



John Locke Global Essay Prize 2025 Prompts Breakdown
Politics Category - Recommended Readings



Politics Q1

Should politicians ever be punished for lying?

Recommended Readings

John Locke's Works

1. Two Treatises of Government (1689)

Establishes the social contract theory and limits of governmental authority

Argues that governments derive their legitimate power from consent of the governed

Relevant sections: Book II, Chapter XIX on the dissolution of government when trust is broken

2. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1689)

Book IV contains Locke's theories on knowledge, belief, and truth

Chapter V discusses the nature and importance of truth

Can help frame philosophical arguments about what constitutes lying versus error

3. Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693)

Sections 131-140 discuss teaching children honesty and the moral problems of lying

Provides Locke's views on character formation and ethical standards

Historical Resources

1. Plato's "Republic"

Introduces the concept of the "noble lie" (Book III)

Questions whether rulers may sometimes deceive citizens for the greater good

Contrasts with Locke's emphasis on consent and trust

2. Machiavelli's "The Prince" (1532)



Chapter XVIII argues that appearing virtuous is more important than being virtuous

Presents pragmatic view that strategic deception may be necessary in politics

Direct counterpoint to moral absolutist positions

3. Kant's "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives" (1797)

Presents deontological argument that lying is always wrong, regardless of consequences

Rejects utilitarian justifications for political deception

Can be contrasted with Lockean pragmatism

4. Mill's "On Liberty" (1859)

Discusses how falsehoods harm society's pursuit of truth

Relevant to how political lies may damage democratic discourse

Complements Locke's emphasis on reasoned debate

5. Hannah Arendt's "Truth and Politics" (1967)

Distinguishes between factual truths and political opinions

Examines how systematic lying destroys the public realm

Provides framework for distinguishing types of political untruths

Contemporary Resources

1. Sissela Bok's "Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life" (1978)

Comprehensive ethical examination of lying in various contexts

Chapter 13 specifically addresses lying in politics

Proposes "test of publicity" for evaluating political lies

2. Eric Alterman's "When Presidents Lie" (2004)

Case studies of consequential presidential deceptions in American history



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Examines long-term effects of political lying on democratic institutions

Provides concrete examples for analysis

3. Michael Lynch's "True to Life: Why Truth Matters" (2004)

Philosophical defense of truth's value in democratic societies

Addresses relativist challenges to truth in politics

Connects to Locke's epistemological concerns

4. Seana Valentine Shiffrin's "Speech Matters" (2014)

Argues that lying violates the moral foundations of communication

Chapter 5 specifically addresses legal responses to lying

Relevant for examining potential punishment mechanisms

5. Lee McIntyre's "Post-Truth" (2018)

Examines contemporary challenges to factual truth in politics

Analyzes social and technological factors enabling political deception

Provides context for modern political lying

6. Jennifer Saul's "Lying, Misleading, and What is Said" (2012)

Distinguishes between direct lying and misleading statements

Relevant for crafting nuanced definitions of political deception

Helps address complexity of determining what constitutes a political "lie"

7. Jonathan Ellis & Francesca Tria, "Transparency in Parliamentary Procedure" (Journal of Legislative Studies, 2020)

Examines institutional mechanisms for promoting truthfulness

Case studies of parliamentary ethics committees



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Provides practical policy approaches to accountability

