

Legal Studies 39E: Democracy, Equality

Tuesdays, 12-2p

203 Wheeler Hall

Fall 2012

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Democracy and equality are two members of the “holy trinity” of contemporary politics, the third being liberty. The point of our seminar is to read some of the most interesting and important books and other writings that have defined these values in the Western tradition. The seminar will involve lots of close reading and participation by everyone, with several pieces of writing expected. The substantive goal of this seminar is to give you a good introduction to some of the most interesting and important works in the history of political thought, and to equip you to make sense of contemporary debates about equality and democracy – debates that have a particular urgency with the dramatic rise in levels of economic inequality, and thus with respect to our common citizenship. We will also, of course, pay attention to liberty, especially as it relates to democratic and egalitarian values. I also expect that this seminar will give you experience in careful classroom discussion of common texts, skill in interpreting complex materials, and practice in writing argumentative, conceptual papers.

Evaluation:

Your grade will be based on two factors: two analytical papers, each 6-8 pages in length, and your participation in the life of the classroom. The 5-7 page papers each count 30% and the participation counts 40%. Your participation evaluation, in turn, will be based on the following factors: your oral participation, three ungraded 1-2 page “reaction papers”; and each of you will take a turn “blogging” our discussion for the week.

The first paper is due in class (in paper and via email) on October 9th; the second paper is due November 19th. I am happy to discuss your papers in advance, and to review an outline, but I will not be able to read paper drafts.

The schedule for the reaction papers will be determined once we know who is in the class. The papers are due by 5pm of the Monday before class. They should be emailed to me with the subject line “[Your name] – reaction to [author]”. The purpose of these papers is simply to elicit a reaction from you to the texts for the week. I ask you to identify some idea in the reading that interests, puzzles, or excites you, and to say why you have that reaction.

Classroom rules:

You are expected to attend every class session, and to participate actively in class. Unexcused absences will affect your grade and more than three absences will result in your being dropped from the class. I also have a strict no-laptop/no electronics policy in the classroom, with the exception of the students responsible for that week’s blogging. **This includes texting.** If you have a documented need for a laptop in the class, I will make a further exception. This means that you will need to print out any online readings for the week.

Books:

Plato’s Republic

J.J. Rousseau, Basic Political Writings

J. S Mill, Considerations on Representative Government

[On Liberty, extract]

J. Rawls, Justice as Fairness: A Restatement

Other materials, including many background readings, will be available on the Bspace website or otherwise online. We may also have a reader, to make the readings more easily available, available for purchase.

Week 1 (August 28): **Introductory meeting**

Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, Preface and Chapter 1 (Bspace, email)

Week 2 (Sept. 4): **Plato, Republic, Bks 1-3**

Week 3 (Sept. 11):

Read the translator's introduction/summary of each book, and beyond that:

Bk II: 368c-376d

Bk III: 408c-417d

Bk IV: 419-423e, 427-442e

Bk V: 451d-453a, 473a-e

Bk VII: 514-519e

Bk VIII: 543-545b, 555b-568d

Week 4 (Sept. 18) **Aristotle, readings from Politics, Nicomachean Ethics**

(Bspace)

Week 5 (Sept. 25): **Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men**

Week 6 (Oct. 2): **Rousseau, Social Contract, Bks. I-II**

Week 7 (Oct. 9): **Social Contract, Bks. III-IV.**

First paper due.

Week 8 (Oct. 16): **Benjamin Constant, The Liberty of the Ancients compared with that of the Moderns**

(<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/conslibe.pdf> and Bspace)

Week 9 (Oct. 23): **Mill, On Liberty, Introduction, Ch. 2, Ch 4**

Week 10 (Oct. 30): **Mill, Considerations on Representative government**

Week 11 (Nov 6): **Mill, Considerations II**

Week 12 (Nov. 13): **Rawls, Justice as Fairness, Parts I & II,**

Week 13 (Nov. 19): **Rawls, JAF Parts III-IV.**

Second paper due.

Week 14 (Nov 26): **Tocqueville, Democracy in America (excerpts,**

http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/toc_indx.html and on

Bspace)