



American Political Thought

Professor Nicholas Tampio

Hamilton College, Fall 2007, GOV 336

ntampio@hamilton.edu

Class hours: TR 10:30-11:45, KJ 222

Office hours: TR 4-5, KJ 135

Course Overview

Contemporary debates in American politics often revolve around a few basic questions: What are the greatest problems facing America? What does it mean to be an American? What are the principles of American politics? Americans often answer these questions by drawing upon seminal texts in American political thought. The aim of this course is to study several of these texts so that we may participate more thoughtfully and effectively in contemporary politics.

We begin with *The Declaration of Independence* (1776), Thomas Jefferson's statement of America's founding ideals. Then, we read *The Federalist*, the 1787-88 essays penned by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay to outline the principles of the United States Constitution. Subsequently, we consider Alexis de Tocqueville's epochal account of American individualism and civil society in *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840). Afterwards, we look at W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a book that portrays the "double consciousness" of virtually all Americans. Next, we examine *Anarchism* (1917), a classic of American radicalism written by the anarchist-feminist Emma Goldman. Then, we study Leo Strauss's *Natural Right and History* (1950), a guiding text for conservatives such as George Will and Paul Wolfowitz. Subsequently, we turn to *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls's great work of Anglo-American liberal theory. We conclude with William E. Connolly's *Pluralism* (2005), a book by one of the New Left's greatest theorists.

Throughout the course, we test each author's ideas by how well they help us grasp contemporary issues in American politics, including presidential elections, Social Security reform, property rights, immigration policy, the war in Iraq, the role of religion in politics, and sports and entertainment. Students are encouraged to follow current events in American politics by reading the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, *Economist*, and other journals and newspapers.

Texts

Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, James Madison, *The Federalist* (Liberty Fund)
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (University of Chicago Press)
W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Norton Critical Editions)
Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (Dover Publications)
Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press)
John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press)
William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Duke University Press)

Course Requirements

Federalist Essay: The *Federalist Papers* provide the philosophical argumentation for the principles codified in the United States Constitution. Write a 5-7 page essay explaining either the argument of *Federalist* #10 or James Madison's and Alexander Hamilton's respective contributions to the *Federalist Papers*. Due **September 11**.

Presentation Paper: The last class on each theorist is dedicated to a discussion of what the philosopher would say about a current political debate or controversy. Early in the semester I will assign students to groups. On the day your group leads discussion, each student will turn in to me, and present to the class, a 10 page research project on how the philosopher helps us grasp questions of global justice.

Tips for presentation paper:

- Find a concrete topic, e.g., the 2008 presidential elections, a bill in Congress, a scandal, the war in Iraq, the National Football League, a movie or book etc.
- Read recent articles on the topic in *The Economist*, *The Financial Times*, *The Nation*, *The National Review*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Time*, or other reputable periodicals.
- Research academic articles in *The American Political Science Review*, *The Journal of Politics*, *Political Theory*, or other journals. Read relevant academic books. Include a bibliography.
- Insert subheadings.
- Schedule an appointment at the Writing Center.

Tips for presentation:

- Speak from an outline.
- Practice. Contact James Helmer (jhelmer@hamilton.edu) to schedule an appointment at the Oral Communication Lab.
- Look professional.

Final Paper Proposal: By **October 30**, turn in a 2-3 paper describing the question of your final paper, why it is important, and how you plan to answer it. This serves as a draft of the introduction to your final paper. You may change your topic after this date.

Bibliography: By **November 13**, submit a 2-3 page bibliography for your final paper.

Final Paper: The culmination of the course is a 20-25 page essay due in my mailbox, noon, **December 11** comparing at least 2 authors on the syllabus on a topic in American politics. Possibilities include:

- “The Role of Religion in American Politics”
- “Tocqueville and Du Bois on the African-American Identity”
- “America’s Immigration Policy”
- “Patriotism and Globalization”
- “Goldman and Strauss on American Identity”
- “What Makes America Distinct?”

Class Participation: Students are expected to come to class with the text, notes, and questions on the material. Students are also expected to attend the major political theory lectures at Hamilton this fall, including:

- September 7 – Leslie Paul Thiele, ‘Social Justice’ 9:30 am Science Auditorium
- October 18 – Langdon Winner, “Information Technology and the Dream of Democratic Renewal.”, 7:30 pm Science Auditorium
- TBD – Harvey Mansfield

Final Grade Distribution:

10% - Federalist Essay
20% - Presentation Paper
10% - Presentation
10% - Research Paper Proposal
10% - Research Paper Bibliography
30% - Research Paper
10% - Class Participation

Classes

1. August 28 – The Questions of American Political Thought

“Declaration of Independence” in *The Federalist*

2. August 30 – Lynn Mayo, the social science research librarian, will discuss research methods.

3. September 4 – Hamilton’s Contribution to *The Federalist*

The Federalist, 1, 9, 15, 23, 35, 84

4. September 6 – Madison’s Contribution to *The Federalist*

The Federalist, 10, 39, 51, 54, 55

5. September 11 – The Problems of *Democracy in America*

Democracy in America: Vol. I: Author's Introduction, Part I, Chs. 2, 3; Part II, Chs. 1, 7, 8

* Federalist essay due.

6. September 13 – Tocqueville on Democratic Republicanism

Democracy in America: Vol. I, Part II, Ch. 9

7. September 18 – Tocqueville on The Three Races

Democracy in America: Vol. I, Part II, Ch. 10

8. September 20 – Tocqueville on American Individualism

Democracy in America: Vol. II, Part II (entire)

9. September 25 - Tocqueville Presentations

10. September 27 – The Problems of *The Souls of Black Folk*

The Souls of Black Folk, The Forethought-Chapter III

11. October 2 – Du Bois on African-American Leadership

The Souls of Black Folk, Chapters IV-VI

12. October 4 – Du Bois Presentations

13. October 9 – The Problems of *Anarchism*

Anarchism and Other Essays, “Anarchism”

14. October 11 – Goldman on Anarchism

Anarchism and Other Essays, “Minorities versus Majorities,” “Patriotism,” “Woman Suffrage,” “Marriage and Love”

15. October 18 – Goldman Presentations

16. October 23 – The Problems of *Natural Right and History*

Natural Right and History, Introduction – Chapter II

* October 25 – No class.

17. October 30 – Strauss on Classical Political Philosophy

Natural Right and History, Chapters III, IV

18. November 1 – Strauss on Modern Political Philosophy

Natural Right and History, Chapter V

19. November 6 – Strauss Presentations

20. November 8 – The Problems of *A Theory of Justice*

A Theory of Justice, Chapter I, §§1-4; Chapter IV §40

21. November 13 – Rawls on Justice as Fairness

A Theory of Justice, Chapter II, §§11-17

22. November 15 – Rawls on Reflective Equilibrium

A Theory of Justice, Chapter III

23. November 20 – Rawls Presentations

24. November 27 – The Problems of *Pluralism*

Pluralism, Prelude, Chapter 1

25. November 29 – Connolly on Americanism

Pluralism, Chapters 2, 3

26. December 4 - Connolly on Sovereignty

Pluralism, Chapter 5

27. December 7 – Connolly Presentations

* Final paper due noon, December 11, in my mailbox.

Appendix – Classics of American Political Thought

Here are several other classics of American political thought you may consider reading on your own or in other courses.

Bartolome de Las Casas, *Diary of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America* (1492-1493)
 Thomas Jefferson, *Political Writings*
 Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776)
 Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography* (1818)
 John Adams, *The Revolutionary Writings of John Adams* (1776-1789)
 Herbert J. Storing, ed., *The Anti-Federalist* (1787-8)
 Alexander Hamilton, *Report on Manufacturers* (1791)
 Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia* (1785)
 John Marshall, *Marbury v. Madison* (1803), *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819)
 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays* (1841, 1844)
 Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (1848), *Walden* (1854)
 Abraham Lincoln, *Selected Speeches and Writings* (1832-65)
 The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments (1865-70)
 William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1884)
 Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911)
 Theodore Roosevelt, *Autobiography* (1913)
 William James, *Pragmatism* (1907)
 Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (1909)
 Woodrow Wilson, "The Meaning of Democracy" (1912)
 John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927)
 Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957)
 Students for a Democratic Society, "The Port Huron Statement" (1962)
 Martin Luther King, "Letter from the Birmingham City Jail" (1963)
 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963)
 Betty Friedan, *Our Revolution is Unique* (1968)
 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987)
 Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (1996)
 James W. Caesar, *Reconstructing America* (1997)
 Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (1997)
 Bill Clinton, *My Life* (2002)
 George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy of the United States" (2002)
 James Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (2002)