

POLS 408 DEMOCRATIC THEORY

BASICS OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY:

PARTICULARITY OF ETHICS AND UNIVERSALITY OF JUSTICE (KANTIAN NOTION OF MORALITY)

Diversity is a social fact. It is not only a fact, it is also a durable fact. Accordingly, potential for social conflict is integral to social existence. This course seeks to inquire into the reasons as to why rule of law, constitutionalism, guarantees for equal rights were invented in the first place. We will do so by revisiting the micro level as it were, by looking at distinct ethical traditions through reading selections of the great books penned by the representatives of some of the diverse ethical traditions. Are there values that are so basic that are universalizable across cultures? If so, could these common values be the basis upon which we can establish norms and rules to ensure a peaceful social coexistence? What shall we do with the incompatibility of values when conflicts arise?

This semester in this course we will read various examples from classical texts that display the particularity of various ethical viewpoints from various traditions and works of literature. That ethics is particular is given, while every person - whether they know it or not- subscribe to an ethical view. We will also read definitions of "justice" from the same authors. The intention is to shed light on the originally Kantian distinction between ethics and morality. This distinction relying on the factuality of the immense variation in the ethical viewpoints yet the possibility of forging an overlapping consensus on the notion of justice is indeed what informs the constitutional democracy conception of the contemporary democratic theory. As accepting "diversity as a durable fact" (Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 1993) is a precondition of democracy, this course will focus and reflect upon the integral relationship between constitutional democracy and pluralism.

Requirements:

Attendance. Reading the assignment before the class. Active participation in class discussions. (10%)

Presentation (35%)

Final Paper: 2 options:

1. Select a writing by an author and analyze its ethics (what is particular to it) and what is universalizable in it. Is there a quality in literature (or cinema or art) that transcends its own situatedness, thus particularity? Why? Why not? Reflections on the good life and peaceful co-existence. How does justice differ from other values? What does justice have to do with democracy?
OR
2. Do the same exercise above but instead of working on additional material, pick one of the books we covered during the course of the semester and respond to the same questions: analyze its ethics (what is particular to it) and what is universalizable in it. Is there a quality in literature (or cinema or art) that transcends its own situatedness, thus particularity? Why? Why not?

Reflections on the good life and peaceful co-existence. How does justice differ from other values? What does justice have to do with democracy?

15-20 pages long (12 font double spaced) essay on the particularity of ethics and the possibility of an overlapping consensus on justice as Kantian notion of morality.

Preliminary List of Readings

Week 1. Introduction

Week 2. Hirschman, Social Conflicts As Pillars of Democratic Market Society

Singer, Afterword to Companion to Ethics

Oxford definition of ethics and morality

Selections from David Hume "An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals"

Week 3. selections from Aristotle "The Nichomachaen Ethics"

Marcus Aurelius "Meditations" Epictetus "The Art of Living"

Week 4. selections from Augustine "Confessions"

Week. 5. selections from Yunus

Week 6. selections from Martin Buber I and Thou

Week 7. selections from Chogyam Trungpa Training the Mind

Week 8. selections from Immanuel Kant "Lectures on Ethics" and "On the Old Saw" That May be Right in Theory but It Won't Work in Practice"

Week 9. Dostoevsky "The Idiot"

Week 10. John Steinbeck "Grapes of Wrath"

Week 11. Habermas Law and Morality (Tanner Lecture), p. 1-30

Week 12. Habermas Law and Morality (Tanner Lecture), p. 30-63

Week 13. Habermas Equal Treatment of Cultures