This course may be taken for honors credit by special arrangement; please email the instructor (kim50@indiana.edu) for additional information.

This course raises and discusses some of the perennial questions of our political and social life. In doing so, we will focus on three theme complexes. We open by examining the very conditions of modern politics. What is politics? What role does it play in human existence? How is politics in modern societies different from that of ancient or pre-modern societies? Second, we will be asking questions regarding the possibility of political order and the sources of political obligation. Why should we—citizens—obey the law? What is it that makes government legitimately claim our allegiance? Is it ever justified to break the law and disobey political authority? Third, and for the remainder of the semester, we will discuss various aspects of “liberal democracy,” which many believe is the only viable, legitimate form of government in contemporary world. Can we identify a coherent set of ideas and values liberal democracy purports to embody? How has it come to obtain virtually nonnegotiable status, at least in the West? Why, then, have so many influential thinkers from antiquity up till today been so skeptical of different aspects of this political system? We will examine these and other questions by reading and discussing selections from major works in the history of political thought, including Plato, Machiavelli, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Burke, and Marx, as well as the writings of some important contemporary political theorists and philosophers.