

## HERTOG 2021 POLITICAL STUDIES PROGRAM

### AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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In this course, fellows will engage key texts that have helped shape the political idea – and political ideals – of America. Led by Professor Darren Staloff, fellows will reflect on the ideas of modern liberal democracy, exploring how the American system has sought to balance the deepest themes of ancient political thought against the imperatives of individual freedom, security, and economic progress that are so central to modern liberal thought. They will examine the relation of nature, reason, rights, and citizenship in forming the core of the American political ethos and search for the philosophical roots of the differences between conservatism and liberalism in the contemporary world.

#### Course Materials:

- Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, eds. Clinton Rossiter and Charles Kesler (Signet Classics, 2003)
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop
- Course Reader

#### Resources:

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites.

Relevant pages include [The Federalist](#), [John Locke](#), [Martin Diamond](#), [Harry Jaffa](#), and [Herbert Storing](#).

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**Monday, July 26, 2021**

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**9:30 AM – 10:30 AM ET**

**Session I: Non-Liberal Republics**

#### Readings:

- Plutarch, “Life of Lycurgus” (excerpts)

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part I, Ch. II., pp. 27–44
- Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (excerpts) and *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (excerpts)
- *Federalist* Nos. 1, 14, and 38 (excerpts)

## Discussion Questions:

1. Would you like to live in Lycurgus's Sparta? In the colonial New England Puritan regime described by Tocqueville?
2. How do these systems differ from America's form of liberal democracy?

## 10:30 AM – 12:30 p.m.      Theoretical Underpinnings of the American Republic

- David Hume, "Of the Original Compact," (excerpts, pp. 1–2, 7–8, 36–38, 46)
- John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (excerpts)
- United States Declaration of Independence
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825 (excerpt)
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to John Cartwright, June 5, 1824 (excerpt)
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Roger Weightman, June 24, 1826 (excerpt)

## Discussion Questions:

1. What is the basis of the colonists' objections to the British government and rule prior to the Revolutionary War?
2. What do these authors mean when they refer to a state of nature and natural rights?
3. The ultimate ground or foundation to which the Declaration appeals is stated to be the Laws of Nature and Nature's God; what were the possible alternative foundations, as mentioned in the letter to John Cartwright? What are the implications of making "nature" the main foundation?
4. What does the Declaration mean by a natural right to liberty? By the truth that "all men are created equal"?

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**Tuesday, July 27, 2021**

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**9:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET**

**Session II: The Creation of the Constitution**

**Readings:**

- *Federalist* Nos. 10 and 51
- Brutus, “Federal v. Consolidated Government,” (excerpt)
- Centinel, No. 1, (excerpt)
- *Federalist* No. 23
- Herbert Storing, Ch. 3, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*,
- *Federalist* No. 63
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to James Madison, September 6, 1789 (excerpt)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What type of citizen is necessary in the new republic? In what measure does this citizen need to possess virtue?
2. Why is the “extended republic” of the Constitution an innovation?
3. What were some of the main objections to the Constitution?
4. What were the Federalists’ chief arguments against the Articles of Confederation?
5. Why study the Anti-Federalists? Have the fears of the Anti-Federalists been borne out?
6. What are the purposes of the separation of powers? What particular qualities were sought from the Senate and from the presidency?
7. Is it a wise idea to “sunset” the Constitution every generation? What reasons does Jefferson give in favor of re-doing the Constitution every generation, and why does Madison oppose the plan? Whose position do you favor?

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**Wednesday, July 28, 2021**

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**9:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET**

**Session III: *Democracy in America***

**Readings:**

- Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Introduction, pp. 3–8 (stop at the paragraph with “it can bestow”); pp. 12–15, beginning with the final paragraph on p. 12 (“Therefore, it is not only to satisfy...”)
  - The character of aristocracy, pp. 535–39, 234–35 (begin with “What do you ask of society”)
  - The varieties of regimes under the modern condition of “democracy”
    - Mild despotism, pp. 661–65, 671 (begin with “I shall finish”), 676
    - Omnipotence (or tyranny) of the majority, pp. 235–50
    - Single-person (or party) despotism, pp. 52–53
    - Liberal democracy (no further reading)
  - Four Maladies or dangerous tendencies of democracy and some antidotes
    - Egalitarianism (love of equality), pp. 479–82
    - “Individualism” (better defined as “privatism” or apathy), pp. 482–84, 486 (begin near bottom with “The Americans have combated individualism”), 492, 496–500
    - Materialism, pp. 506–8, 517–24
    - Fatalism, pp. 469–72, 425–26
  - The effects of democracy on sentiments and manners, pp. 399–400, 500–503, 506–8, 510–14, 517–24
  - The effects of democracy on the family and women, pp. 563–67 and 573–76
  - The effects of democracy on thought (“intellectual movement”), pp. 403–10, 417–24, 425–28, 450–52

## Discussion Questions:

1. How does Tocqueville use the word “democracy”? Be careful; it has a slightly different meaning than our normal use today.
2. What are the purposes of “political science” (p. 7)? What work is it supposed to do in the modern era?
3. What does Tocqueville mean by “aristocracy”? Is it just an inequality in wealth or income? How do aristocrats think and feel, and what do they value? Which “regime” – aristocracy or democracy – is preferable? Why?
4. What characterizes each type or kind of rule under the modern condition of democracy?

5. Define each malady and how it threatens liberty.
6. If these tendencies are as powerful as they sometimes seem, are the antidotes Tocqueville identifies strong enough to counteract them?
7. What is the doctrine of self-interest rightly understood? What are its strengths? Its limitations?
8. What does Tocqueville mean by greatness?
9. Tocqueville compares a radically individualist (or androgynous) conception of sexual equality with what he believes is a better understanding the Americans have. What are the elements of the American understanding of relations between the sexes? What does Tocqueville mean when he speaks of “the superiority of [America’s] women”? Has the ideal that he describes and endorses been refuted or decisively overturned by contemporary feminism or can one still make a case for the desirability or possibility of sexual difference as the foundation of family and community?
10. How far is it possible to explain or deduce thought and ideas from the social state of equality? What are the limitations of this approach, sometimes called “the sociology of knowledge”?
11. *Democracy in America* continually compares democracy and aristocracy. Is there anything we learn about aristocracy that is helpful in guiding life in a democratic age? In what way(s), if any, can aspects of aristocracy be “fit” into democracy?

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**Thursday, July 29, 2021**

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**9:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET**

**Session IV: Progressivism and/or Liberalism**

**Readings:**

- Franklin D. Roosevelt, *First Inaugural Address*, 1933
- John Dewey, “The Future of Liberalism,” *Philosophy of Education*, 1935

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the meaning of the idea that history progresses? Do you accept the proposition that things have gotten better? Does the record of the 20th century provide evidence in favor of or against the idea?
2. What, in terms of American politics, is progressivism? What is the progressive’s critique of the Founding? In what ways was the Founding, especially the Constitution, inadequate?

3. Compare and contrast progressivism with liberalism. How do both inform contemporary partisan debates?
4. How does Dewey understand the meaning of liberalism?

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**Friday, July 30, 2021**

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**9:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET**

**Session V: A Conservative Response**

**Readings:**

- F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Chs. 3–9, 11

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What does Hayek mean by “planning”? For Hayek, is all planning bad? Why is centralization dangerous even if the motives of the central planners are benign?
2. Why does centralization ultimately lead to loss of freedom and to totalitarianism?
3. How does central planning affect prices in a market economy? What information do prices convey?
4. Is government interference in the economy ever justified, according to Hayek? If so, in what circumstances?
5. What is the relationship of economic freedom to political freedom? To intellectual freedom?