



SYLLABUS SUMMARY

American Political Philosophy

POL/PHI 330 Section 01

Class

Semester Fall 2023
Course Length 16 weeks
Credit Hours 3
Course Location Harold Miller Center 317
Course Schedule Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-3:15pm

Instructor

Instructor Kevin Walker, Ph.D.
Office Hours Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 11-12;
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30-5
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Course Description

No other nation can be like America, Margaret Thatcher once observed, because all other nations “are the product of history and not of philosophy” (Speech at the Hoover Institution, 1991). The American Founding, in other words, was a philosophic creation: the Founders may have borrowed from history, but they established a regime rooted in “the laws of nature and nature’s God,” which they believed revealed self-evident truths of human equality, and the fundamental truths of human nature. The American Founding was an *idea* far more than a tradition – and though we progress and change and move forward into history, that idea never quite lets us go. This course is a study in the themes and cycles of this philosophic regime between the time of the Founding and the dawn of our own era since the 1960s. We will look at the American Founders who left us the basics of liberty and self-government, as well as the constitutional framework in which all subsequent politics occurs; we will study the development of that tension in the Antebellum and Civil War eras, and the response from Abraham Lincoln in his attempt to recover the principles of the Founding in a time of national crisis; we will consider the subsequent Gilded Age and Progressive Era with the rise of social Darwinism and the tensions between administrative planning and free-market capitalism; we will examine concepts of American identity – the rise of “Americanism,” the possibilities envisioned in social engineering, the nature of racial tension, and the women’s movement; lastly, we will consider the origins of radicalism of our own time, and the conservative response. Throughout, we will study important ideas shared by all Americans – exceptionalism, equality, liberty, democracy, open space, and our place in human history.

Texts

The following texts are *required* (in order of reading):

Readings in American Political Thought.

Lincoln, Abraham. *Great Speeches*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991.

Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*. New York: Dover Publications, 1996 [1888].

Sumner, William Graham. *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*. Caldwell: Caxton Press, 2003 [1883].

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Minola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994 [1901].

Kirk, Russell. *A Concise Guide to Conservatism*. Regnery Gateway, 2019 [1957].

Expectations

- **Participation and Attendance (10%).** Come to class every day and be prepared to discuss the assigned reading. Contact the professor as soon as possible for excused absences. Each unexcused or unexplained absence will result in the loss of a percentage point.
- **Reading Questions (20%).** Following the Socratic method, respond in class to the weekly reading questions focused on the texts. They will be distributed before each week.
- **Debates (20%).** Present one side or the other of a key debate covered in class. There will be a sign-up sheet.
- **Little Essay: A Major Term (10% -- 3%, 3%, 4%).** A one-page essay that meditates in your own words on a single term related to class – “What is...” It will be due in three drafts.
- **Big Essay (20% -- 5%, 5%, and 10%).** A 5–6-page research essay based on a topic of your choice related to class (*not* the same as the Little Essay). There will be a prompt.
- **Final Exam (20%).** A comprehensive exam on the material covered this semester.

All late assignments will receive no higher than a B+ unless other arrangements are made by contacting the professor with a specific explanation.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to read the [University of Mary's Academic Honor Code and Honor System](#) and abide by all the standards of conduct and requirements contained therein. When a student is in doubt about whether or not an action might constitute an Academic Honor Code violation, s/he should request clarification from the instructor *before* the action in question is undertaken. The Academic Honor Code is available for review on my.umary.edu under the General University Policies link. To clarify: *Cheating* is copying one's own notes (e.g., a cheat-sheet) or someone else's exam. *Plagiarism* is copying text you did not write without proper citation as if it was your own, whether it is from online or from another essay.

Artificial Intelligence

The whole purpose of AI software like ChatGPT is to generate fake text. There is therefore absolutely no reason for using AI software for this course. Use of these tools is strictly prohibited, and all assignments will be carefully screened by TurnItIn.com and ZeroGPT.com. Students will be notified about all incidents and offered a chance to explain, but their submission will be reported to the Vice President of Student Affairs.

Technology

For all its uses, certain attitudes toward technology threaten to overwhelm everything distinctly human in us and replace our best qualities with machine functions. This class is focused on preserving humanity. Everything you need to know will be in the assigned texts, the classroom discussions, and your own reasoning and personal insights, meaning there is no need for laptops in class unless you have an accommodation.

Reasonable Accommodations

The University of Mary, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and in the spirit of our mission, offers support for disabled students who provide required documentation. Students with disabilities who need accommodations should apply to the [Office of Student Accessibility Services](#). For further information, contact Dr. Lynn Dodge, coordinator of Student Accessibility Services, in the Student Success Center (lower level of Welder Library) at (701) 355-8264 or ljdodge@umary.edu.

Excused Absence Policy

The University has a policy on excused absences related to sponsored/sanctioned activities and events. The policy is available for review online. Students participating in such activities and events are expected to review this policy and comply with it. As long as appropriate prior notification is given according to this policy, students and faculty reach a mutual agreement concerning make-up work, and students complete the work in question, faculty shall not penalize a student for missing a class or exam when they were granted an excused absence from the university. Any questions concerning the policy may be referred to the course instructor who may refer the question to the athletic director, student activities director, or academic affairs for response.

Channel for Communication Relating to this Course

Aside from the instructor, students may report or appeal decisions to: Dr. Mark Springer, Department Chair (mmspringer@umary.edu); Dr. David Tamisiea, Dean of Arts and Sciences (datamisiea@umary.edu).

Benedictine Values

Each of the Benedictine values – hospitality, service, community, moderation, respect for persons, and prayer – are emphasized at different points throughout the course in discussing the pursuit of the common good. Still, a political philosophy course is focused on two:

- **Community.** All human communities are political in some way or another. As Aristotle taught, we are “political animals,” meaning that whenever any group of people tries to live together, they will get political. Like all aspects of our human nature – our bodies, our minds, our relationships, our fine art, etc. – politics is meant to be a glorious reflection of the image of God in us; like all of those things, it too is corrupted by sin. Our response should be to discern its original glory and become agents of redeeming our political life. This class will offer the tools to help us do that, whether as public officials or as private citizens.
- **Respect for Persons.** Any just political order depends entirely on the acceptance of the dignity of the human person. It is the standard we appeal to every time we get angry: complaints about injustice are themselves revelations of justice that exists by nature. It is Jesus Christ's maxim to “do under others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12); the Declaration of Independence's claim that it is “self-evident that all men are created equal”; Abraham Lincoln's statement that “as I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master” (Fragment from c. 1858); or Martin Luther King's observation that “[a]ny law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust” (Letter from a Birmingham Jail, 1963).

Class Schedule

Read each text listed under that particular day.

I. The American Founding

Week 1 – A Free Man

September 5

Introduction

September 7

Readings – George Washington

Week 2 – Modern versus Classical Republicanism

September 12

Readings – Alexander Hamilton

September 14

Readings – John Adams

Week 3 – Democracy and Constitutionalism

September 19

Readings – Thomas Jefferson

September 21

Readings – James Madison

II. Jacksonian Democracy

Week 4 – Sources of Justices

September 26

Readings – Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (1849); Abraham Lincoln, *Great Speeches* – Lyceum Address (1838)

September 28

Readings – John Calhoun, *Slavery as a Positive Good* (1837); Speech on the Oregon Bill (1848); William Lloyd Garrison, *No Compromise with the Evils of Slavery* (1854); Lincoln-Douglas Debates (1858)

Week 5 – “A New Birth of Freedom”

October 3

Great Speeches – Cooper Union Speech (1860); First Inaugural Address (1861); Message to Congress in Special Session (1861)

October 5

Great Speeches – Gettysburg Address (1863); Letter to Mrs. Bixby (1863); Second Inaugural Address (1865); Last Public Speech (1865)

III. American Identity

Week 6 – Race

October 10

Readings – Booker T. Washington, Atlanta Compromise Speech; W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901)

October 12

W.E.B. DuBois – *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901)

Week 7 – Race (continued)

October 17

W.E.B. DuBois – *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901)

October 19

W.E.B. DuBois – *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901)

Week 8 – Women

October 24

Readings – Lucretia Mott, *Discourse on Woman* (1849)

October 26

Readings – Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Solitude of the Self*

IV. Progressives

Week 9 – Social Democracy

October 31

Edward Bellamy – *Looking Backward*

November 2

Edward Bellamy – *Looking Backward*

Week 10 – Democracy and Economics

November 7

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

November 9

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

Week 11 – The Strenuous Life

November 14

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

November 16

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*; Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life* (1899)

Week 12 – Progress

November 21

Woodrow Wilson, *What is Progress?* (1912); Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (1922)

November 23

Thanksgiving – No Class

V. Cultural Dissent: Radicals and Conservatives

Week 13 – Radicals!

November 28

Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (1947); The Port Huron Statement (1963); Mario Savio, *The End of History Speech* (1964); Jerry Ruben, *A Yippie Manifesto* (1968)

November 30

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963); Stokely Carmichael, *Black Power* (1966)

Week 14 – Conservatives

December 5

Russell Kirk, *Concise Guide to Conservatism*

December 7

Russell Kirk, *Concise Guide to Conservatism*

Week 15 – The American Right: Does Conservatism need to Progress?

December 12

Russell Kirk, *Concise Guide to Conservatism*; Barry Goldwater, *Acceptance Speech at the Republican National Convention* (1964); Phyllis Schlafly, *What's Wrong with Equal Rights?*; Michael Anton, *A Flight 93 Election* (2016)

December 14

Discussion and Review