

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
POLITICAL SCIENCE 2537F–Section 650
FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL THEORY (DISTANCE ONLINE)
Summer 2026

Dr. R. VandeWetering Lectures: available by Monday at noon (but usually a few days earlier)
E-mail: Please check your UWO e-mail account for periodic messages. My e-mail address is
rvandewe@uwo.ca. When you e-mail me, put in the subject heading “2537–your last name”. This will
help prevent the deletion of your message as spam. E-mail is the best way to contact me. You are
welcome to visit me at my office SSC 7249 or phone me at (519) 661-2111, ext. 85177. Please e-mail me
to arrange a time to meet or talk; if it is a nice day we can meet in Victoria Park!

Important Notice Re: Prerequisites/Antirequisites *Please Note: You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites, and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as a basis for an appeal. If you are found to be ineligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time and you will receive no adjustment to your fees. This decision cannot be appealed. If you find that you do not have the course prerequisites, it is in your best interest to drop the course well before the end of the add/drop period. Your prompt attention to this matter will not only help protect your academic record, but will ensure that spaces become available for students who require the course in question for graduation.*

Prerequisites: Politics 1020E or Politics 1025F/G and Politics 1026F/G

Antirequisites: Phil 2800F/G, Phil 2801F/G, Phil 2802E, Politics 2237W/X, Politics 2538F/G

Important Notice Re: use of AI: *Use of AI is Prohibited. The use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, DALL-E, etc.) are not permitted in this class; therefore, any use of AI tools for work in this class may be considered a violation of the University of Western Ontario's Academic Misconduct which may constitute a Scholastic Offence. The use of unauthorized AI tools will result in: a failure to receive full grades, the need to resubmit the assignment, need to orally present the assignment in office hours, or a failure to complete the requirements of the course.*

Course Description: To study politics properly one must think theoretically. In this course we will examine a number of well-known political theories centered on liberal egalitarianism and relate them to contemporary issues.

Learning Objectives: By the end of the course, students should a) be able to describe and evaluate a selection of political theories;
b) be able to relate these theories to contemporary issues; and
c) improve their writing skills.

Required Textbook: Kymlicka, Will. Contemporary Political Philosophy (2nd ed.). Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2002. https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=N2026&courses%5B0%5D=650_UW/POL2537F

The other readings are available at OWL-Brightspace (OWLB). Note: I recommend that you purchase or borrow the books you will need for your essay as soon as you can (see below).

Evaluation

Special Reading Question 1	10%	due May 12 by 11:59 PM (send e-mail–see below)
Special Reading Question 2	10%	due May 19 by 11:59 PM (send e-mail–see below)
Essay	40%	due May 30 by 11:59 PM at OWLB
Final Exam	40%	available June 15th at 10:00 AM at OWLB; due June 16th at 10:00 AM at OWLB

Essay: *Watch Week Four Part Three: “**WRITING AN ESSAY FOR PROFESSOR VANDEWETERING**” (OWLB) for tips about writing essays for Dr. VandeWetering. Usually you need only two sources for your essay: the book (or books) of a theorist (listed below), and a specified book or article to describe the issue and define key terms.

Essay: minimum 2500 words (not including bibliography or footnotes), maximum 3000; double-spaced; you must keep a copy for yourself and you must keep your notes and rough drafts; if you make a reference to or quote from a source on the internet, you must give me an exact reference so that I can find it. Include page numbers with every non-internet reference. Include a title page with the title, the essay question number, your name, and your e-mail address—please do not put your name on the inside of the essay (e.g. headers). Submit an electronic copy at OWLB **under Assignments** by 11:59 PM on May 30.

***Plagiarism is cheating. Using artificial intelligence (eg ChatGPT) to write an essay is cheating. Buying an essay is cheating. All will be treated as academic offenses.**

Essay: For each essay you will examine an issue from the point of view of a theorist.

*****Please immediately take steps to borrow or purchase the books you intend to use.**

Natural Law:

Finnis, John. Natural Law & Natural Rights (2nd ed). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Utilitarian:

Singer, Peter. Practical Ethics (2nd ed). Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Utilitarian:

Singer, Peter. The Most Good You Can Do. New Haven, U.S.: Yale University Press, 2015.

Utilitarian:

Mill, John Stuart. On Liberty (any edition), Utilitarianism (any edition): you must use both pieces.

Liberal Egalitarian:

Rawls, John. A Theory of Justice. Cambridge, U.S.: Belknap, 1971.

Libertarian:

Nozick, Robert. Anarchy, State, and Utopia. New York, U.S.: Basic, 1974.

Marxist:

Marx, Karl. The 1844 Manuscripts, The Communist Manifesto, and The German Ideology. (Each available at www.marxists.org/archive) Note—you must use all three pieces for the essay.

Socialist Feminist:

Jagger, Alison M. Feminist Politics & Human Nature. London, U.K.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983.

Essay Topics: essay due May 30 by 11:59 PM at OWLB

1. “Mary Sigler’s argument that ‘some disenfranchisement of prisoners is morally justifiable’ is mostly right.” How would one theorist reply to this statement? For this essay, use Sigler’s article “Defensible Disenfranchisement” (in Iowa Law Review (Vol 99, issue 4, May 2014). pp. 1725-44) to explain her position.
2. “Lisa Hill’s argument that ‘the Australian system of compulsory voting is morally justifiable’ is mostly right.” How would one theorist reply to this statement? For this essay, use Hill’s article “On the Reasonableness of Compelling Citizens to ‘Vote’: the Australian case” (in Political Studies (Vol 50, 2002). pp. 80-101) to explain her position.
3. “Alan Dershowitz’s argument for ‘torture warrants’ is mostly right.” How would one theorist reply to this statement? For this essay, use chapter four of Dershowitz’s book Why Terrorism Works (New Haven, U.S.: Yale University Press, 2002.) to explain his position. You may NOT use Finnis, Singer or Mill for this essay.

Late essays: Extensions will only be granted in exceptional—and properly documented— medical circumstances, and by prior arrangement with instructor. Computer problems do not qualify as an excuse: prepare your essay assuming that you will have problems with your hard drive. Late papers will be penalized **10% per day**, including weekends. **Please note that one minute late = late.** Social science students should refer to <http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/havingproblems.asp> if you have a problem.

Special Reading Questions: 20% of final mark. There are two S.R.Q.s, each worth 10% of the final mark. Your first S.R.Q. is due May 12th. You will be required to answer two questions on each topic. Each S.R.Q. (totalling both answers) will be a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 750 words. Do not include quotes, but include references (page numbers from the assigned reading) where ever you make claims about the theorist (e.g. ‘Aquinas wrote that pizza was an excellent choice for lunch (pg. 23)’). You will submit your answer to me via e-mail at rvandewe@uwo.ca by 11:59 PM on the specified dates with the specified title in the subject line. Late submissions will be penalized 10% per day; **please note that one minute late = late.**

Final: “take-home exam”: available on June 15 at 10:00 AM at OWLB. You will answer two questions. Each individual question requires an answer from 750 (minimum) to 1500 words (maximum). You will submit your two answers in one file at OWLB under Assignments. The exam is due June 16 at 10:00 AM. The essay answers must be in essay format (intro, thesis, conc). Base your answers only on material from the course readings and lectures.

Readings: textbook; the rest are available at OWLB.

Lecture Schedule: will be available at OWLB on Mondays by noon (but usually a few days earlier). The lectures are the intellectual property of Richard VandeWetering. You may not copy them or re-broadcast them in any medium. All non-textbook readings are available at OWLB.

WEEK ONE: MAY 4

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

PART TWO: CONTEMPORARY MORAL POLITICAL THEORY

PART THREE: NATURAL LAW

PART FOUR: AQUINAS

PART FIVE: FINNIS

Readings: 2537Intuitionism; 2537NaturalLaw; 2537Stanlis; 2537Finnis

WEEK TWO: MAY 11 UTILITARIANISM

PART ONE: BENTHAM

PART TWO: J.S. MILL

PART THREE: SINGER

Readings: Kymlicka chap 2; 2537Bentham; 2537MillUtilitarianism; 2537deLazariRadekandSinger

Special Reading Topic #1 due MAY 12 at 11:59 PM *Aquinas on Just War and Rebellion*: send e-mail to rvandewe@uwo.ca with subject heading “Aquinas–your name”

Read: 2537Aquinas: note that Aquinas writes in a peculiar way: he gives wrong answers first, and in the middle section gives his answer.

Questions: a) Rank the three requirements for a just war in terms of importance, and explain why you rated the first as most important.

b) What has Aquinas left out? Suggest at least one more “requirement”.

WEEK THREE: MAY 18: LIBERAL EGALITARIANISM

PART ONE: RAWLS

PART TWO: THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

PART THREE: INSTITUTIONS

Readings: Kymlicka chap 3; 2537Rawls1; 2537Rawls2

Special Reading Topic #2 due MAY 19 at 11:59 PM: *Socrates’ Choice*: send e-mail to rvandewe@uwo.ca with subject heading “Socrates–your name”

Read: 2537Socrates

Questions: a) “The good of our children must take priority in our decisionmaking.” How would Socrates respond to this statement?

b) If your child committed a crime, under what circumstances would you turn him in? Under what circumstances would you help him evade the law?

WEEK FOUR: MAY 25: LIBERTARIANISM

PART ONE: NOZICK

PART TWO: INSTITUTIONS

PART THREE: “WRITING AN ESSAY FOR PROFESSOR VANDEWETERING”

Readings: Kymlicka chap 4; 2537Nozick

ESSAY DUE SATURDAY MAY 30 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK FIVE: JUNE 1: MARXISM

PART ONE: MARX (video lecture)

PART TWO: KYMLICKA ON MARXISM

Readings: Kymlicka chap 5; 2537MarxCommunistManifesto

WEEK SIX: JUNE 8: FEMINISM

PART ONE: JAGGAR

PART TWO: INSTITUTIONS

Readings: Kymlicka chap 7; 2537Jaggar

FINAL: “TAKE-HOME EXAM”: on **June 15 by 10:00 AM** the exam will be made available at OWLB. You will do two questions. Each individual question requires an answer from 750 (minimum) to 1500 words (maximum). Base your answers only on material from the course readings and lectures. You will submit your two answers in one file at OWLB under assignments. The exam is **due June 16 by 10:00 AM**. The essay answers must be in essay format (intro, thesis, conc).