

**GVPT 449**  
**Seminar in Political Philosophy: Social Criticism**  
**Spring 2015**  
**University of Maryland**

**3 Credits / GVPT Majors Only / Prerequisite: GVPT 241**

**[Day, Time & Location TBD]**

**Instructor**

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Office Hours: [Day & Time TBD]  
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**Description**

This seminar examines traditions of social criticism in the history of political thought. Special attention is given to the theme of justice. 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The third focuses on influential 20<sup>th</sup> Century figures drawing upon these legacies of critical writing in addressing four faces of injustice: racism, extreme poverty, and environmental injustice.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students will develop greater familiarity with traditions of social criticism and be able to discuss and write about them in a scholarly manner. **In particular, they will be able to demonstrate an improved grasp of three key ideas – interconnectedness, good governance, and sustainability – that are key to environmental justice specifically and political justice more generally.** This is in keeping with the University's sustainability initiative; for more information on the initiative, please see <http://www.sustainability.umd.edu/>.

**Requirements**

- 1) Seminar Participation: 30% of final grade
- 2) \*\*Oral Presentation(s): 20% of final grade

- 3) **\*\*Short Response Essay, 5-7 pages, due TBD: 10% of final grade**
- 4) **\*\*Research Essay, 15-20 pages, due TBD: 40% of final grade (Includes a paper proposal, due TBD, and an initial draft, due TBD).**

All written work must be turned in as a working Word or PDF attachment (.docx or .pdf) via ELMS by **5pm** (EST) on the relevant due date.

**\*\*denotes a “Major Scheduled Grading Event” for the purposes of the University’s Medical Absence Policy. See the “Course Policies” section of this syllabus (below) for more information.**

### *1) Seminar Participation*

This is a discussion-intensive seminar, rather than a lecture course. Accordingly, students are expected to attend discussion sections regularly, to do the reading carefully in advance, and to participate responsibly. Legitimate excuses include the observance of religious holidays (please notify me, in writing, by the end of the course adjustment period) and issues of a medical nature. Attending class without participating counts as borderline performance (= D). The first week’s session does not count toward the grade.

Oral contributions in seminar will be judged according to participation rubric posted on ELMS.

### *2. Oral Presentations*

Starting in the second week of class, each seminar will begin with a 15-20 minute oral presentation addressing the readings and/or other material 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 discussion 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.

### *3. Short Response Essays*

These short (5pp) papers are an occasion for you to reflect critically on one of the texts (or the film) studied in the first five weeks of the course. You are expected to articulate a careful, original and interesting claim about the material and argue for it in a way would likely elicit thoughtful responses from other students. In this respect, it resembles an oral presentation; it differs, however, in that it is a written piece.

#### *4. Research Essays*

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 readings is fair game.

All students are required to submit a paper proposal for my approval by **TBD**. 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 essay is due on **TBD**.

**Essays that are late without a documented excuse will be penalized at the rate of a full letter grade per day. Late proposals and drafts will receive a penalty of one full letter grade per day that will be applied to the overall grade for your research paper.** For the purpose of this policy, each day runs from 5pm to 5pm. This means, for example, that a paper turned in at 6pm on the original due date will count as one (1) full day late. Written work that is sloppy and or incomplete will not be accepted.

#### **Policies**

1. Academic Integrity. **In GVPT 449, matters of academic integrity are taken very seriously.** All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the University's Code of Academic Integrity, including the Student Honor Pledge, at all times. Suspected violations will be reported to the Student Honor Council (<http://www.shc.umd.edu/SHC/Default.aspx>). For more information, please see <http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii100a.html>. If you have any questions about how the Code applies in the context of this course, or about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please do not hesitate to ask your Teaching Assistant or me. You should know that the standard penalty for a student found guilty of academic dishonesty by the Honor Council (without a prior record) is a grade of XF for the course.

2. Accommodations Related to a Disability. I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Disability Support Service (DSS) Office and who provide me with a University of Maryland DSS Accommodation form that has been updated for the Spring 2014 semester. Only written DSS documentation of the accommodation will be considered. This form must be presented to me during the first month of class.

3. Medical Excuses. You (student) or a guardian must email me or call me **PRIOR** to class to inform me that you will not be in attendance due to illness or injury and thus will miss either a lecture or a discussion section. On the very next class (either lecture or

discussion) that you are in attendance, you must present me (or your Graduate Teaching Assistant) with a self-signed note for missing one single lecture or discussion section. This note must include the date of illness and a statement that the information you have provided is true. You must also state that if your absence is found to be false, you understand that you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. The statement must be signed and dated. Do understand that only one self-signed note for one class or discussion section's absence will be allowed.

**For illnesses or injuries resulting in 1) extended or non-consecutive absences, 2) an absence on the scheduled date of your oral presentation, or 3) an inability to submit written work by the relevant due date(s) noted above, I will require a Health Center or medical doctor's health excuse. These are "Major Scheduled Grading Events." If you do not inform me or if you do not present me with timely documentation, you will be given a grade of "F" for the written work or presentation in question.** Note: In the case that you are unable to get a written medical excuse, you may ask your provider for a copy of your medical notes for the specific visit(s) in question.

4. Student Emergencies. Absences resulting from compelling circumstances beyond the student's control will be handled in accordance with the University's Policy on Attendance and Assessment: <http://www.testudo.umd.edu/soc/atedasse.html>. Note that documentation of the relevant circumstances will be required.

5. Religious Observances. Students requesting an excused absence due to a religious observance must provide me with a request, in writing, By the end of the course adjustment period. Requests will be handled in accordance with the University's Policy On Religious Observances: <http://www.testudo.umd.edu/soc/atedasse.html>. Please remember that accommodations are NOT made for travel to and from the religious observance.

#### 6. Grading Procedures.

Final Grades for GVPT 449 are calculated as follows. You will receive a letter grade for each component of the course. In the calculation of your final grade, letter grades will be converted to the following percentages and applied to each weighted component of the course:

A+ = 100, A = 96.9, A- = 93.4, B+ = 89.4, B = 86.9, B- = 83.4, C+ = 79.4, C = 76.9,  
C- = 73.4, D+ = 69.4, D = 66.9, D- = 63.4, F = 0

The total points you accumulate for all the course components will then be added and converted to a letter grade according to the following scale:

97 and above = A+; 93.5 – 96.9 = A; 89.5 – 93.4 = A-; 87 – 89.4 = B+; 83.5 – 86.9 = B;  
79.5 – 83.4 = B-; 77 – 79.4 = C+; 73.5 – 76.9 = C; 69.5 – 73.4 = C-; 67 – 69.4 = D+;  
63.5 – 66.9 = D; 59.5 – 63.4 = D-; 59.4 and below = F

If you have a concern about your grade for any component of the course, please supply me with a written explanation, and we will meet to discuss.

There is no provision for “extra credit” or “bonus points” in this course.

7. Course evaluations. Students are encouraged to complete the online evaluation (available at [www.courseevalum.umd.edu](http://www.courseevalum.umd.edu)) at the end of the semester. The evaluation site will open on TBD.

8. Personal Technology Devices. Use of Cellular Telephones, PDAs, etc. in class is strictly prohibited, and is considered disruptive behavior. Laptops and tablets are permitted, but for note-taking only. Use of laptops and tablets in class for purposes other than note-taking is prohibited and considered disruptive behavior. Disruptive behavior may be reported to the office of student conduct.

9. Contacting Your Professor via Email. Email messages to me will exhibit proper grammar, spelling and punctuation. They are not to be composed in the informal manner of a “text message.” It can take up to 24 hours for me to respond to your message. This means that, if you have a question concerning work that is coming due, it is your responsibility to ask well ahead of the relevant deadline.

10. Emergency Campus Closings. In the event that the University is closed for an emergency or extended period of time, I will communicate to you via ELMS to indicate schedule adjustments due to inclement weather and campus emergencies. Official closures and delays are announced on the campus website <http://www.umd.edu>. The snow phone line is 301-405-SNOW.

## **Schedule**

Required books are available for purchase at the University Book Center. All other required readings (marked with an asterisk “\*”) will be available via 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.

I reserve the right to make minor changes to the schedule of readings in consultation with the class. Students will be given timely notice of any such changes in class and via ELMS.

### Week One: Introduction and Course Overview

Introduction to major themes and concepts for GVPT 449D

## **PART I: PRE-MODERN ORIGINS**

Week Two: Prophetic Social Criticism

*Book of Amos and Book of Jonah* (Hebrew Bible)\*  
Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (selections)\*

Week Three: Criticism and Empire in Late Antiquity

Augustine of Hippo, *City of God Against the Pagans* (selections)\*

Week Four: Republics and Empires

Cicero, *On Duties* (selections)\*  
Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (selections)\*

Week Five: The Early-Modern Crisis of Authority

Luther, "On Christian Liberty"\*  
Montaigne, "Of Custom"\*  
Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (selections)\*

**PART II: MODERN DEVELOPMENTS**

Week Seven: The Rights of Women

Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman"\*

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

Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Selections)\* *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (Selections),\* and "Speech on Fox's India Bill"\*

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

Thoreau, *Walden*, Chapters 1-9\*

Week Ten: Thoreau and the Democratic Ordinary

Thoreau, *Walden*, Chapters 10-18\*

Week Eleven: Marx's Critical Humanism

Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"\* and *Paris Manuscripts* (selections);\* Feuerbach, "The Essence of Christianity" (Selections)\*

**PART III: TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOCIAL CRITICISM**

Week Twelve: W.E.B. DuBois on White Supremacy

DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*\*

Week Thirteen: George Orwell, Poverty, and Observational Social Criticism

Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"\* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (University Book Center)

Week Fourteen: Wither Cities?

Jacobs, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* (University Book Center)

Week Fifteen: The Unsettling of America

Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (University Book Center)  
"An Act to establish and endow an Agricultural College in the State of Maryland"\*