

## INTRODUCTION TO EUROPEAN CULTURAL HISTORY

### History 1322

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Room 238, Salisbury Labs

Office hours: 5:00-6:00 pm TF and by appointment.

A Term 2011

4:00-4:50 MTThF

Higgins Labs 114

### Required Texts:

Ronald Dworkin, Is Democracy Possible Here? Principles for a New Political Debate (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006).

Michael Sandel, Justice (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

Jonathan Wolff, An Introduction to Political Philosophy (Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

Required texts are supplemented with **class readings** that are available under HI1322 on myWPI. **You must either print out these supplemental readings or bring your laptops to class, as we will go over the texts very closely. Also bring the text to class that is assigned for that day.**

**Many class sessions will be guided by discussion question handouts. Always note the page and paragraph in the text that supports your answer.**

For each class there are about 20 pages of reading from the classics of Western thought (available on myWPI) that must be done closely and carefully. You must take particular care to read the text with great attention to detail; special effort must be made to follow the argument of the Great Thinker under examination. **Note where in the text you can find answers to discussion questions.** Read with a dictionary; enhance your vocabulary! The classics are read in the context of arguments set out by your assigned texts listed above. These texts should be read for their overall argument. You need to understand these texts, but you need not "study" them as is the case with readings from the classic tradition of Western Civilization. However, note in these texts as well where you find answers to discussion questions.

**Course goals:** The broadest area of concern in this course is the history of Western Civilization, primarily the celebrated intellectual and cultural traditions that define our civilization. This year's edition of the course will focus on the ethical underpinnings of socio-political thought in the West. The ultimate goal of this course is to understand the origins and basis for our own ethical and political precepts by looking critically at the evolution in thinking surrounding those precepts. This is a course in the history of ideas--ideas that make up the basic assumptions and structure of our (those of us who are Westerners) own thinking. To be fully the master of these ideas (and thus of ourselves) we must understand the force and the weakness of their logic; freedom of mind necessitates understanding the causal history that brought such ideas to be.

Students will have an opportunity to develop their abilities in analysis and argument, as well as verbal and written communication. Such skills are useful in all types of scholarly pursuits. More importantly, students will be challenged to think, and to think for themselves.

**Class discussion sessions**--the day-in, day-out format for this course--will focus closely on the texts assigned for each day, and will cover material essential for your writing assignments; thus students must keep abreast of reading assignments. Again, this entails mastering the argument of short but difficult primary texts from the Western classical tradition, and grasping the

general argument of contemporary scholars writing on ethical and political issues. Classroom discussion is a collective responsibility for which we all have an obligation to prepare and participate. Regular class attendance is therefore of paramount importance and figures prominently in your final grade.

**Grading Process:** It should be noted from the start that this course is heavily weighted toward classroom participation. A large measure of grading will be a day-by-day process of assessing the extent of student preparation for informed classroom discussions, **including occasional, unscheduled 10-minute tests on reading assignments for that day.** Everyone is encouraged to continue classroom argument on the Discussion Board in myWPI. Unless otherwise specified, reading assignments should be completed by the first day indicated on the course schedule below. Class attendance, keeping up with reading assignments, and completing exercises are of crucial importance for success in this course, these exercises will include several short writing assignments. There will be a short answer and identification final exam.

**Grades:** A C grade reflects a general knowledge about the ideas and concepts covered in the course, consistent attendance in class and participation in discussion, and the ability to write and argue with clarity. A B grade reflects exact and detailed knowledge about the ideas and concepts covered in this course, repeated contributions to discussion with specific references and examples drawn from assigned readings, and the ability to write and argue with a precise and sophisticated vocabulary. An A grade reflects not only all of the characteristics of above average work, but also, that the student has engaged the great ideas of Western Civilization with a reflective personal commitment toward building the ethical and political dimensions of his or her own intellectual identity.

**Final Essay Assignment:** The Great Works of Western Civilization are of little value if they are not read and internalized as part of our own intellectual identity. This is not a matter of memorizing facts presented in lectures; this is a matter of being inspired and informed by the seminal literature of Western culture. You should keep a personal diary of your reactions to these works and to classroom discussions . . . musings, reflections, questions, personal statements. Your entries should reflect a close reading of texts, but they should never be a simple summarization of the works or class notes. You must write from what interests you and what challenges you to think, using your assigned texts for illustration and inspiration; these notes should search for some degree of personal involvement with the assigned readings. (If you cannot find those interests and challenges, you are in the wrong class!) This personal diary should be a record of your own intellectual growth in this class and at WPI; such a record should show increasing self-awareness about your own identity and how you fit into the Great Scheme of Things. This diary will be your resource for a seven to eight page (double-spaced) final essay about your personal philosophy concerning the ethical principles that should underlie socio-political structures.

**Academic Integrity:** It hardly needs to be said that such things as plagiarism or stealing another student's work are unacceptable. However, in this class, it is entirely proper to work in teams to prepare discussion questions or the answers to essay finals, as long as you yourself have mastery of those answers and are prepared on your own to present them in class. Students are also encouraged to read each other's final essay draft and to give each other suggestions and corrections, always realizing that the final paper must be an expression of your own personal beliefs and arguments.

I hope that mutual trust among all participants of the class, including the teacher, will lead us to interact as if we were under an honor code. This would mean we all share responsibility in the success of this course and we thereby have certain obligations toward one another. First and foremost is the obligation to respect opinions that are different, sometimes radically different from our own. Each of us is encouraged to think carefully and critically about what he or she believes about the most important realms of human life and to share those beliefs in class discussion. We must always respect diversity of opinion by listening carefully to the ideas and arguments put forth by others, student or teacher. We do not, however, have to sit silent in the face of what we believe to be illogical argument, fallacious evidence, or unethical propositions.

**Examination Accommodations:** If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you have medical information to share with me, please make an appointment as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, students with disabilities, who believe that they may need accommodations in any class, are encouraged to contact the Disability Services Office (DSO), as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. The DSO is located in Daniels Hall, (508) 831-5235.

#### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

August 25    **Intro to Course**

26    **What is Socio-Political Ethics?**

Sandel, Chpt. 1. (Note that Sandel filmed his Harvard lectures leading to this book and they are available at: [www.justiceharvard.org](http://www.justiceharvard.org))  
Wolff, "Introduction"

29-30    **What is a Moral Act--Utilitarianism?**

Sandel, chpts. 2.  
Aristotle, Book 1 of the "Nicomachean Ethics"  
Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill

Sept. 1-2    **What is Moral Action--Deontology?**

Sandel, chpt. 5.  
Dworkin, chpt. 1.  
Plato's "Analogy of the Cave"  
Immanuel Kant, "The Categorical Imperative"  
Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor"  
Short essay on the nature of moral action due (see myWPI).

6-9    **The State of Nature and the Nature of Man**

Wolff, chpt. 1.  
Sandel, chpt. 2.  
Thomas Hobbes, "Leviathan"  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Discourse on Inequality"

12-13    **Political Solutions to Justice: The Nation State or Anarchism?**

Wolff, chpt. 2.  
Hobbes, "Leviathan"  
Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"  
Sandel, chpt. 3.

- 15-16     **liberalism, Liberalism, Libertarianism**  
Wolff, chpts. 3-4.  
Dworkin, chpts. 2-3.  
John Locke, "Second Treatise on Government"  
John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty"  
Rousseau, "The Social Contract"
- 19-20     **The Capitalist Ethic**  
Sandel, chpt. 4.  
Dworkin, chpt. 4.  
Adam Smith, "Theory of Moral Sentiments" & "Wealth of Nations"
- 22-23     **Socialism and Communism**  
Wolff, chpt. 5 to p. 152.  
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto"  
Sandel, chpt. 6.  
Short essay on the nature of the ideal polity due (see myWPI).
- 26-30     **The Welfare State and Communitarianism**  
Sandel, chpts. 7-8.  
Wolff, chpt. 5, pp. 152-176.  
Primary readings to be assigned
- October 3-4     **Contemporary Political Issues: Strict Constructionism, Sexual and Gender Equality, Are We Post Racial?, Human Rights**  
Wolff, chpt. 6.  
Sandel, chpt. 9.  
Readings to be assigned.
- 6-7     **Are Democracy and Justice Possible?**  
Dworkin, chpt. 5 & Epilogue  
Sandel, chpt. 10.  
Selections from your final paper.
- 10-11     **Course Summary**
- 13     **Final Exam**

## SHORT ESSAY ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MORALITY

Write a two-page (double-spaced) essay on the difficulties and possibilities of moral action in an age of cultural relativism. If there is no Truth, if all is but the fog of opinion, if every moral judgment is shaped by the historical circumstances under which it is formulated, how is possible to proclaim that a great ethical wrong—the enslavement of children or the genocide of a people—is always, eternally condemnable? Which aspects of the Judaic-Christian tradition coincide with philosophical arguments about moral behavior? Should a utilitarian or a deontological argument be the basis for moral action? You need not answer these explicit questions, but these questions should inspire your answer.

In your essay quote a phrase or sentence from two of these thinkers that most supports your argument: Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Kant, Dostoevsky.

## THE IDEAL POLITY

### Essay Assignment

Write a five page essay (typed double space) on the ideal political-social structure, i.e., state. This essay, as in the work of the contract theorists, should discuss your conception of the nature of man, what social arrangement best accommodates this nature, and what are the purposes and related values of man and society. In your essay cite 5 of the following authors at least once: Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Henry David Thoreau, Karl Marx. Don't just use a citation haphazardly; elaborate on the point being made by the thinker you are quoting and engage their *arguments* either in agreement or disagreement. Use correct format for references, whether in published form or taken from the Internet..

As Rousseau says, "Give your pupil no verbal lessons; he should be taught by experience alone. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Or, as John Stuart Mill would have it, "the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race" for there will be no occasion for error to collide with truth. <sup>2</sup>

1. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, in *Classics of Western Thought*, 4th ed., vol. 3, *The Modern World*, edited by Edgar E. Knoebel (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1988), 153.

2. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in *Classics*, 325.

## FINAL ESSAY ON ETHICS AND THE STATE

### A Statement of Personal Beliefs

Your assignment is to compose a eight to ten page (typed double-spaced) essay that articulates your beliefs about socio-ethical behavior and the nature of the state. Your essay should, however, be based upon larger, perhaps more fundamental dimensions of your personal philosophy (your worldview), that is, your social, moral, and political views should be built upon and indicate your basic understanding of the nature of man and universe. **While building your arguments in terms used by the great political thinkers of Western Civilization, you should use examples (or an example) drawn from contemporary debates in American politics—health care reform, the recession, government bailouts of banks and the car industry, religion in public life, the partisan nature of contemporary American political debate in Congress and with the national media. Material for this aspect of your paper can be drawn from Ronald Dworkin's *Is Democracy Possible Here?* and from primary material drawn from contemporary debates, which I will post on myWPI. In writing this final paper, you should use your first two papers, responding to my editorial suggestions, in this final essay.**

Your essay should not *simply* be a statement of your personal opinions, no matter how imaginatively or persuasively you are able to express them. Of course, your essay will be at base an expression of your *personal* values and beliefs, but you should articulate these personal beliefs in terms of the concepts and language of the Great Thinkers of Western Civilization. By thinking through and expressing your own ideas in this lofty and complex manner, you enter into a

celebrated *discourse* of argument and counter-argument concerning the great issues facing all humanity. This discourse makes up the heritage of Western culture and in bits and pieces, is a part of the thinking of every American. **Such thinking should have relevance to matters of great weight and importance in current political debates.**

Your argument for an ideal socio-political community in which justice is honored should be, to some degree, a broad reflection upon many aspects of human experience. In a nutshell, your essay must strive for depth, as well as comprehensiveness and coherence, by showing that ethical and political positions arise out of a larger personal understanding of the nature of man and universe. To avoid self-contradiction, a personal philosophy about any aspect of life must show a consistent manner of argument from matters of ontology to matters of axiology (*look those words up!*), from the nature of being to the nature of society, from religion to politics. In brief, a philosophy of life is a cosmology of interconnected beliefs, and in this essay your arguments about complex matters of ethical behavior and an ideal state must be well founded upon more fundamental beliefs rooted in questions of metaphysics, epistemology, scientific and philosophical methods, and so forth. Of course, in an eight-page essay you can hardly be expected to write at length about every great question facing humanity or about every dimension of philosophy. You will have to decide which aspects of your most basic personal beliefs underlie your views about man, morality, and the state, **as well as current political debates.** Nevertheless, your essay should demonstrate an awareness of this interconnectedness between dimensions of thought (philosophy) **and problems facing a democratic citizenry.**

Just as your essay must demonstrate an awareness of the broad complexity necessary to sustain a coherent worldview, any sophisticated argument must also show an awareness of the most forceful articulation of opposing argument (**both within philosophical traditions and within current political debates.**) Thus you cannot write your essay simply by accumulating the thoughts of those Great Thinkers with whom you find yourself in agreement. Your essay must also demonstrate you understand and can answer the counter-arguments (**opposing political positions**) that might be raised against your beliefs (again, “counter-arguments” articulated in the terms and concepts of the Great Western Thinkers).

You should not think of this essay as having a right or wrong answer, although you must show by citation of original texts that you are making a defensible interpretation of the Great Thinker **or opposing political positions.** You should think of this essay as a creative endeavor, in which your goal is to be clear in your wording and consistent in your argument, stylistic elegance and sophisticated complexity, and rich use of the intellectual heritage of Western Civilization. **Essay due Friday, October 14.**