Language and the Political
The Gallatin School of Individualized Study, NYU
FIRST-UG709, 4 CR, Spring 2017

Seminar location: Gallatin 401
Instructor: Andrew Libby, e-mail: al260@nyu.edu
Office hours: W: 10:00–11:00 and by appointment; room 416 (Gallatin)

Course Description

How does language affect how we think about political possibilities? How have writers and activists sought to change society through changing how we use language? How is rhetoric used politically, in essays, law, oratory, propaganda, and poetry? We read arguments about the interplay of language and the political, think about political theory, examine political rhetoric, and study literary works. We write about the power of rhetoric to form and criticize political practices: movements for civil rights, human rights, rights for women, workers’ rights, and animal rights. We investigate in detail how language participates in our ideas about rights, ethics, political action, and social justice. And we examine the affective dimensions of this interaction of language, ideas, and values.

We will use the readings to focus your critical thinking capacities, expand your horizons, and communicate the results of these processes in writing that is persuasive, coherent, exhilarating, meaningful. During a process of familiarizing ourselves with various approaches to thinking political and social relations, you will then explore in depth two issues of social justice that particularly animate you. You will produce two research projects and present the results of your research to your colleagues.

Learning Goals

1. To use close-reading and writing to evolve the ability to discuss and think critically about an array of texts;
2. To develop and carry out two research projects;
3. To acquire a critical awareness of how political identity categories are never simply given or natural but are subject to a specific set of social-cultural conditions that change through time;
4. To synthesize this awareness so that it can inform your own personal life experience and broaden your scope.

Required Texts

• Plato, and Marx and Engels, are available online at www.gutenberg.org.
• Marx and Engels are also available at www.marxists.org.

In addition to the works above, I have also placed some required readings on the Resources menu tab on our course website. They appear in folders, one for each unit (e.g., Piety, Family, Fear). These readings are indicated by an asterisk (*) in the schedule below.

We also rely on reading your work to sharpen our understanding of key concepts and connections. By participating in this course, you agree to allow me, the instructor, to post your work on our NYUClasses website. If you wish to opt out, you must do so in writing to me.

**Writing Practices: Formal and Informal Writing and Workshops**

You will write two research essays for the seminar: one 5-page critical research essay and one 8–10-page critical research paper. You will shepherd each of these critical essays through a process of drafting and peer-workshopping.

In addition to these two essays you will write two thinking essays (2–3 pages each), and one group essay (at least five pages) submitted as a forum post. We will also do low-stakes in-class writing, and I may give a few brief written homework assignments.

Finally, as part of a pilot project developed by the Dean's office and Gallatin's EduTech team, you will write 3 blog posts (min. 300 words) to be submitted via your e-Portfolio. More detailed instructions for writing blog posts are on the class website.

We draft the essays, and drafts of your essays in progress form an essential component of our workshops (and your grade). I will give specific instructions on workshopping as each of our workshop dates approach.

In our student research conferences at the end of the term, you will present the results of your research. We'll discuss specifics of the two research projects and of presentation format as we proceed.

**Formatting.** Final versions of your essays must be formatted as follows: double-spaced, 12-point typeface, with one-inch margins on all sides. “Four pages” means four full pages of your own writing. Put your name, my name, the course name, and the title of your essay on a separate cover sheet. When you need to include documentation, style it in accordance with MLA style guidelines (see Hacker for details). You must carefully proofread and edit your final versions. Each of your essays must have an original title. Final versions are due on the dates indicated on the syllabus.

**Submitting work.** Final versions of each essay are due on the due dates indicated on the syllabus. You may choose whether to submit your work in hard copy or as an electronic file. If you are submitting hard copy, that is due at the beginning of class on the due date; electronic versions are due by 10:30 a.m. on the due date.
All thinking essays and final drafts for formal essays may be submitted electronically by sending an attached Word file to my e-mail address: al260@nyu.edu. Please label your file as follows: your first name, comma, name of the author you’re writing on. For example: Andrew, Plato.doc. It’s also fine to submit your work in hard copy.

**Course Requirements**

Our seminar relies on discussing and analyzing the readings together and on a regular series of writing workshops. This method will not succeed without your regular and timely attendance. You must attend class on a regular basis and arrive on time. If you fall ill or experience an emergency, please call Gallatin and e-mail me so that you can be prepared for the next class. Excessive absences (more than two) can jeopardize your final course grade.

**Grading**

Grades are based on your ongoing class participation, your responses to your colleagues’ writing, and the quality of your written work. Participation consists in regular attendance, punctuality, in-class work and contributions to discussions. The development you experience as you write improves the quality of your writing, so I will consider it when reckoning final grades. I am happy to read and evaluate any revisions of essays, provided (a) the first version of the essay was submitted on time and (b) you submit the revision not later than one week after I have returned the first version of the essay to you.

The anticipated numerical breakdown for each component of your final grade is as follows:

- Participation, in-class writing, homework: 20 %
- Blog posts (3): 5 %
- Forum post: 10 %
- Thinking essays (two): 15 %
- Research essay 1 (all phases): 20 %
- Research essay 2 (all phases): 30 %

More than two absences will jeopardize your grade. **Do not miss a workshop day.** Workshops give us all key insights into revision possibilities. If you’re not there, you won’t benefit and your grade for that essay will be subject to a deduction of half a letter grade.

**Doing Honest Work**

I follow the Gallatin policies on academic integrity.

Plagiarism is the use of work done by someone else and presented as one’s own work, without acknowledging the source. Examples include but are not limited to using material from books, articles, blogs, websites, reference works (including wikipedia), student or faculty papers, etc., that one did not write oneself without properly attributing the source of the material. This also includes purchasing or outsourcing written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism can be found in Hacker. Gallatin’s policies and procedures for handling such academic dishonesty are published in the Gallatin student handbook: [http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf](http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf)
I will go over proper documentation style in the course of the semester in conjunction with Hacker’s *A Pocket Style Manual*.

**Office Hours and Connectivity**

My office is room 416 in 1 Washington Place. E-mail is the best way to reach me: al260@nyu.edu. The phone is 27772.

My office hours for the spring term are:

- Wednesdays, 10:00–11:00 a.m. and by appointment.

I may need to adjust this syllabus and course schedule to accommodate pedagogical needs as they arise. If I do, I will.
Course Schedule
You should read each assigned text by the dates indicated below. For instance, you have to finish reading *all* of Le Guin and Genesis before coming to class on Jan. 25.

1. Piety, Family, Fear

January 23
- Introduction.
- Writing assignments:
  - Letter to your mother (approx. 150 words);
  - Essay on the clip (200–300 words);
  - Blog post 1.

January 25
- Discussion of writing.
- Reading for discussion: Le Guin (2 pp.)* and Genesis 1–3 (4 pp.)*.

January 30
- Le Guin and Genesis (cont’d); Plato, *Apology*;
- Writing assignment due next session: Write two pages analyzing how Le Guin’s protagonist uses language to make her point.

February 1
- Two-page essay on Le Guin due.
- Reading for discussion: Plato, *Apology* and *Crito*.
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay on Plato (due Feb. 13).

February 6
- Plato, conclusion; Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” (18 pp.)*;
- Freud tutorial;
- Writing assignment: Develop one critical question on Neumann.

February 8
- Submit critical question on Neumann.
- Neumann, “Anxiety and Politics” (25 pp.)*;
- Discussion of research paper 1: developing a research question.

February 13
- Thinking essay on Plato due.
- Reading for discussion: Wilson, *Jitney*.
- Writing assignment: Develop one critical question on Orwell or Lakoff.

2. Speech, Work, Exploitation

February 15
- Submit critical question on Orwell or Lakoff.
- Reading for discussion: Orwell, “Politics and the English Language” (10 pp.)*; Lakoff, “The Political Unconscious” (32 pp.)* and “The Brain’s Role in Family Values” (34 pp.)*;
- Discussion of research paper 1: developing a research question (cont’d, as needed).
February 20: No class. Presidents’ Day.

February 22
- Reading for discussion: Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (30 pp.).
- Discussion of source materials for research essay.
- Discussion of research paper 1: developing a research question (cont’d, as needed).
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay (3 pp.) on *The Communist Manifesto*.

February 27
- Thinking essay (3 pp.) on *The Communist Manifesto* due.
- Reading for discussion: Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (cont’d);
- Discussion of research paper 1: developing a research question (cont’d, as needed).
- Writing assignment: Develop one critical question on Lorde or Shiva.
- Writing assignment due next session: Research essay 1 proposal and annotated bibliography.

March 1
- Research Paper 1 proposal and annotated bibliography due.
- Submit critical question on Shiva or Lorde.
- Discussion of research projects.
- Writing assignment due next session: Draft research essay 1 (min. 5 pp.).

March 6
- Workshop for research essay 1 (min. 5 pp.).
- Discussion of proper citation and documentation.
- View *Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners* (1 hour 41 minutes).

March 8
- Research essay 1 (min. 5 pp.) due.
- Film for discussion: *Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners*

*Spring Recess: March 13 (Monday) through March 19 (Sunday).*

March 20
- Writing assignment due: Blog post 2.
- Reading for discussion: Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (60 pp.);
- Group Presentation on Sun Tzu.

March 22
- Reading for discussion: Sun Tzu (cont’d); Gandhi (149 pp.);
- Group Presentation on Gandhi.

March 27
- Reading for discussion: Gandhi (cont’d); Karuna Mantena, “Gandhi’s Realism: Means and Ends in Politics” (Mantena talk)*;

March 29
- Film for discussion: *Hunger* (film).
- Group Presentation on *Hunger*.
- Open discussion of the next research project; freewrite.
4. Dignities, Conflicts, Convergences

April 3
• Dignity Day.

April 5
• Reading for discussion: Waldron, Moyn*.

April 10
• Reading for discussion: Walker, Meridian (front matter and pp. 1–132);
• Group Presentation on Walker;
• Discussion of topics for research project 2.

April 12
• Reading for discussion: Walker, Meridian (133–242).
• Writing assignment due next session: A research-project proposal (one paragraph) with 8 sources, annotated.

April 17
• Proposal (one paragraph) with 8 sources, annotated, due.
• Discussion of Research Project 2 based on your Proposal.
• Writing assignment due April 19: Draft your research essay 2, first version (min. 5 pages).
  o Final version of your research essay 2 due by May 8: 8–10 pages.

April 19
• Workshop research essays 2, first version (min. 5 pages) due.
• Discussion of proper citation and documentation.

April 24
• Presentations of research projects.

April 26
• Presentations of research projects.

May 1
• Draft of your research essay 2 due if you’d like me to review it (optional).
• Presentations of research projects.

May 3
• Presentations of research projects;
• Writing assignment due: Blog post 3.

May 8
• Conclusion;
• Research essays due (8–10 pages).