

THE POLITICS OF CONSCIENCE

L93 IPH 150 • First-Year Seminar
MW 4:00-5:30pm • Eads 203
Washington University in St. Louis
Fall 2018

Professor: Dr. Amy Gais
Office: Umrath 233
Email: amy.gais@wustl.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-5:00pm, and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

While liberal democracies have historically protected the ‘liberty of conscience,’ the proper role of conscience in political and social life remains deeply contested. This first-year seminar examines several classic accounts of the politics of conscience in the Western tradition, ranging across ancient Greek political thought, early modern political thought, and theories of civil disobedience. In concluding, we will consider the politics of conscience in prominent Supreme Court cases in order to address the secular and religious legacy of conscience in contemporary American politics. While this course examines conscience from a philosophic, historical, and legal perspective, it primarily aims to equip students with fundamental skills in the discipline of political theory, such as interpretive analysis and critical thinking.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Critically examine classic accounts of the politics of conscience in the Western tradition.
2. Introduce students to key themes, questions, and approaches to political theory, as well as equip them with the tools, vocabularies, and critical practices of the history of political thought.
3. Engage in the critical practices of the history of political thought both in seminar discussions and writing assignments: sympathetically reconstruct a textual interpretation, identify complexities and ambiguities in an argument, and grapple with deep theoretical and normative questions.
4. Expose students to a diverse set of approaches to intellectual inquiry and apply critical perspectives and reading practices to a wide range of texts, including works of literature, philosophy, and legal decisions.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Monday, August 27: Introduction & Housekeeping
Barack Obama, “The Politics of Conscience”

UNIT 1: ANCIENT ACCOUNTS OF CONSCIENCE

- Wednesday, August 29: Sophocles, *Antigone*
Line 1-895, especially exchange between Antigone and Ismene, line 1-116, and Antigone's monologue, line 499-525 [pg. 59-101 in Fagles edition]
- Monday, September 3: [Labor Day – No Class]
- Wednesday, September 5: Sophocles, *Antigone* (cont).
Line 900-1470 [pg. 102-128 in Fagles edition]
*Shortened seminar will run from 4:00-5:00pm
- Monday, September 10: Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*
Line 17a-35d, especially 31d [pg. 63-89 in West edition]
- Wednesday, September 12: Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* (cont.)
Line 36a-42a [p. 89-97 in West edition]
- Monday, September 17: Martin Luther, St. Paul's Main Point in His Letter to the Galatians
(circulated electronically)
- Wednesday, September 19: John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (selections
circulated electronically)

[Paper 1 Due on Friday, September 21st at 5:00pm]

UNIT 2: EARLY MODERN (RE)INTERPRETATIONS OF CONSCIENCE

- Monday, September 24: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I and II
- Wednesday, September 26: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III – V

[Revised Paper 1 Due on Friday, October 5th at 5:00pm]

- Monday, October 1: John Milton, *Areopagitica* (circulated electronically)
Pg. 486-530, especially 487-488, 491-493, 514-515.
- Wednesday, October 3: John Milton, *Areopagitica* (cont.)
Pg. 530-570, especially 543, 548, 554-555, 559-560, 563-566.
- Monday, October 8: Roger Williams, "Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of
Conscience" (selections circulated electronically)
Pg. 85-107.

Wednesday, October 10: Roger Williams, “Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience” (cont.)
Pg. 107-156.

Sunday, October 14 – Tuesday, October 16 [Fall Break – No Monday Class]

Wednesday, October 17: Mid-Semester Review

Monday, October 22: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, Chapter 1-7, 10-16

Wednesday, October 24: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 17-18, 21, 32, 47, Review, and Conclusion

Monday, October 29: Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration* (circulated electronically)

Wednesday, October 31: Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration* (cont).

[Paper 2 Due on Friday, November 2nd at 5:00pm]

Monday, November 5: Thomas Jefferson, Draft of a Bill Exempting Dissenters
George Mason, Amendment to the Bill Exempting Dissenters
James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments
(circulated electronically)

Wednesday, November 7: Thomas Jefferson, A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom
George Washington, Thanksgiving Proclamation
George Washington, Letter to the Quakers
George Washington, Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport
Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Danbury Baptists
(circulated electronically)

UNIT 3: MODERN ACCOUNTS OF CONSCIENCE

Monday, November 12: Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (circulated electronically)

Wednesday, November 14: Humanities Lecture Series, 4:30pm-6:00pm, Location TBA
Marilynne Robinson, “Holy Moses: An Appreciation of Genesis and Exodus as Literature and Theology”

*** The Humanities Lecture Series will run from Tuesday, November 13 – Thursday, November 14 in the afternoons. You are encouraged to attend the other two sessions.

Monday, November 19: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (circulated electronically)

[Final Paper 1-Page Proposal Due on Sunday, November 18th at 5:00pm]

Wednesday, November 21 – Sunday, November 25 [Thanksgiving Break]

Monday, November 26: Gandhi, *Political Writings* (selections circulated electronically)

Wednesday, November 28: Gandhi, *Political Writings* (selections circulated electronically)

Monday, December 3: *United States v. Seeger* (circulated electronically)

Wednesday, December 5: *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* (circulated electronically)

[Final Seminar Paper Due on Friday, December 14th at 5:00pm]

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

The Three Theban Plays: Antigone; Oedipus the King; Oedipus at Colonus
Sophocles, Robert Fagles (transl.), Bernard Knox (intro.)

4 Texts on Socrates: Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito and Aristophanes' Clouds, Revised Edition
Plato, Thomas G. West (transl.), Grace Starry West (transl.)

Hamlet (Folger Library Shakespeare)
William Shakespeare, Barbara A. Mowat (ed.)

Hobbes: Leviathan: Revised student edition
Thomas Hobbes, Richard Tuck (ed.)

*** Most of the materials for this course will be available electronically as PDFs on Canvas/email. Please see course schedule/reading assignments for these readings.

OFFICE HOURS:

My office hours are Tuesday 3:00-5:00pm and by appointment in my office, Umrath Hall, Room 233. Please sign up for a slot at <https://calendly.com/amylgais/office-hours>. All slots for the semester are live now, so sign up in advance and plan accordingly around your assignments.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

1. Attendance and Participation (20% of course grade)

Students will be expected to attend all class sessions. However, active participation in the seminar conversation and a deep engagement with the course material is much more important than mere attendance. Students should come to class prepared to ask relevant questions about the readings, interrogate the competing accounts of conscience offered in the course material, and engage constructively in a seminar discussion.

2. *Two Short Paper Assignments (40% of course grade, first paper 15%, and second paper 25%)*

Students will write two short paper assignments over the course of the semester, practicing two key skills of political theory.

The first paper focuses on nuanced interpretive analysis and interrogation of key concepts and arguments in the material. The goal of this short assignment is to engage thoughtfully and carefully with an important (and likely, difficult) passage in the course material. Students will have an opportunity to revise the first paper after receiving some feedback on their first drafts (this second draft will receive the final 'grade' for the paper). A successful paper will articulate the most generous interpretation of the passage and ask critical questions about both the theoretical argument and the rhetoric deployment of that argument (if relevant). This paper should be 3 pages.

The second paper aims to develop first-blush reactions and interpretations into more sophisticated and nuanced ones. A successful paper will articulate a counter-intuitive interpretation (and explain why it is counter-intuitive), further interrogate the underlying assumptions motivating an argument, and identify contradictions or qualifications in the text. This paper should be 5-6 pages.

Together, these two assignments hope to familiarize students with the key tasks of political theory and prepare them for the final seminar paper, which asks them to perform these two skills in the context of a larger interpretive and theoretical paper.

3. *Final Seminar Paper Proposal (5% of course grade) + Final Seminar Paper (35% of course grade)*

Students will write a longer final seminar paper as a culmination of their engagement with the politics of conscience. They are encouraged to develop their own topics based on the reading or an idea sparked by one of their earlier shorter papers. The goal of this final paper is to demonstrate a deep engagement with the theme of course – the politics of conscience – by engaging more deeply with one of the authors (or perhaps several) on the syllabus. Students will be expected to perform sophisticated interpretive analysis, drawing attention to easily neglected passages and unpacking the conceptual ambiguity of key concepts or arguments. They will also be expected to move beyond first-blush interpretations and take more nuanced, complex, and insightful positions on the course material. Students will also be expected to motivate their paper with a compelling and clear question, tension, or problem related to conscience, and explain the stakes of the argument throughout the paper. This paper should be 8-9 pages.

A brief one-page paper proposal will be due before the Thanksgiving holiday. Your proposal should answer three questions and be ruthlessly pragmatic:

1. What do you plan to write about for your final paper (i.e. what is the topic or theme of your paper?)
2. What textual evidence will you analyze in your final paper (i.e. name specific passages and page numbers that you plan to examine)?
3. What is your intuition about the text (i.e. you might not have developed an actual thesis or argument yet since you haven't written your paper, but why are you especially interested in exploring this specific topic)? What seems puzzling, surprising, or interesting to you about a specific passage or thinker that you want to address in the paper?

POLICIES:

Attendance and Participation:

We will focus on fostering a conversation over the course of the semester, so collaboration, comradery, and (respectful) disagreement are encouraged.

Absences from seminar will negatively impact your grade.

Technology:

Laptops and cell phones are not allowed in seminar, except for reference to the readings. Please plan to take notes with pen and paper and bring hard copies of the readings (if shared electronically) or your book. You are also free to use electronic versions of the readings on your laptop, but if technology becomes a distraction, I will ask you to use hard copies exclusively.

Assignment Submissions:

All assignments should be submitted as .doc/.docx Word documents (not PDFs) via email at amy.gais@wustl.

Please use Times New Roman, font size 12, double-spaced, 1" margins for your assignments. Please also include your name and page numbers on your assignments.

Late assignments will not receive credit. No extensions will be given (barring extraordinary circumstances).

Disability Resources:

Please let me know if you need any accommodations and we will consult with the Disability Resource Center at Cornerstone to make these easily available to you.

Writing Resources:

WashU has fantastic resources to support your growth as a writer, and you should take advantage of them this semester, especially as you begin your undergraduate career.

Please consult the expert staff at the Writing Center (writingcenter.wustl.edu) in Olin Library (first floor). In the beginning stages of writing, they can help you organize your thoughts and overcome procrastination or writer's block. As you work through drafts of your papers, they can provide helpful feedback on the strength of the argument, clarity of the writing, and the structure of your papers.

You can schedule a one-on-one appointment here:

<https://writingcenter.wustl.edu/writing/schedule-an-appointment/>.

Additional resources on writing are available here: <https://writingcenter.wustl.edu/writing/writer-resources/>.

Academic Integrity:

Ethical behavior is an essential component of learning and scholarship. Students are expected to understand, and adhere to, the University's academic integrity policy:

wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html.

For the purposes of our course, here are the two most important things to keep in mind to ensure academic integrity:

- Always cite your sources when you present ideas and/or language that you have not developed yourself, including material from class discussions.
- Violation of this policy includes collaborating on assignments where collaboration is not allowed.