

POSC 252

FREE EXPRESSION: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

Professor Laurence Cooper

Fall 2021

Willis 416
x4111

Office Hours: Tues. 3-5, Wed. 2-4,
and by appointment

I. Purpose and Scope

In our current moment as a society, this course is as topical as they come. But it is also an inquiry into timeless questions—questions of politics and morality, of human nature and human flourishing. It is also an inquiry into liberal education, for liberal education consists in the exercise of such freedom of inquiry and expression as we currently enjoy for the sake of attaining, through knowledge and insight, even greater freedom of inquiry and expression. But what *are* free inquiry and free expression? Are they really possible for human beings; and if so, to what extent? What is their relation to our private and public lives and to the life of society? Are they simply good, or do they carry dangers or costs? And how shall we think about these things? This course is devoted to unfolding these questions as they are illuminated by some of the finest minds on record. Each of the authors we're reading is both an advocate and an exemplar of free inquiry and free expression. Indeed, each author upholds these freedoms as the decisive mark of a truly human life. But precisely *as* free and rigorous inquirers, each author also takes seriously the complexity and ambiguity of these freedoms.

II. Course Requirements and Grading

By far the most important requirement is that you read all assigned passages **closely** and **before class**. The readings for this course are engaging but also very demanding if we want to learn what's being taught. When possible, you would do well to read the assignments **more than once**. Course grades will be based on three 6-8 page papers (25% each) and class participation (25%).

III. Academic Honesty

Strict standards of academic integrity will be upheld in this class. Your submission of written work means that your work is your own, that it is in accord with Carleton's regulations on academic integrity, and that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Be sure you are familiar with Carleton's principles and policies on Academic Honesty: if you haven't done so already, review the website found at <https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/>. I take academic honesty very seriously: students who are found to have violated these standards should expect severe sanctions.

IV. Assigned Texts

With the exception of the first day's reading (which are posted on Moodle), each of the assigned texts is available for purchase at the bookstore:

Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)
Michel de Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*
John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (in *Collection of Essays*)
Vaclav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless" (in *Open Letters*)
Thomas Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy*

V. Class Schedule

Note that this is an *approximate* schedule. We may depart from it if class discussions, etc. so require.

1. Free Inquiry and Free Expression—What and Why

September 19: Plato, Image of the Cave; Nietzsche, selections—on Moodle

September 21: Plato, *Apology of Socrates*

2. *What Can I Know?*—Free Inquiry and the Human Being

September 23: Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, pp. 1-15

September 28: Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, pp. 15-47

September 30: Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, pp. 48-62

October 5: Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, pp. 62-121

October 7: Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, pp. 121-148

FIRST PAPER DUE MONDAY, OCTOBER 11, 4:00 PM

October 12: Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, pp. 148-164

3. *What May I Say?*—Free Inquiry and Society

October 14: Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, entire

October 19: Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

October 21: Mill, *On Liberty*, chapters 1-3

October 26: Mill, *On Liberty*, chapters 4-5

4. *Vox Populi, Vox Dei?*—Free Inquiry and Democracy

October 28: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: volume I, part 2, chapter 7 (pp. 235-249) and volume II, part 1, chapters 1-5 (pp. 403-424)

SECOND PAPER DUE MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 4:00 PM

November 2: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: volume II, part 1, chapters 8-10, 15, and 20 (pp. 426-439, 450-452, and 469-472) and volume II, part 2, chapters 1-5 9 (pp. 479-492)

November 4: Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”

November 9: Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*

November 11: Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*

November 16: Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy*, Introduction and Part 3

November 18: Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy*, Part 4

THIRD PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2:30 PM