Course Synopsis

There are two things wisdom has it that are not to be discussed at the dinner table: religion and politics. This rule acknowledges that both subjects tend to create unpleasant discussion, and the dinner table is about enjoying each other’s company. This class will not follow this wisdom to the letter, but we will keep its spirit in mind. We will be discussing religion and politics, but rather than debating our own personal views, we will be examining and analyzing serious texts on the topic.

The first half of the course examines two major moments in western political philosophy as it relates to religion and politics: Plato's presentation of the trial and death of Socrates, and John Locke's argument for religious toleration. Each of these is key to understanding where we are today, and each has another side of the story to it. We will take time to consider the other side of the story, which is often neglected as the weaker point of view. We will therefore consider whether Socrates deserved to die, and whether religious toleration really is such a wise idea. If it is weaker, after all, we need not fear it. If it is strong, we will still be okay.

Midway through the course, we look at how compatible religion and tolerant, liberal citizenship seems to be today. Each of the major Abrahamic religions are examined in this light, and we focus in particular on John Dewey’s argument for a new kind of “common faith” for democratic society that is progressive and detached from spiritual dogmas.

The last section focuses on the American constitutional debate over religious freedom and discrimination. Differing perspectives on major Supreme Court cases involving the tension between religious liberty and discrimination are covered. The debate includes sophisticated “point-counterpoint” ethical reasoning for how the Constitution should be interpreted, which serves as a useful model for today’s ongoing political discourse.
Required Texts (outside readings posted on Blackboard)

1. *Four Texts on Socrates: Plato's Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito and Aristophanes’ Clouds*
   Translators West and West
   Cornell University Press
   ISBN: 978-0-8014-8574

2. *Locke on Toleration*
   Editor Richard Vernon
   Cambridge University Press
   ISBN: 978-0-521-13969-4

3. *A Common Faith*
   John Dewey
   Yale University Press
   ISBN: 978-0-300-18611-6

4. *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination*
   Corvino, Anderson, and Girgis
   Oxford University Press

Recommended:


Course Goals
Generally, we will be working on 3 ASU Core Objectives: Critical Thinking (CT), Communication Skills (CS), and Personal Responsibility (PR). Each of these Core Objectives contains its own Student Learning Objectives (SLOs). More particularly, we also will work on 3 SLOs of the Political Science Program (each set of SLOs is listed on back page). Your progress towards these objectives may be assessed through your performance on the assigned material. In particular, some (but not all) writing assignments may be used for purposes of this assessment.
Course Format and Expectations

Class Discussion. There is typically new reading for each class period. Class time will be devoted to discussing our day’s reading. We will work off of prepared discussion questions, and make every effort to follow the text closely. Students are always expected to have their own copy of the day's reading with them in class, as well as their own notes on the text.

Short Papers. This class is writing intensive – there are no exams and 4 short paper assignments. Students will be provided with a writing prompt for each paper. Papers will be evaluated for clarity in expression and structure, depth of analysis, and presence of properly cited textual evidence. Students are strongly encouraged to write outlines of their papers before beginning the drafting and revising stages of the writing process. Students are also encouraged to take advantage of my availability during my office hours and via email for assistance on these assignments.

Attendance Policy—Please Read Carefully

Attendance is mandatory and roll will be taken each class. You are allowed 2 weeks’ worth of “free” absences (6 absences)—these are for any reason—after which I will subtract two points per absence from your final grade point total. There are no “excused” or “unexcused” types of absences in this course, except in very serious and/or emergency circumstances. Please be present and on time as much as possible.

Assignments and Grading

Grade Distribution

- Paper #1 15% (can be re-written and re-submitted with the final paper)
- Paper #2 25%
- Paper #3 25%
- Paper #4 35%

Grading Scale

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<td>A</td>
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<td>59 &amp; below</td>
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**Academic Honesty**

*This class strictly adheres to the university’s policy on academic honesty.* Please consult the following website for guidelines on the proper citation of sources and for avoiding plagiarism: [http://www.angelo.edu/student-handbook/code-of-student-conduct/misconduct.php](http://www.angelo.edu/student-handbook/code-of-student-conduct/misconduct.php). *Sanctions for a violation of Academic Policy can include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and a notation on the academic record, and suspension from the university.*

**Religious Observances**

Every effort will be made to accommodate all forms of religious observance in compliance with ASU OP 10.19. Students who require additional arrangements to be made should make these known in good time in order that arrangements can be made.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students that feel that they may need special assistance for any reason should contact the Student Life Office, Rm 112 University Center.

**Readings, Assignments, and Due Dates**

**Unit 1: Platonic Piety**

Section summary: We explore why ancient Athens executes Socrates for impiety, and whether it was just to do so.

Week 1: Aristophanes’ *Clouds*

Week 2: Plato’s *Euthyphro*

Week 3: Plato’s *Apology*

Week 4: Plato’s *Crito*

*Short Paper due the following Monday (2-3 pages)*

**Unit 2: Lockean Liberal Toleration**

Section summary: We explore landmark reasons behind separating church and state in early modernity.

Week 5: Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

Week 6: Proast’s Response (1690)

Week 7: Locke’s Second Letter (excerpts)
Week 8: Proast’s Response (1691) (excerpts)

*Short paper due the following Monday (2-3 pages)

**Unit 3: Tensions between Religion and Secularism** (outside readings on BB)

Section summary: Post-separation of church and state, we explore compelling views on how the major historical religions function in Western (primarily American) political society.

Week 9: Judaism, Christianity, and the Secular State

Sandel’s “Mastery and Hubris in Judaism”

Dreher’s *Benedict Option*, Chapter 4

Week 10: Islam and the Secular State

Nasr’s *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, Chapter 6

An-Na’im’s *Islam and the Secular State*, Chapter 1

Weeks 11 and 12: Progressive Secularism

Dewey’s *A Common Faith*

*Short paper due the following Monday (3-4 pages)

**Unit 4: Constitutional Religious Liberty and Discrimination**

Section summary: We end at the new front line in the American culture war, the heated legal struggle between religious liberty advocates and LGBT rights advocates.

Week 13: *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination*, the LGBT rights perspective

DRL, Ch. 1 and selections from Ch. 2

Week 14: *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination*, the religion advocate perspective

DRL, Selections from Ch. 3

Week 15: *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination*, rebuttals from both sides

DRL, Selections from Chs. 4 and 5

*Final paper due (4-5 pages)
**ASU Student Learning Objectives**

**Critical Thinking Skills (CT)**

CT1. Gather, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information relevant to a question or issue.

CT2. Develop and demonstrate a logical position (i.e. perspective, thesis, hypothesis) that acknowledges ambiguities or contradictions.

**Communication Skills (CS)**

CS1. Develop, interpret, and express ideas through effective written communication.

CS2. Develop, interpret, and express ideas through effective oral communication.

**Personal Responsibility (PR)**

PR1. Demonstrate the ability to evaluate choices, actions and consequences as related to ethical decision-making.

**Political Science Program Learning Objectives**

(SLO 1) Students will demonstrate critical reading and critical writing skills relating to Political Science subjects.

The course primarily exercises these skills in class and through paper assignments. All readings and writing assignments directly involve political philosophy, political science, or constitutional law.

(SLO 3) Student will demonstrate awareness of ethical and moral dilemmas relating to Political Science.

Predominant themes to be examined include: Norms and values of liberal-democratic citizenship; the tension between the rights (religious, economic, social, political) of the individual vs. the rights of the political body to advance a common agenda aggregated from the people through the political system; differing intellectual perspectives related to these first two themes; differing political arrangements in place today and across history related to these first two themes.