

Reason and Politics

Political Studies 222

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Monday, Tuesday, Friday
7th period (2:40 - 3:20)

Course Description

The capacity for reason is often cited as the most significant advantage human beings have over other animals. The very possibility of political society – and democracy in particular – seems to be predicated on the rationality of human decision-making. But how reasonable, and how rational, are we really? What is the nature of the tie between reason and politics? Do the genocidal horrors of the 20th and 21st centuries belie the bond between reason and politics, or do they represent a case for building a tighter connection between the two? Might reason serve as a mask for racial, gender and cultural oppression? Are we thinking rationally when we step into the voting booth? Is there something to be said for the benefits, or even the beauty, of irrationality? In this seminar we will explore these questions and others – including what “reason” and “rationality” might mean – through close study of texts of political philosophy as well as court cases and scholarship in cognitive psychology and ethics. Readings by Aristotle, David Hume, Robert Nozick, Edward Stein, Hannah Arendt, John Rawls, Don Herzog, Bryan Caplan, Drew Westen and Al Gore, among others.

Structure

This is a course in the discipline of Political Science at BHSEC. It builds on some of the themes in First Year Seminar and highlights and deepens certain themes you will explore in Sophomore Seminar. It was not designed as a companion course for Sophomore Seminar, but students will find the material in these courses mutually enriching, with plenty of opportunity for cross-reflection and cross-fertilization.

The reading in this course is not light. It is pretty tough, and there is plenty of it. All students deciding to take the course should commit themselves to the reading and writing assignments and be prepared to participate actively.

Class sessions will be conducted seminar-style. We will explore the issues through frequent in-class writing, discussion and perhaps an in-class debate or two. Consistent active engagement of every student is essential to the success of the course.

Books

You may not make any marks in the five course texts provided by BHSEC. If you would like your own copies, the books are readily available. If you do choose to buy books, please buy *these editions* (note the publisher) so we'll all be on the same page.

- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Yale University Press, 2002)
- Robert Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton University Press, 1993)
- Don Herzog, *Cunning* (Princeton University Press, 2006)
- Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Penguin Classics, 2006)
- Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* (Princeton University Press, 2007)

Additional Readings

We will use a coursepack with additional readings to supplement these five books. These anthologies are yours to keep courtesy of Bard College (so mark them up to your hearts' content!), but safeguard your copy: you'll get only one. I will pass out additional photocopied readings from time to time.

Film

We will watch one film together: *Memento* (2000). This movie must be experienced in one sitting to be fully appreciated, so we will find a time after school for a screening on a cold, grey day in December (specific day TBD). If you can't make the date, you will need to rent the movie and watch it on your own before the next class meeting.

Requirements

Preparation for class: Everyone must come to each class ready to participate. Prior to each class meeting students must complete the reading assignment listed on the syllabus for that day and prepare a reading journal entry thereon (see below).

Reading Journal: You must dedicate a notebook to in-class and out-of-class writing on our texts. **You should make journal entries for every reading on the syllabus.** You are free to choose a format that works for you, but I would strongly suggest using a "quote and response" format for at least some of your entries. With this format, you copy down a short passage from the day's reading and then attempt to explain it, critically engage it, or ask questions of it. This can mean exploring an author's argument, developing a response, ranting, raving, querying, but in all cases *engaging*. When I examine and evaluate your response journal (which I will do, with short notice, several times during the term), I will look for evidence that you are reading carefully and thinking through questions raised by the readings. Your consistent interaction with the texts in your journal is crucial to effective and reflective participation in class discussions.

Presentation: Several times during the term, beginning Week 4, each student will facilitate discussion of our day's reading assignment. You will give a short (5-10 minute) summary of what you took to be the main arguments/features of the reading selection and pose questions for discussion. You should come prepared with enough juicy questions to keep discussion moving for

the full class period, though the professor will often have an agenda of his own to supplement yours. Look over the syllabus, think about which readings look most interesting to you and sign up for your slots during Week 3.

Exams: There will be no Midterm. A Final Exam will be administered in January.

Writing Assignments: In addition to less formal in-class and out-of-class writing, each student will write two short polished analytical essays of 3-4 pages each (800 words) and one final paper of 6-8 pages (1500 words). Topics for the two short papers will be provided by the professor; students will propose their own topics for the final essay, which will include a research component and a short presentation.

Grading

Attendance, Participation (*)	20%
Response Journal	20%
Two 800-word Essays (each 10%)	20%
One Final Paper (1500 words of writing + presentation)	20%
Final Exam	20%

(*) *Encompasses punctuality, attendance, presentations and overall contributions to class discussions and debates. Note that participation does not mean simply talking in class. It means being well prepared, contributing thoughtfully to discussions, listening carefully to others and engaging fellow students' concerns and questions. Latenesses and absences will adversely affect your participation grade.*

A very important note: Be sure to provide appropriate citations in all of your work! (1) Any phrases, sentences or paragraphs appearing in your essays that are directly taken from another source must appear within quotation marks AND be followed by a citation (footnote or parenthetical reference). (2) Any ideas that are taken from another source must be identified with a citation. (3) All listed citations must be to sources you have researched (i.e., seen with your own eyes). Never list sources in your bibliography that you have not found yourself. (4) All work submitted must be your own, and must not be work submitted for another class. Consequences for academic dishonesty include automatic failure and additional sanctions. When in doubt if you are citing correctly, ask.

Calendar and Reading Assignments

Part I: The Roles of Reason

Week 1 (9/8 - 9/12)	Introduction to the course
Tues. 9/9	Reason, Rationality, Politics and You
Fri. 9/12	John Judis, "Death Grip: How Political Psychology Explains Bush's Ghastly Success" (TBD)
Week 2 (9/15 - 9/19)	Two Accounts of Human Rationality
Mon. 9/15	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I (CP)
Tues. 9/16	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Preface + 1st section (pp. 3-21)
Fri. 9/19	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , 2 nd section
Week 3 (9/22 - 9/26)	The Humean Critique: Reason as Slave of the Passions

Mon. 9/22 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part III, Section iii (CP)
Tues. 9/23 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part II, Section i (CP)
Fri. 9/26 Discussion

Part II: Are Human Beings (Really) Rational?

Week 4 (9/29 - 10/3) Views from Cognitive Science & Philosophy

Mon. 9/29 Stein, *Without Good Reason*, ch. 1 (CP)
Fri. 10/3 Stein, *Without Good Reason*, ch. 3 (CP)

**** Rosh Hashana/Ramadan, Tues. 9/30 - Wed. 10/1 - No School ****

Week 5 (10/6 - 10/10) Symbolic Utility

Mon. 10/6 Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality*, intro & half of ch. 1 (pp. xi - xvi & 3-26)
Tues. 10/7 Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality*, rest of ch. 1 (pp. 26-40)
Fri. 10/10 Nozick discussion

**** Columbus Day, Mon. 10/13 - No School ****

Week 6 (10/14 - 10/17) Conclusions?

Tues. 10/14 Stein, *Without Good Reason*, ch. 8 (CP)
Fri. 10/17 Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality*, ch. 3 (pp. 100-106 *only*), ch. 5 (pp. 133-181)

Part III: Rationality, Voting and Democracy

Week 7 (10/20 - 10/24) Are Voters Rational?

Mon. 10/20 Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, introduction + ch. 1 (pp. 1-22)
Tues. 10/21 Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, read ch. 2 (pp. 23-49) and *skim* ch. 3 (esp. pp. 50-56)
Fri. 10/24 Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, ch. 4 (pp. 94-102 only), ch. 5 (pp. 114-141); Belluck, "States Face Decisions on Who is Mentally Fit to Vote" (CP)

Week 8 (10/27 - 10/31) The Emotional Component

Mon. 10/27 Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, introduction + ch. 1 (1-22, 23-44) (TBD)
Tues. 10/30 Westen, *The Political Brain*, introduction + chs. 1-2 (pp. ix-xv, 3-44) (TBD)
Fri. 11/2 Westen, *The Political Brain*, ch. 4 (pp. 69-88), ch. 6 (pp. 117-141) (TBD)

Week 9 (11/3 - 11/7) Assessing the 2008 Election - Signs of Rationality?

Mon. 11/3 Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, ch. 9 + conclusion (pp. 245-273) (TBD); Westen, *The Political Brain*, conclusion (pp. 417-420) (TBD)
Fri. 11/9 Readings TBA

**** Election Day, Tues. 11/4 - No School ****

Part IV: Rationality and the Law

Week 10 (11/10 - 11/14) Tort Law and the "Reasonable Man"
Mon. 11/10 "Tort Law: Capsule Summary of the 'Reasonable Man' Standard," *Vaughan v. Menlove* (1837), *United States v. Carroll Towing Co.* (1947) (CP)
Fri. 11/14 *People v. Goetz* (1986) (CP)

**** Veterans Day, Tues. 11/11 – No School ****

Week 11 (11/17 - 11/21) Constitutional Law & Theory
Mon. 11/17 *Capitol Square Review Board v. Pinette* (1995) (CP)
Tues. 11/18 *Loving v Virginia* (1966) (CP)
Fri. 11/21 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, "Powers of Citizens & Their Representation" (CP)

Week 12 (11/24 - 11/26) A Feminist Critique
Mon. 11/24 Nagl-Docekal, "The Feminist Critique of Reason Revisited" (CP)
Tues. 11/25 *Frontiero v. Richardson* (1972) (CP)
State of New Jersey v. Kelly (1984) (CP)

**** Thanksgiving Recess: Th. 11/27 - Sun. 11/30 ****

Part V: Does Rationality Have a Dark Side?

Week 13 (12/1 - 12/5) Evil
Mon. 12/1 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chs. 2-3 (pp. 21-55)
Tues. 12/2 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chs. 6, 8 (pp. 83-111, 135-151)
Fri. 12/5 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, ch. 15, epilogue (excerpt), postscript (pp. 234-252, 277-279, 280-298)

Week 14 (12/8 - 12/12) Cunning I
Mon. 12/8 Herzog, *Cunning* (pp. 1-37)
Tues. 12/9 Herzog, *Cunning* (pp. 38-67)
Fri. 12/12 Herzog, *Cunning* (pp. 71-102)

Week 15 (12/15 - 12/19) Cunning II
Mon. 12/15 Herzog, *Cunning* (pp. 103-143)
Tues. 12/16 Herzog, *Cunning* (pp. 143-192)
Fri. 12/19 *Discussion on Arendt, Herzog & "Memento": whither cunning?*

Week 16 (12/22 - 12/23) Final Paper Workshop
Mon. 12/22 Workshop I
Tues. 12/23 Workshop II

**** Winter Recess: Wed. 12/24 – Sun. 1/4 ****

Part VI: Student Presentations

Week 17 (1/5 - 1/9) Final Paper Presentations

Mon. 1/5
Tues. 1/6
Fri. 1/9

Week 18 (1/12 - 1/16) Final Paper Presentations

Mon. 1/12
Tues. 1/13
Fri. 1/16

**** MLK Day: Mon. 1/19 - No School ****

Week 19 (1/20) Final Paper Presentations

Tues. 1/20

Final exams: January 21 - 26

Regents exams: January 27 - 30