This course is an introduction to the study of politics that is oriented to the problems of political action. These problems are distinctive because politics is at once the creation of a legitimate public order and a system of power, and the requirements of order and the imperatives of power are often in tension with each other. This tension shows up in the questions we will address in the first unit of the course. As a citizen, I am obligated to obey the laws, but as a moral being, it’s often said I must “obey” my conscience. But what should I do if the dictates of law conflict with the judgments of conscience? How can I be obligated to obey laws I have not made or to which I have not agreed? When – if ever – may I justifiably disobey?

The second issue of political action we discuss is often called the problem of ends and means – what can we properly do to bring about a just (or relatively just) society? The imperatives of power often seem to dictate that one be prepared to dirty one's hands if one wishes to advance the good in political life. Thus, we must ask what kind of person must one be if one is to engage in political activity? Must one, as Machiavelli argued, learn how not to be good, or is there a way in which the demands of politics and ethics can be reconciled, as Gandhi argued? These questions will occupy us during the second part of the course.

In the third part of the class we will consider the character of the political order that claims our obedience. Some kinds of governments may be legitimate, and I may be obligated to obey their laws. But there are certainly some regimes that are illegitimate, and so can make no moral claim against me. We will examine two answers to the question of what kind of regime has the authority that obligates us to obey its rules. The first is Plato’s idea that the best regime is one in which authority is vested in the hands of those who have knowledge of political and moral truth. The second is the ideal of liberal democracy, which rests on the idea that authority can only arise from the people over whom it is exercised. But for authority to arise from the people, the people must be able to express their views, and must have the ability to form their own judgments, which means they must have access to the information and analyses of others, so there must be freedom of thought and expression. But freedom of thought and expression can be invoked to license hate speech, which marginalizes powerless groups and undermines their ability to participate as part of the people whose judgments determine what the laws will require. The class will conclude by considering these apparent paradoxes.

Course Structure and Expectations:

This course is structured to permit a high level of discussion and intensive work on writing and the close analysis of texts. The reading is quite varied, including plays, classical philosophical texts, essays in various styles, contemporary works of political theory, and a film.
Like all classes, this class is a cooperative endeavor, in which we work together to explore and enhance our understanding of a subject. Each of us brings a unique background and perspective to the class, and each contributes by engaging with one another and with the readings and other class material. We need to listen sympathetically and respectfully in order to understand each other’s concerns and points of view, especially since many of the topics we discuss may provoke serious disagreement. At the same time, we need to engage critically, raising questions to clarify and deepen the discussion. All participants have the responsibility to make class discussions fruitful, which means that everyone must do the reading and think about the issues prior to class. Thinking about the readings means being prepared to state and explain the key concepts used by an author, to outline the main thesis or theses in two or three concise sentences, to set out the core argument(s) of the text(s), and to present your own assessment of its persuasiveness.

Written assignments: two short (2-3 page) papers, two 6-8 page essays, and a final. All papers are to be submitted as e-mail attachments and should be in WORD or rich text format. If you can’t submit papers in these formats, please see me prior to the deadline for the paper. Short papers will be due on the following dates: February 3, February 19, April 9, and April 23. You must write at least one short paper in the first half of the term and at least one in the second; if you write more than one, the one with the higher grade will be used to calculate the final grade. No late short papers will be accepted for any reason. The longer essays will be due March 7 and May 4. Unexcused late 6-8 page papers will be penalized one letter grade per day. If you anticipate any problem getting a 6-8 page paper in on time, you must see me ahead of time, as extensions will not be granted on the day the paper is due. These dates are somewhat provisional, and may be changed slightly depending on the pace of our class discussions. There will also be a final exam on Tuesday, May 10, from 2 to 5 PM. The exam will be administered electronically; it will be e-mailed at or slightly before 2 PM that day; you should write your answers on whatever word processor you use, and submit your exam by noon in either Word in RTF format, which means that you can take it anywhere in the world. I hope that this procedure will give you a little more flexibility at the end of the term. In computing the final grade, the average grade for the two required short papers, each 6-8 page essay, and the final will have equal weight. Class participation will be used to adjust the grade based on the written work up or down by up to 1/3rd of a grade.

Papers will be evaluated according to the following criteria:
1. analytical rigor (logic, precision, clarity of argument, consideration of counterarguments, etc.)
2. originality and creativity
3. scholarship (accurate representation of authors cited, other works engaged with when appropriate, quality of research if a research paper, etc)
4. mechanics (quality of prose, grammar, spelling, citation of sources, etc.)
All work is to be done in accordance with the Honor Code.
I will discuss writing in the class, but here are some important guidelines:
1. Establish a focus. A good paper has a thesis, a central idea or claim that it is making, and it presents an argument supporting that thesis. You should be able to make an outline of your paper, which will at the same time be the skeleton of the argument you are making. It is often
helpful to write out the outline – in sentence form, not as a list of topics – before writing the paper or, at least, the final draft. A good way to think about your paper is ask yourself, “What do I want my readers to believe after they have read my paper? What reasons can I offer them to think that?” If you can answer these questions succinctly, you’re off to an excellent start.

2. **Title.** The title should express the main idea or focus of your paper, preparing your reader to see immediately what you’re going to say, and why it’s interesting.

3. **Structure and organization.** The paper should have a clear structure, with an introduction presenting the central question or problem you are addressing, a body that sets out a logical progression of the reasons and evidence you are offering, and a conclusion that ties the paper together. Although not applicable to this class, in longer papers it is often useful to provide section headings. The introduction should state the central issue or question the paper addresses and provide an overview of the structure of the argument to make it easier for your reader to follow it.

Some specific points:

1. Please NUMBER your pages.

2. All quotations, paraphrases, and direct use of another's ideas (even if not quoted) MUST BE cited. Using parenthetical references (author’s last name, page number) with a bibliography is fine; you do not have to use footnotes or endnotes in short papers. Footnotes can be used to present additional ideas, qualifications, or other points that would detract from the flow of the paper.

3. Avoid common but egregious errors such as misuse of too, to or two; there, they're, or their; its or it's; affect or effect; principal or principle.

4. Stamp out sexism. If you mean men and women or he and she, say so. Don't assume that "man" or "men" refer to human beings generally. There are lots of ways of writing that avoid the awkwardness of, e.g., saying he or she over and over again. For help, you might consult Williams (see #5) or a more specialized guide such as the *Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* by Miller and Smith.

5. There are a number of excellent guides for good writing. Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style* is a classic, especially for grammar and word usage; it offers a useful set of “principles of composition” and is available at the Reference Desk at Olin Library. I also recommend Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. His work is particularly helpful in offering examples of how awkward passages can be rewritten, using rules or principles that are fairly concrete and address specific issues such as clarity, cohesion, emphasis, etc. (these are all chapter headings in his book). Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, offers a helpful discussion of how to develop (and express) an argument in a tight, logical way.

I am committed to being accessible in and outside of the classroom. I will hold regular office hours and will be available to meet at other times by appointment. You should feel free to contact me by e-mail, and I will get back to you within a reasonable amount of time. I will also make every effort to read your papers quickly and to provide constructive feedback on your work. I am happy to meet or correspond with you about your ideas before you write a paper, and to read outlines and drafts, time permitting (which is a serious constraint in a class of this size – but I will do my best). A paper in the “B” range is a good paper: it will be well written and argued
with a clear thesis, showing a strong command of the materials of the class. An “A” paper is an excellent paper: it will have the strengths of a “B” paper but to a higher degree, and it will reflect original and creative thinking about the issues. A paper in the “C” range is one that does not adequately meet one of the first three criteria used to evaluate papers, listed above.

Students with disabilities:

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Books: All of the following books have been ordered at the bookstore; except those that are available in electronic format, noted by the symbol {E}, they are also on reserve; many of the classic texts are available in the library in multiple translations and editions, and many are available on the web in useful formats (but often don’t have page numbers or other ways in which they can be cited). Please note that, in many cases, we will not be reading an entire book, so you may wish to use the reserve room rather than purchasing every book. I have marked books that we will be reading in their entirety with an asterisk.

Sophocles I (Oedipus Trilogy), Chicago 0-226-30792-1 (v. 1)
Plato, The Trial and Death of Socrates, Hackett 0 915144 158
*Nicolo Machiavelli, The Prince, Hackett 0 87220 316 6 {E}
Jean Paul Sartre, No Exit and Three Other Plays, Vintage 0 679 72516 4
Albert Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays Vintage 0-394-70207-7
Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth Grove 0802141323
Mahatma Gandhi, Selected Political Writings Hackett 0 87220 330 1
*Plato, The Republic Hackett 0 87220 136 8 {E}
*John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration Hackett 0 915145 60X
The Federalist Papers Mentor, New American Library 0 451 62881 0 {E}
*John Stuart Mill, On Liberty Hackett 0 915144 43 3 {E}

Syllabus: Readings must be done by dates shown. Items marked by asterisk (*) are available through the library e-reserves; articles in journals are available through the library; all books assigned for the course will be on reserve in Olin except as noted above. There will be one film, “Battle of Algiers,” that will also be on reserve, and students should plan on watching it before the class in which it will be discussed (Tuesday, February 16). I recommend watching it in
groups with other students so you can talk about it afterwards. For students wishing to pursue certain topics in greater depth, I have listed a small number of recommended readings for certain topics. Students wishing further guidance should consult with me. Due dates for papers and readings may be changed depending on the progress of class discussions.

I. Political Obligation, Conscience, and the Claims of Authority

Class 01 (Th, 1/21): Introduction to class and discussion of Sophocles, “Antigone”
Class 02 (T, 1/26): Socrates, Apology and Crito

Recommended: H. Bedau, ed., Civil Disobedience; P. Singer, Democracy and Disobedience

First short paper due no later than noon, Wednesday, February 3.

II. Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands
A. Ends and Means: The Craft of Politics

Classes 04, 05 (2/2, 4): N. Machiavelli, The Prince
Class 06 (2/09): J.P. Sartre, "Dirty Hands," in No Exit and Three Other Plays

Class 07 (2/11): Albert Camus, “The Just Assassins,” in Caligula and Three Other Plays


Second short paper due no later than 9 AM Friday, February 19.

B. Violence, Conflict and Political Power
Class 08 (2/16): Film: “Battle of Algiers”
  F. Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, "Preface" (by Sartre), "Concerning Violence," and "Conclusion"

Class 09 (2/18): *Alan Dershowitz, “Should the Ticking Time Bomb Terrorist be Tortured,” ch. 4 of his Why Terrorism Works, pp. 131-63 and 247-54
  Conor Friedersdorf, “The Ticking Time Bomb Defense of Torture is Embarrassing and Irrelevant,” at


III. The Moral Foundations of Political Life I: Authority and Knowledge


Spring Break, weeks of March 7, 14

First 6-8 page paper due no later than Monday, March 7 at noon.

Class 14 (3/22): Plato, Books 3 and 4
Class 15 (3/24): Plato, Books 5, 6 and 7
Class 16 (3/29): Plato, Books 8 and 9
Class 17 (3/31): Book 10

Third short paper due no later than noon, Saturday, April 9.

IV. The Moral Foundations of Political Life II: Liberal Democracy

Toleration and Constitutional Democracy

Classes 19, 20 (4/7, 4/12): Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*

Class 21 (4/14): *Federalist* nos. 9, 10, 14, 39, 47-53

Freedom and Equality

Fourth short paper due no later than noon, Saturday, April 23.


Conor Friedersdorf, “The New Intolerance of Student Activism,” *Atlantic Monthly*, November 9, 2015, at


Class 26 (5/3): no new readings

Second 6-8 page paper due no later than 5 PM on Wednesday, May 4.

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 10, 2-5 PM.