

GVPT449B Seminar in Political Philosophy: Political Theory and Social Criticism
[Fall 2009; 3 Credits; Students are expected to have completed GVPT 241]

Tuesday and Thursday, 12:30pm- 1:45pm; 1108 Tydings Hall

INSTRUCTOR:

Professor Ian Ward

1147 Tydings Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:30pm to 5:30pm & by appointment

Office Phone: 301-405-0427

iward@umd.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This seminar examines traditions of social criticism in the history of political thought. Special attention is given to the theme of domination, and to critics addressing this theme explicitly in modernity, including Edmund Burke, Henry David Thoreau, W.E.B. Du Bois, Eric Arthur Blair (a.k.a. George Orwell), Albert Camus, and Wendell Berry. The course is designed to provide advanced undergraduates with an opportunity to engage the history of social criticism at a high scholarly level as well as an occasion for theoretical reflection on their own political commitments.

The course is divided into three stages. The first traces pre-modern traditions of social criticism, culminating in the crisis of political authority in early-modern Europe. The second examines social criticism in the wake of this crisis in the 18th and 19th Centuries. The third focuses on influential 20th Century figures drawing upon these legacies of critical writing in addressing four faces of domination: white supremacy, poverty, totalitarianism and environmental destruction.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- **Read this syllabus carefully.**
- Seminar Participation: 25%
- Oral Presentation(s): 15%
- Response Paper, 5pp, due **October 1**: 20%
- Research Paper, 15-20pp, due **December 15**: 40% (Includes a paper proposal, due **October 15**, and an initial draft, due **November 12**). All written work must be submitted as a working MS Word email attachment to the instructor by 5pm on the relevant due date.

1. Seminar Participation: 25%

This is a discussion-intensive seminar, rather than a lecture course. Accordingly, students are expected to attend class, to do the reading carefully in advance, and to participate responsibly in the seminar discussions. A student who fails to attend class without a legitimate excuse receives a failing grade for that session. Legitimate excuses include the observance of religious holidays (please notify me in advance, in writing, by September 14, 2009), and emergencies of a medical nature. Please notify me, if possible, of legitimate absences in advance. Campus senate policy

also requires that students who are absent due to illness/injury present written documentation verifying the illness/injury on the first day class that you return to class. Attending class without participating counts as borderline performance (= D). The first session does not count toward the grade.

Oral contributions in seminar discussion will be judged according to the following criteria:

- * the degree to which they manifest genuine attention to, and understanding of, the material being discussed;
- * the degree to which they succeed in advancing the discussion by responding meaningfully to what others have said; and
- * the degree to which they articulate coherent, interesting, thoughtful, plausible, and original claims, questions, and arguments.

To earn an A for this component of the course, a student needs to participate regularly in the discussion and satisfy the above criteria in high degree. Regular participation, by itself, does not guarantee a high grade. For example, a student who participates regularly and seems to have read the assigned material, but does not demonstrate a good grasp of the ideas and arguments being discussed, and therefore does not contribute much of value to the discussion, would earn a C for seminar performance.

2. Oral Presentations: 15%

Starting in the second week of class, each meeting will begin with a 10-15 minute oral presentation addressing the required and/or recommended readings for that session. The presenter is expected to articulate a careful, original and interesting claim about the readings and argue for it in a way that elicits thoughtful responses from other students. **Each student will be responsible for 1 or 2 presentations (depending on enrollment) throughout the term.**

The most important criterion for evaluating oral presentations is the **quality of the seminar discussions they generate**. Generally speaking, presentations that **refer explicitly to specific passages of the text(s) under discussion** and raise **at least three questions about the week's material** fare better on this score than those that do not.

Presentations are also evaluated in accordance with the criteria for oral contributions given above.

3. Response Papers: 20%, due October 1

These short exercises are an occasion for you to reflect critically on a reading from the first part of the reading schedule (given below). Ideally, your reflections will emerge in response to points raised in class discussion thus far. They are also an opportunity to receive early feedback on your written work. Additional information about the response papers will be posted on the ELMS course site.

4. Research Papers: 40%, due December 15 (Proposal due October 15, Draft due November 12)

The papers are meant to state a thesis that is both interesting and germane to the topic of the course, to clarify it, and to argue for it. The argument should respond to objections that reasonable people in our scholarly community might want to raise against it. What would make a good paper topic? Anything in the assigned or recommended readings is fair game.

The papers are meant:

- * to be carefully written,
- * to be based on independent thinking, and
- * to state, clarify, and defend a thesis of interest to students of political thought.

My standards for judging a paper's quality are all implicit in this simple (but basic) formula. All students are required to submit a paper proposal for my approval by **October 15**. The proposal should be approximately five pages long, and state: (a) the topic you want to address, (b) how you think this topic, and your approach to it, will satisfy the basic formula, (c) a short bibliography, and (d) a tentative outline of your argument. An initial draft of the paper is due on **November 12**. **This means that you will have to read ahead if you are interested in writing about texts and themes we address late in the semester.** Further information about final papers will be posted on the ELMS course site.

OTHER COURSE POLICIES

- All students are expected to be familiar with the University's Academic Integrity Policies (<http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html>).
- Students with special needs related to a disability should contact the Disability Support Service (<http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/>) as soon as possible to arrange appropriate accommodations. I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the DSS office and who provide me with a University of Maryland DSS Accommodation form which has been updated for the Fall 2009 semester. This form must be presented to me no later than October 1, 2009.
- Course evaluations: Students are encouraged to complete the online evaluation (available at www.courseevalum.umd.edu) at the end of the semester. The evaluation site will open on December 2, 2009.
- Personal technology devices. Use of Cellular Telephones, PDAs, etc. during class is strictly prohibited. Use of such devices in the classroom will be considered disruptive behavior. Laptops are permitted, but on a provisional basis: if at any point during the semester I discover that laptops are being used for any activity other than note-taking, I reserve the right to ban them from class (except for students with DSS accommodations that specifically require use of a Laptop).

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Required books are available for purchase at the University Book Center. All other required readings (marked with an asterisk “*”) will be available on the Electronic Reserve or Course Documents sections of the ELMS course page. Recommended readings are primarily intended for students wishing to pursue an author or topic in greater detail in their final course papers. This schedule is subject to minor changes; these, if required, will be announced in class.

Week One: Introduction and Course Overview

Tuesday, September 1
Overview of Course

Thursday, September 3
No class – Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association

PART I: PRE-MODERN ORIGINS

Week Two: Prophetic Social Criticism

Tuesday, September 8
Book of Amos (Hebrew Bible)*

Thursday, September 10
Book of Jonah (Hebrew Bible)*
Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Selections)*

Week Three: Criticism and Empire in Early Christianity

Tuesday, September 15
Augustine of Hippo, *City of God Against the Pagans* (Selections)*

Thursday, September 17
Augustine of Hippo, *City of God Against the Pagans* (Selections)*

Recommended: Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (widely regarded as the best biography of Augustine in English); Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*; Gareth Matthews, ed. *The Augustinian Tradition*; Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*; Robert Markus, *Saeculum*

Week Four: Criticism, Republic and Empire

Tuesday, September 22
Cicero, *On Duties* (Selections)*

Thursday, September 24
Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (Selections)*

Recommended: Anthony Everitt, *Cicero*; Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli and The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. 1: The Renaissance*; Philip Pettit, *Republicanism*

Week Five: The Early-Modern Crisis of Authority

Tuesday, September 29
Martin Luther, "On Christian Liberty"*

Thursday, October 1
Response Papers Due
Michel de Montaigne, "Of Custom;"* René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (Selections)*

Recommended: Emerson, "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic," in *Representative Men*; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. 2: The Reformation*; Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*; Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight From Authority*; Harry Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers and Madmen*; Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*.

PART II: DOMINATION AND THE AFFIRMATION OF ORDINARY LIFE

Week Six: Hume and Diderot on the Social Virtues

Tuesday, October 6

David Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm"* and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Selections)*

Thursday, October 8

Denis Diderot, Articles from the *Encyclopédie* (Selections)*

Recommended: Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*; Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment* (2 vols); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (pp. 211-65); Hont and Ignatieff eds., *Wealth and Virtue*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Who's Justice? Which Rationality?* Chapters 12-16.

Week Seven: Edmund Burke: Beauty, Criticism and Nostalgic Romanticism

Tuesday, October 13

Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Selections)* *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (Selections)*

Thursday, October 15

Research Paper Proposals Due

Burke, "Speech on Fox's India Bill"*

Recommended: David Bromwich's introductory essay in *Burke on Empire, Liberty and Reform*; Connor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody*; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*; Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics and Aesthetics*.

Week Eight: Thoreau, Progressive Romanticism, and "The Sleepers"

Tuesday, October 20

Thoreau, *Walden* Chapters 1-4*

Thursday, October 22

Thoreau, *Walden* Chapters 5-9*

Recommended for Weeks Eight and Nine: Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* Chapter 1; George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*; Stanley Cavell, *Senses of Walden* (Tough going, but an excellent work about and inspired by Thoreau); Jack Turner, "Performing Conscience: Thoreau, Political Action, and the Plea for John Brown," *Political Theory* 33.4 (August 2005): 448-71.

Week Nine: Thoreau and the Democratic Ordinary

Tuesday, October 27
Thoreau, *Walden* Chapters 10-14*

Thursday, October 29
Thoreau, *Walden*, Chapters 15-18*

Week Ten: Marx's Critical Humanism

Tuesday, November 3
Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach;"* Feuerbach, "The Essence of Christianity" (Selections)*

Thursday, November 5
Marx, *Paris Manuscripts* (Selections)*

Recommended: Cornel West, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (Highly Recommended); Lesek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*

PART III: FACES OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY DOMINATION AND CRITICISM

Week Eleven: W.E.B. Du Bois on White Supremacy

Tuesday, November 10
Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* "Forethought" and Chapters I-VII*

Thursday, November 12
Research Paper Drafts Due
Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapters VIII-XIV and "Afterthought"*

Recommended: Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk;"* Lawrie Balfour, "Unreconstructed Democracy: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Case for Reparations," AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW, February 1993; Cornel West, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism"

Week Twelve: George Orwell: Poverty and Observational Social Criticism

Tuesday, November 17
Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (University Book Center), pp. 1-118.

Thursday, November 19
Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, pp. 121-232.

Recommended: Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*; Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics* (Chapter on Orwell); Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel*.

Week Thirteen: The Plague of Totalitarianism

Tuesday, November 24

Albert Camus, *The Plague* (University Book Center) pp. 1-116.

Thursday, November 26

THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS

Recommended: Camus, *The First Man* and *Notebooks 1951-59*; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*; Anson Rabinbach, "Totalitarianism Revisited," *DISSENT* (2006).

Week Fourteen: Totalitarianism (Cont'd) and Environmental Destruction

Tuesday, December 1

Camus, *The Plague* pp. 117-252.

Thursday, December 3

Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (University Book Center) pp. 1-50 and "The Mad Farmer Liberation Front."*

Recommended: Jim Whitman, *The Limits of Global Governance*; Jason Peters ed., *Wendell Berry: Life and Work*

Week Fifteen: The Unsettling of America

Tuesday, December 8

Berry, *The Unsettling of America* pp. 51-142

Thursday, December 10

Berry, *The Unsettling of America* pp. 143-223

Recommended: "An Act to establish and endow an Agricultural College in the State of Maryland"

RESEARCH PAPERS DUE DECEMBER 15