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Phil 5510
Ancient vs. Modern Political Philosophy
M 1800-2030, Cocke 108
Fall 2014

HISTORY OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (IN REVERSE): SYLLABUS

I. TEXTS (in the order in which they will be studied)

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*
Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*
J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*
Plato, *Republic*
Aristotle, *Politics*

II. SCOPE & PURPOSE OF ANCIENT vs. MODERN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Given that our readings span 22 centuries and five philosophers, it must be conceded that this seminar is something of a "survey course." Despite the low-octane ring of the term, that's not all bad. When the philosophers are as good as these and the issues as important, surveying their views is a more than reasonable use of one's time. Still, to give form to such a synopsis and thereby render it manageable it's useful to provide some overarching structure within which the various components can be seen as displaying some thematic interaction.

Accordingly, this seminar will be (loosely) structured as an "Ancients vs. Moderns" debate. For reasons that aren't entirely clear - at least to me - during the 17th century there emerges an idea of government sharply limited in its legitimate functions. Primary among these functions is the protection and preservation of *individuals' rights* where these rights are understood as preeminently *liberties*: rights to be let alone. What I'm describing is, of course, the nascent theory of *liberalism*. The first half of the seminar will, then, be given over to tracing the development of liberal theory during its classical period. We'll begin with Locke's *Second Treatise*, arguably the first comprehensive statement of a classically liberal politics, proceed to an examination of Kant's political writings which some (me!) take to be the high water mark of a mature liberalism, and we'll conclude this portion of the tour with J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*, a work that stands athwart - and to a considerable extent helps bring about - the transition from the "old" liberalism to the "new" varieties of the second half of the 19th century.

Next we shift to classical political philosophy, reading Plato's *Republic* and, as much as time allows, Aristotle's *Politics*. It will not have escaped your attention that this ordering isn't exactly historical. That calls for some explanation. What I'm hoping - whether it works out this way

remains to be determined - is that by doing so we'll be motivated to consider these classical works as significant *challenges* to liberal political orthodoxy rather than as defunct philosophical documents of exclusively antiquarian interest. I don't wish in any way to impugn the importance of historical studies directed toward unraveling the thought of the past, but if the significance of the classic texts is entirely confined to a political world that no longer exists, they may be venerable icons but they're not living philosophical documents. The presumption I bring to this seminar is that liberalism represents the most significant tradition of political thought of the modern era but that it does not thereby consign classical political understandings to the dustbin of history. Rather, the classical paradigm remains, I believe, the most substantial alternative to the politics of modernity. (For example, compared to communitarianism, eco-feminism, postmodernist this-and-thatism, etc.) Whether and how that may be so will occupy our attention during the course of the seminar, but some "previews of coming attractions" may be in order.

Liberalism, it is often said, rests on a commitment to the primacy (either ontological, ethical or both) of the *individual*. As individuals we are in many ways involved with others, but these relationships are all external. They do not constitute our being as such, and so we are prior to the relationships in which we find/place ourselves. But classical political theory conceives of human beings as by nature social and political animals. Aristotle famously (if somewhat obscurely) declares the polis to be prior to the individual, and Plato's best city is characterized as one in which individuals occupy the offices and positions they do for the sake of procuring a common rather than individual good. In this regard the ancients can be deemed to be allies of contemporary communitarians pitted against the radical individualism of liberalism.

A liberal politics is *neutral* among individual conceptions of the good. That is to say, the state is not entitled to privilege some favored conception of valuable and thus valued projects at the expense of other rights-respecting ways of life deemed by it to be less worthy. The characteristic expression of neutrality in early liberalism was the extension of toleration to religious dissenters. A contemporary variant showing perhaps how far we have come is the permission afforded to Rawls's grass counter to be let alone as he numbers his blades. But neutrality as a liberal ideal has recently come under attack from some "members of the family" (e.g., Thomas Nagel, Joseph Raz) as well as overt antiliberals. Neutrality certainly has no place within the classical conception of a proper political order; how can a self-respecting state show itself neutral between the noble and the base, between virtue and vice, between God and the Devil? Some liberals defend neutrality by adopting a conception of value as purely subjective, merely the focus of individuals' preferences whatever those preferences might be. But if value is objective such that persons can be better or worse judges of what comprises a good life, isn't neutrality a dubious proposition? And if neutrality goes, whither liberalism?

The preceding remarks aren't meant to set in stone the itinerary of this course, but they do, I hope, afford some preliminary idea of the kinds of issues that I expect to come to the fore during our survey of these 22 centuries. So on with it!

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

1. Our seminar readings are comprised entirely of primary sources. This might be misleading in two ways. First, it might lead one to suppose that what's being offered is an introductory course. Not so. I shall assume that all participants have done prior sustained and serious thinking about the issues of moral and political philosophy. And further, I shall assume that many if not all of these readings are at least somewhat familiar territory to you. If these assumptions are accurate then we shall be able to dive into the depths of these texts rather than content ourselves with surface whorls and eddies. That's very much my aspiration; I should like to see us *engage* these philosophers rather than undertake some arm's-length rite of initial acquaintance. Second, although secondary source material isn't officially part of the syllabus, that is not meant to communicate a message that I regard it as unimportant. (Though you won't be mistaken if you infer that I take it to be, quite literally, secondary.) Rather - here's yet another assumption being brought to the seminar - I take it for granted that advanced undergraduates and, especially, graduate students will take it upon themselves to make use of the relevant surrounding literature in a manner tailored to their own personal requirements. That goes not only for the seminar paper (see below) but also with regard to preparing for regularly scheduled meetings during the semester.
2. PHIL 5510 is a seminar and will be conducted accordingly. Because for some of you this may be your first seminar experience, let me be explicit about what that means. First, students are expected to invest their very best effort in the texts, to read – yes, and *reread* – with care and energy sufficient to secure a working appreciation of where these five philosophers are heading and how they attempt to get there. Second, we shall approach the seminar as a genuinely *cooperative activity*. I expect each seminar member (including auditors: see III.7) to help advance discussion around the table. That involves being prepared to offer interpretations, objections, and questions. Just as importantly, it involves *listening* to what others have to say and not attempting to monopolize the discussion or steer it exclusively in one's own favored direction. Third, regular attendance is required. Even – or especially – if you don't need the insights of the other participants, they need yours. I realize that absence is sometimes unavoidable, but your presence (and that means both physical *and* mental presence) is as integral a component of the course as are doing the readings and writing assigned papers. If you *must* miss a class, please so inform me in advance. I urge those who are not fully prepared to meet these three conditions to register for a different course.
3. My general procedure will be to throw open for discussion what I take to be some of the salient philosophical issues raised by the day's readings and to give you opportunity to put on the table others that you find provocative, puzzling, etc. Although from time to time I may offer canned mini-lectures, I take the seminar format of the course seriously (see preceding). You are expected to bring to the table a reflective conception of what is going on and to be willing to present these ideas to the rest of us. To put it another way,

doing philosophy is necessarily an active process, and I regard it as central to my job to ensure that all seminar participants occupy a significant role in that endeavor.

4. Keeping with the preceding, for each session one or two students will supply seminar discussion papers. That involves writing an essay in the 4-7 page range – no disquisitions here, please! – that focuses on some philosophically significant aspect of the reading under consideration for that meeting. The choice of both content and form is up to you, with the proviso that it be truly *philosophical*. That is, either by way of providing clarification or by increasing our mutual perplexity, you will help spotlight that which is of crucial significance in the arguments. In saying that the form of the paper is up to you, I mean that it need not be a shorter version of the sort of essay that philosophy journals publish. It can be mostly argumentative, mostly interpretive, mostly an exercise in mining conundrums, or some combination of these. However you choose to proceed, keep in mind the overriding aim of helping us steer our way profitably through these philosophers. The one thing I do *not* want from you is a *Reader's Digest*-type summary of the text. Because we've all read it carefully (see III.2), that would do us no good at all. Rather, your goal is aiding us to understand it better.

Seminar discussion papers need not be finished, polished specimens, but I do expect them to display literate philosophical prose. Let me tell you now so that you have due warning: I become exceedingly irked when presented with papers that obviously have been hastily thrown together. That is out of place in any UVA course, especially one conducted at this level. It is a matter of simple respect for others not to burden them with items that you yourself don't consider worthy of your own time and full energy.

Discussion papers are to be made available sufficiently far in advance of the meeting to allow all of us to read and think about them prior to the class. What does that mean? So as to avoid confusion, let us stipulate that papers are to be transmitted no later than Sunday 11:59 p.m., although earlier is better. The best way to distribute papers is as an email attachment sent to all seminar members or upload to Collab or both. Please note: We will *not* discuss the papers per se during seminar sessions but rather the arguments, objections, questions, etc. they raise. Sometimes we will focus quite directly on a particular piece but on other occasions the paper will be allowed mostly to hover in the background. That should not be taken as an implied appraisal of the paper's quality (I shall give my estimation of quality in written comments provided to the author) but rather as a function of how it happens to fit into the natural progression of the seminar discussion. It may turn out that a contribution for one class will reemerge as a prime object for discussion in some later session.

These papers serve essentially two purposes. One, as noted above and as their name implies, is to spur discussion. The other is a function of your status as apprentice-philosophers. I don't believe that it's possible to develop as a philosopher without continuously *doing* philosophy. That involves both regular discussion and writing.

Producing a paper every few weeks and receiving feedback on it from course participants contributes to that process.

5. The other writing requirement is to produce a term paper. I do not need an extended essay of journal article dimensions, although if you think you have some especially cogent reason to write such a piece I'm prepared to listen. (For those who are current or prospective philosophy PhD students it's a very good idea to adopt a policy of writing at least two or three articles intended for conference presentation and/or eventual publication prior to graduation.) What I have in mind is something on the order of 10-20 pages in which you bend your powers of philosophical analysis to some particular issue that has emerged from the course. This will be the one occasion on which you will be strongly encouraged to peruse and mine the relevant secondary literature. Writing the term paper isn't a one-shot deal. Rather, the process will involve various stages, including formulating a paper proposal and producing a working bibliography: further details to be provided anon. (Yes, I go to shameless lengths to use the word 'anon'.)
6. Your PHIL 5510 grade will be based on seminar performance (including but not restricted to discussion papers you write) and your term paper.
7. Auditors are welcome but second-class citizens are not. Anyone sitting in will be expected to participate on all fours with those officially enrolled – including regular preparation of discussion papers. Auditors are not, however, required to write a term paper. And in keeping with the no second-class citizens policy, there will be no differences in treatment of undergrad and grad students. I do recognize, though, that seminar participants differ in their depth of political philosophy background. Those who are fairly far along in their philosophical study will be encouraged to write more ambitious or sophisticated papers than those who are relatively junior.

IV. INITIAL READINGS

Consider this more a prediction than declaration. As we proceed I'll get a better handle on what's going to be a good working pace for us and will adjust accordingly.

WEEK 1

Sept. 1 Locke, *Second Treatise* Paragraphs 1-51

WEEK 2

Sept. 8 “ Paragraphs 52-158

WEEK 3

Sept. 15 “ Paragraphs 159-243

WEEK 4 Sept. 22	Kant, <i>Political Writings</i>	<i>Theory of Right</i> , pp. 132-175
WEEK 5 Sept. 29	“	"Universal History," pp.41-53
	“	"What is Enlightenment?", pp. 54-60
	“	“Beginnings of Human History, 221-234
	“	”Contest of the Faculties,” pp. 177-190
WEEK 6 Oct. 6	“	“Theory and Practice,” pps. 61-92
	“	”Perpetual Peace,” pp. 93-130

OCT. 13, READING DAY; NO CLASS
Use this time to explore in your own life the Spirit of Liberty!

WEEK 7 Oct. 20	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i>	Chapters 1-2
WEEK 8 Oct 27	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i>	Chapters 3-5
WEEK 9 Nov. 3	Plato, <i>Republic</i>	Book I
WEEK 10 Nov. 10	“	Books II-III
WEEK 11 Nov. 17	“	Books IV-VII
WEEK 12 Nov. 24	“	Books VIII-X
WEEK 13 Dec. 1	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>	Books I-II
WEEK 14 TBA	“	Books III-IV