72; D+ = 68-69; D = 63-67, D- = 60-62; F < 60.

Late Papers & Exam Make-Ups: Short papers are due at the beginning of class on the day they are due; these cannot be turned in late or made up. Exams must be taken at the assigned times. For situations of real emergency or necessity (travel plans do not qualify for either classification!) exceptions may be granted for the in-term exams at the instructor's discretion. For the final examination, students wishing to change an exam time must petition in writing to the Academic Senate Review committee at least two weeks in advance. If you have reason to anticipate a conflict, it is your responsibility to bring this to the instructor's attention as far ahead of time as possible.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Students who choose to disclose a disability are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as early as possible in the semester to discuss possible accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted for students whose disabilities have been verified by the ODS. Accommodations are designed to minimize the impact of a disability and ensure equal access to programs for all students with disabilities. Please contact ods@westmont.edu or visit the website for more information <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability>

Writer's Corner

From WC: The writing center is a creative, collaborative space where you can improve in writing skill and confidence. Our peer tutors serve as friendly "test readers" for your projects, helping you develop and revise your writing before submitting it to professors, employers, and others. We encourage you to meet with a tutor at least 48 hours before your writing deadline. Be ready to share your assignment prompt and your latest draft, no matter how rough. All tutorials are free of charge. **Make an appointment** at <https://westmont.mywconline.com/> We hope to see you soon!"

Format

While primarily lecture-based, this course will also incorporate discussions. Since these discussions are central to the learning of the entire class, each member must be well prepared for every class session. As described above under “expectations,” participation is factored into each student’s grade.

Academic Integrity

Each student is expected to maintain honesty in his or her communication and conduct and to submit his or her own work in every context associated with the course, be it papers, examinations, or anything else. Among other things, this means that plagiarism is absolutely prohibited. “Plagiarism” refers to the practice of submitting the work or thinking of someone else as if it is one’s own. This can be as extensive as submitting an entire paper written by someone else, or as little as using an idea without giving credit to its source. Using quotations and interacting with the ideas of others is expected in student writing, but must be rigorously documented by citation and quotation marks (where appropriate). Paraphrasing does not make someone else’s work yours—the ideas must be cited, even if the words are different. When in doubt, always err on the side of caution by citing your sources. Be particularly careful in your use of the Internet. If you use a website to help you on an assignment in any way, be sure to cite it. (There will be times when I indicate that the Internet should not be used at all on an assignment, such as with the short papers.)

You are responsible for knowing Westmont’s policies on academic integrity (available at http://www.westmont.edu/offices/provost/plagiarism/academic_integrity_policy.html). If you have questions about it, be sure to ask me.

In cases of inappropriately shared material within the class (e.g., copying test answers, papers, etc.), the student whose work is being copied will be held liable as well.

Failure to maintain academic integrity constitutes both stealing and lying (see Exodus 20:15-16). It violates the policies of Westmont College and is a breach of trust that damages your relationship with me and your relationships with your fellow students. A violation of academic integrity is reported to the administration and will result in serious disciplinary consequences. Don’t do it.

References: From time to time, students ask me to complete reference forms or letters of recommendation for them. I am happy to do these. In order to write the best possible recommendation, I will need at least four weeks’ notice prior to the deadline. I will ask you for detailed information relevant to the recommendation (e.g., résumé, transcript, program information, personal statement/application letter, etc.). Moreover, I will usually ask to meet with you outside of class to discuss the program or position for which you are applying.

Texts to Purchase (Please double-check *ISBN & edition*—these must be correct! Also, please *purchase not rent* your texts!):

Koyzis, David T. 2019. *Political Visions and Illusions*, 2nd Ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

(ISBN: 9780830852420)

Love, Nancy S. 2011. *Dogmas and Dreams*, 4th Ed. Washington DC: CQ Press. (ISBN: 9781608712373).

Tinder, Glenn. 2004. *Political Thinking: The Perennial questions*. 6th Ed. New York: Pearson-Longman.

(ISBN: 0-321-00527-9)

Wolters, Al. 2005. *Creation Regained*. Second Edition Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. (ISBN: 978-0-8028-2969-6)

Coursepack Reader (from the Bookstore, once available). These readings are also posted on Canvas. Additional readings will be distributed by e-mail, handouts, library reserves, and/or Canvas.

Schedule *The schedule below provides a provisional overview of when we will consider various texts. This will be subject to amendment as the semester goes by. All readings should be completed before class on the day listed. When students miss class, it is their responsibility to find out if readings have been modified.*

Section One—Political Theory and the Christian Liberal Arts

Commented [JDC2]: This section provides key conceptual and theological tools for thinking about justice and other related themes.

August 31—Introductions, Syllabus Review

September 2—What is Political Theory?

Tinder—Introduction, Chapter 1 (p. 1-21)

Adler—“How to Mark a Book” (Canvas)

September 9—Politics and the Liberal Arts (45)

Alan Bloom—“The Democratization of the University” (Love, 201-223)

Arthur Holmes—“The Liberal Arts: What and Why?” *The Idea of A Christian College*.
(Canvas/Coursepack)

Westmont College’s General Education Document (Canvas/Coursepack)

September 11—Holistic Christianity: Theology as Paradigm (52)

Wolters—Chapter 1: “What is a Worldview?” (p. 1-12)

Wolters—Chapter 2: “Creation” (p. 13-52)

September 14—Theology & Political Theory I—Human Relationships and the Fall (50)

Tinder—Chapter 2: “Estrangement and Unity” (p. 23-58)

Wolters—Chapter 3: “Fall” (p. 53-68)

September 16—Theology & Political Theory II—The Problem of Equality (56)

Tinder—Chapter 3: “Inequality and Equality” (p. 61-100)

Wolters—Chapter 4: “Redemption” (p. 69-86)

September 21—Theology & Political Theory III—The Problem of Power (63)

Tinder—Chapter 4: “Power and Its Possessors” (p. 103-131)

Tinder—Chapter 5: “Limits on Power” (p. 133-166)

September 23—Theology & Political Theory IV—Political Values and Human Will; Writing Instruction (65)

Tinder—Chapter 6: “The Ends of Power” (p. 167-204)

Tinder—Chapter 7: “Historical Change” (p. 207-235)

September 28—Theology & Political Theory V—Thinking Theologically about Ideology (64)

Wolters—Chapter 5: “Discerning Structure and Direction” (87-114)

Love—“Introduction: Ideology and Democracy” (p. 1-10)

Koyzis—Chapter 1: “Introduction: Ideology, Religion, and Idolatry” (1-26)

Section Two—Classical Ideological Perspectives

September 30—Liberalism I (39)—(Paper #1 Due)

John Locke—“Treatise of Civil Government” (Love, 21-32)

John Stuart Mill—“On Liberty” (Love, p. 50-69)

James Madison—“Federalist Papers, 10 & 51 (Love, 39-59)

October 5—Liberalism II (65)

Milton Friedman—“Capitalism & Freedom” (Love, 89-111)
Isaac Kramnick—“Equal Opportunity...” (Love, 112-123)
Koyzis Chapter 2: “Liberalism: The Sovereignty of the Individual” (27-62)

October 7—Conservatism I (45) (Paper #2 Due)

Edmund Burke—“Reflections on the Revolution...” (Love, 171-185)
Michael Oakshott—“On Being Conservative” (Love, 147-170)

October 12—NO CLASS—FALL HOLIDAY

October 14—Conservatism II

Irving Kristol—“The Neoconservative Persuasion” (Love, 224-228)
James Dobson—“Standing Strong” (Canvas/Coursepack)
TBA / W. James Antle III—“Conservative Crack-Up” (Canvas/Coursepack)
Koyzis Chapter 3: “Conservatism: History as Source of Norms” (63-89)

October 19—MIDTERM EXAMINATION

October 21—Nationalism & Fascism

Joseph Mazzini—“The Duties of Man” (Love, 707-713) 7
Benito Mussolini—“Fascism: Doctrine...” (Love, 419-428)
Adolph Hitler—“Mein Kampf” (Love, 429-458)
Koyzis—Chapter 4: “Nationalism: The Jealous God of Nation” (90-119)

October 28—Socialism I (58) (Paper #3 Due)

Charles Fourier—“Utopian Socialism” (Love, 255-277)
Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels—“Communist Manifesto” (Love, 291-318)
V.I. Lenin—“State and Revolution” (Love, 319-333)

October 26—Socialism II/Anarchism (60)

Emma Goldman—“Anarchism...” (Love, 359-370)
Henry D. Thoreau—“Essay on Civil Disobedience” (Love, 371-378)
Petyr Kropotkin—“Mutual Aid” (Love, 379-390)
Koyzis Chapter 6: “Socialism: Common Ownership as Redemptive” (151-181)

November 2—Democracy (67)

Handout—Ball & Dagger: “The Democratic Ideal” (Canvas/Coursepack)
Handout—Robert Dahl: “Why Democracy” (Canvas/Coursepack)
Koyzis Chapter 5: “Democracy or Democratism? When the People Claim Too Much” (120-150)

Section Three—Developments in Political Ideology

November 4—Gender & Sexual Identity I (30) (Paper #4 Due)

Mary Wolstonecraft—“Vindication...” (Love, 495-502)
Betty Friedan—“Our Revolution is Unique” (Love, 503-510)
Phyllis Schlafly—“The Power of the Positive Woman” (Love, 511-525)

Commented [JDC3]: This section of the course contains significant (but not all) of the materials related to the JRD.

November 9—Gender & Sexual Identity II (26)

Monique Wittig—“One is not Born a Woman” (Canvas/Coursepack)
Audre Lorde—“Age, Race, Class, and Sex...” (Love, 546-554)
Gloria Anzaldúa—“La Conciencia de la Mestiza” (Love, 555-568)
TBA

November 11—Racial Identity

Malcolm X—“The Ballot or the Bullet Speech” (Canvas/Coursepack)
Steve Biko—“Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity” (Canvas/Coursepack)
The Nationalist Front—“14 points”

November 16—Racial Identity II—Race, Justice, and Ideology

Vince Bacote—“A Time for Reckoning—Facing Truth on the Path to Unity”
Tim Keller—“A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice”
TBA

November 18—Environmentalism & Ecologism

Love—“Environmentalism and Ecology” (p. 619-624)
Rachel Carson—“Silent Spring” (Love, 625-630)
Bookchin & Foreman—“Defending the Earth” (Love, 649-666)
Vandana Shiva—“Stolen Harvest....” (Love, 667-678)

November 23— Islam and Islamism

Edward W. Said—“Origins of Terrorism” (Love, 743-754)
Osama bin Laden “Fatwa” (Canvas/Coursepack)
Graeme Wood—“What ISIS Really Wants” (Canvas/Coursepack)

November 25—NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Holiday

November 30— Globalism

Samuel Huntington—“The Clash of Civilizations” (Love, 755-771)
Benjamin Barber—“Jihad v. McWorld” (Love, 772-784)
Kwame Anthony Appiah—“Cosmopolitanism....” (Love, 785-800)

December 2—Multiculturalism

Will Kymlicka—“Justice and Minority Rights” (Canvas/Coursepack)
Susan Moller Okin—“Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” (Love, 126-140)

Section Four—Beyond Ideologies: Thinking Christianly

Commented [JDC4]: This section also provides important Christian perspectives on justice and diversity.

December 7—Christian Alternatives (61)

Koyzis Ch. 7—“Transcending the Ideologies: Affirming Societal Pluriformity” (182-218)
Koyzis Ch. 8—“Towards a Nonideological Alternative: Two Historic Christian Approaches” (p. 219-249)

December 9—Christian Alternatives, Course Conclusion

Koyzis Ch. 9—“The State and its Task: Doing Justice in God’s World” (p. 250-70)
“Epilogue: Toward the Future” (271-274)
“Concluding Ecclesiological Postscript” (275-286)

December 15 (Wednesday), 8:00-10:00am—Final Examination