

COURSE OUTLINE

1. Course Number/Title: Govt200, Roots of American Order

Prerequisites: None

Credit: 3 hours

2. Course Description: Govt200, *Roots of American Order* uses Russell Kirk's book of the same name to introduce students to American political thought. Kirk's work interprets the origins of the American nation and its constitutional order through an examination of the intellectual sources that shaped the American Founding.

Kirk employs the term "American Founding" more broadly. Rather than fixing the the American Founding at the date of America's declaration of its independence from British rule, Kirk focuses on the origins of a whole complex of constitutions and laws, political bodies, traditions, mores, and habits that supported the emergence of the American people and nation. Thus in Kirk's assessment, the emergence of a new American nation and government did not reflect a radical break from the past, it was instead an attempt to defend an existing political culture that had deep historical roots. Kirk denies that our political institutions can be understood properly— or can even function properly—if American citizens lose their connection with the living roots of their political order.

3. Course Goals: After completing this course, students will recognize the historical imperative to reflect deeply about and make the case for the connections in the American experience between past and present and between moral and political order as the basis for civic virtue and public service. Specifically, students will develop familiarity with the arguments of the American Founding—the primary sources from which they were derived and the ways in which they were employed in debates about the shape The American Republic ought to take. They will leave the course with an ability to discuss the moral, institutional, and political significance of the arguments of the American Founding to contemporary American life.

4. Course Learning Outcomes: At the conclusion of the course, students will be able to

1. Describe the multiple ways in which religion influences political life; specifically, how specific passages from the Old Testament shaped the mind of early Americans;

2. Compare and contrast the various classical regimes similarities and differences; apply Cicero's concept of "natural law" to the intellectual construct of key Americans during the Founding period.
3. Compare and contrast the concept of 'virtue' in its classical, Christian, and modern meanings and apply it to American thinking about its peculiar destiny from its colonial to its Founding periods.
4. Distinguish between and justify both the rationalist and traditionalist interpretations of the American Founding, including the Declaration of Independence, and determine which provides for and encourages civic virtue.
5. Compare and contrast classical; modern, or Machiavellian; and Madisonian republicanism.
6. List and define the key principles of the U.S. Constitution.
7. Make Anti-Federalists and Federalists arguments against and for the proposed Constitution of the United States.
8. Characterize the historical and political issues relating to questions about the nature of the union, including arguments for nullification.
9. Describe the constitutional mechanisms and how they work to maintain the checks and balances within the system and to maintain a balance between factions among the population.

5. Course Concepts

1. Influence of Judeo-Christian history and values on the American colonialists;
2. Influence of classical (ancient Greek and Rome) philosophy, history and values on American thinking regarding the best regime, the most just relationship between the ruled and the rulers (ruling and being ruled);
3. Recognizing the differences between the ancient Greeks and Romans that bear on the gap between political philosophy and a practice of civic virtue; theory versus practice; the "lived" just life;
4. Ancient concepts of virtue contrasted to the emergence of "divine" virtue as represented by Christianity within the Roman Empire; the political conundrum for both the pagans and the Christians of the city of Man and the city of God (lived on earth);
5. Divine virtue co-opted by Machiavelli, on the one hand, and Protestants, on the other hand. Both claiming a new "order" that

repositions the role of the effective, virtuous, or elected individual as opposed to the Christian kingdom;

6. American religious toleration—its history, experience, and endurance as a political value: From Roger Williams, John Leland, to Justice Kent in *The People v. Ruggles*;
7. The affect of the European Enlightenment on America: from Montesquieu to Edmund Burke;
8. American concepts of “natural law” and how they are formulated in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers;

6. Required Texts

Kirk, Russell. *The Roots of American Order*. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003. \$14.40 Purchase online at

<http://www.isi.org/books/bookdetail.aspx?id=f4ebf235-4432-4615-8394-ddd016eb7025>

ISBN: 1-88292-699-4.

Steinberger, Peter J., ed. *Readings in Classical Political Thought*.

Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000. ISBN: 0-87220-512-6. \$28.60

7. Recommended Readings [Located in the Syllabus for Govt200]

8. Additional Resources

Lectures on Russell Kirk’s *The Roots of American Order* are located in “Resources.” Lectures are provided by Gleaves Whitney, a student of Russell Kirk’s work. Mr. Whitney is the director of the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies at Grand Valley State University, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. You may visit the Hauenstein Center to learn more about Mr. Whitney and his relationship with Russell Kirk at:

<http://www.gvsu.edu/hauenstein/index.cfm?id=3758D832-E86B-D462-8F23F01D797AD1EB>

A second set of lectures on the English background by Dr. Richard Bishirjian has been installed in Lectures/Texts and titled “Audio Lectures 2.”

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Number: Govt200

Title: Roots of American Order

Faculty: Peter Haworth, Ph.D. and Richard Bishirjian, Ph.D.

Preliminaries:

Class Participation and Performance Requirements:

Students are ultimately responsible for participating in the course through the following academic activities: uploading assignments, posting to discussion topics, responding to instructor inquiries, submitting written papers and taking quizzes and exams. Students are expected to be involved in ongoing instructional activities based on the recommended schedule for course completion as detailed in the syllabus. In order to actively participate in a course, students must make contact with their faculty mentor on a regular basis through one of the following methods:

- Uploading weekly written discussion topic responses into the Discussion section of the course delivery system for grading by your Instructor.
- Participation in discussion threads with the instructor and other students.
- Posting of other assignments as identified by the course instructor.

Assessments:

Students' progress in Govt200 will be based upon the following:

1. **Contribution to Discussion Topics** (50% of final grade): For each session of this course, students will read the assigned texts, and choose a discussion topic. Students will submit a response to a Discussion Topic and wait for their instructor's response. Students will comment on the instructor's response and choose a second topic.
2. **Eight weekly papers.** (50% of final grade). Every week students will choose one topic from a list of suggested topics and write a 250-500 word essay. Writing topics are located in Assignments and student's submissions are uploaded in the Upload functionality in Assignments.

Assessment Percentages

Discussion topics	50%
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Weekly papers	50%
Total	100%

Yorktown University official grade and writing rubrics are located at http://www.yorktownuniversity.edu/new_rubrics.cfm

Academic Integrity

Available both in the student and faculty handbooks.

Recommended schedule for course completion

Session 1: The Hebrew World – Revelation. Introduction to Russell Kirk’s concept of “order” in so far as it informs the perspective from which this course looks at American history. “Order” will be characterized in both its classical and religious roots as it pertains to the American experience.

Assignments

Required Reading:

Kirk, *Roots*, Order: The First Need of All, Chapter. 1, pp. 3-10.

Kirk, *Roots*, The Law and the Prophets, Chapter 2, pp. 10-50.

Lectures:

Whitney, Lecture 1, Part 4.

Whitney, Lecture 2. Parts 1-4.

As cited in the Course Outline, lectures that accompany this course were given by Gleaves Whitney at a summer school for school teachers conducted by the Center for the American Idea in Houston. Mr. Whitney was a colleague of Dr. Russell Kirk and is one of his best interpreters. You may visit the Center at <http://www.americanidea.org>

Discussion Topics: Choose a topic. Submit a response and wait for your instructor’s response. Comment on that response and choose a second topic.

1. Russell Kirk writes that “an order is bigger than its laws.” What is the difference between the order of laws and order itself? How is order itself “greater”?
2. Russell Kirk speaks of two sorts of roots: the roots of the moral order and the roots of the social order. From what source do these two sorts of roots originate?

3. Russell Kirk writes: “If the roots of an order are healthy, that order may be reinvigorated and improved.” How healthy are the roots of America’s order?

4. Is the “revelation” of the God of Israel—and religion itself—relevant to social order?

Paper One.

Session outcomes: 4:1

Session 2: The Greek World – Philosophy

This session presents the classical heritage that informed American thinking about the best regime, its lawmakers, and statesmen, and how the Founders intended to avoid the typical causes for its decay.

Assignments

Required Reading:

Kirk, *Roots*, Glory and Ruin: The Greek World, Ch. 3, pp. 51-96.

Steinberger, *Classical Political Thought*, “Fragments from Solon,” pp. 14-15.

Steinberger, *Classical Political Thought*, Plato’s *Republic* Book VII, Allegory of the Cave, pp. 262-64.

Steinberger, *Classical Political Thought*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, Books IV, chapter 1, pp. 402-403; chapter 11, pp. 404-405.

Recommended:

“Solon,” from Plutarch’s *Lives*:

<http://www.bostonleadershipbuilders.com/plutarch/solon.htm>

Lecture:

Whitney, Lecture 3 (4 audios) (40 mins)

Discussion Topics: Choose a topic. Submit a response and wait for your instructor’s response. Comment on that response and choose a second topic.

1. The American Founding Fathers were attracted to Solon’s intellect, character and reforms? Is there an equivalent historical person in American history?

2. Plato’s allegory of the cave is an important aspect of the Western philosophical tradition. Describe in your own words what you think Plato is attempting to say.

3. Aristotle is concerned with these questions: “Who should rule?” and “What is the best constitution?” How would you analyze who rules in the United States today? Is the U.S. Constitution still the best?

Paper Two

Session outcomes: 4:2

Session 3: The Roman World—Republic and Empire. Despite the signal importance of the Greeks in posing the questions and the major constructs about political philosophy, the Romans were closest to the hearts of American statesmen because of their stance on civic virtue. This session explains that affinity.

Assignments

Required Reading:

Kirk, *Roots, Virtue and Power: The Roman Tension*, Ch. 4, pp. 97-136.

Recommended:

Marcus Tullius Cicero from Plutarch's Lives

<http://www.bostonleadershipbuilders.com/plutarch/cicero.htm>

Steinberger, *Classical Political Thought, Cicero's Republic*, pp. 443-460.

Lectures:

Whitney, Lecture 4 (5 audios)

Discussion Topics: Choose a topic. Submit a response and wait for your instructor's response. Comment on that response and choose a second topic.

1. Most educated Americans of the revolutionary era were keenly interested in the history of Rome and were intrigued by Rome's rise and fall. Can you say the same of Americans today? If not, does it matter? If it does matter, how would you remedy that?
2. Russell Kirk suggests that the "higher law tradition" of American jurisprudence can be traced to Cicero's idea of natural law and America's republican virtues can be traced to the Roman poet Virgil. Is any of this relevant to the United States today?
3. Apply what you've learned from Russell Kirk's discussion about the history of Rome's rise and fall to the United States of today.

Paper Three

Session outcomes: 4:3.

Session 4: The Rise of Christianity, the Fall of Rome

This session considers how the introduction of Christianity into the classically minded-West changed the West's understanding of "virtue" and "order."

Assignments

Required Reading:

Kirk, *Roots*, The Genius of Christianity, Ch. 5, pp. 137-176.

Steinberger, *Classical Political Thought*, St. Augustine's *City of God*,

Book I, Preface and Chapter 1, pp. 463-464;

Book II, Chapter 19, pp. 465-466;

Book III, Chapter 21, p. 468.

Book IV, Chapter 4, pp. 468-469.

Book IV, Chapter 33, p. 469.

Book V, Chapter 16, pp. 471-472.

Book VIII, Chapter 5, pp. 475-476.

Book XII, Chapter 23 and 24, pp. 479-480.

Book XIV, Chapter 4, p. 482.

Book XIV, Chapter 28, pp. 488-489.

Book XIX, Chapter 21, pp. 499-500.

Lectures:

Whitney, Lecture 5, Parts 1 and 2

Discussion Topics: Choose a topic. Submit a response and wait for your instructor's response. Comment on that response and choose a second topic.

1. Assume that you are living in the year 2110 and the United States has been invaded by the People's Republic of China. Using your understanding of how St. Augustine viewed the fall of Rome when Rome was invaded by the Goths, how would you defend yourself against those blaming you for America's fall?

2. At Book XIX, Chapter 21, pp. 499-500, St. Augustine argues that if we take Cicero's definition of a "republic," Rome was never a republic. Is St. Augustine being too extreme?

3. Russell Kirk argues that St. Augustine is a "Christian realist." Is Augustine too critical of the City of Man?

Paper Four

Session outcomes: 4:4.

Session 5: The Growth and Decline of Christendom

Christianity's political entity, Christendom, prevailed over Western culture in many respects by redefining what constitutes "order" and "virtue" in terms of its perspective of natural law.

Assignments

Required Reading:

Kirk, *Roots*, The Light of the Middle Ages, Chap. 6, pp. 177-219.
Steinberger, *Classical Political Thought*, St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Question 91, "Of the Various Kinds of Law," pp. 511-516.
Steinberger, *Classical Political Thought*, St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Question 94, "Of the Natural Law," pp. 524-529.

Lectures:

Whitney, Lecture 5, Part 3 and 4

Discussion Topics: Choose a topic. Submit a response and wait for your instructor's response. Comment on that response and choose a second topic.

1. Russell Kirk writes about our "medieval patrimony." String together words that come to mind when you hear the word "medieval" and comment on whether the common meaning of those words reflects the historical influence of medieval civilization and culture on America.
2. The English Constitution, representative government, the rule of law, were a natural growth within English culture that led to Parliamentary government. Is there anything in American history since the first colonists settled in Jamestown that suggest something of the sort is at work in America also?
3. Natural law is a concept in law, philosophy and theology that is found in American understanding of justice. Compare St. Thomas' discussion of natural law to the language of the Declaration of Independence.

Paper Five

Session outcomes: 4:5.

Session 6: The Reformation and 17th Century English Influences

This session explores the American intellectual heritage of the Reformation in England and English Protestant ideas and historical events in England during the colonization of America.

Assignments**Required Reading:**

Kirk, *Roots*, The Reformers' Drum, Ch. 7, pp. 229-258.
Kirk, *Roots*, The Constitution of Church and State, Ch. 8, pp. 259-268 and pp. 293-300.

Lectures:

Whitney, Lecture 6 (3 audios)
Bishirjian, Lecture 1A and 1B, Richard Hooker
Bishirjian, Lecture 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D, Thomas Hobbes

Bishirjian, Lecture 3A, John Locke

Discussion Topics: Choose a topic. Submit a response and wait for your instructor's response. Comment on that response and choose a second topic.

1. Kirk writes of the "the Protestant character," especially the Protestant character of Scottish Protestants who emigrated to America, and the Protestant "tendency toward democracy." Are there aspects of that character in America today?
2. "The ideas of democracy and equality, rooted in the Reformation, have been taken too far and now they challenge traditional authority and the original intention of the Founders of the Constitution." Do you agree with this statement?

Paper Six

Session outcomes: 4:6.

Session 7: Religion and Politics in the American Colonial Experience
Declaration of Independence. This session explores the founding of the American colonies, intellectual justification and experience with religious toleration.

Assignments

Required Reading:

Required Reading:

Kirk, *Roots*, Ch. 9, Salutary Neglect, pp. 301-345.

Lectures:

Whitney, Lecture 8, Parts 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Recommended:

Liberty: The American Revolution. <http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/index.html>

People of Williamsburg: <http://www.history.org/Almanack/people/index.cfm>

Discussion Topics: Choose a topic. Submit a response and wait for your instructor's response. Comment on that response and choose a second topic.

1. Is there such a thing as a revolution conducted on conservative principles?
2. Go the next meeting of your city or town council and relate on what you observed to Kirk's description of Colonial town meetings and county courts.
3. Does the successful career of Jonathan Edwards tell us anything about the religious sentiments of the Americans of the mid-eighteenth century?

Paper Seven

Session outcomes: 4:8.

Session 8: Declaration of Independence and Constitution. This session considers the philosophical and historical history behind the Declaration's key concept, the "unalienable rights" of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness and the question of how the Founders devised a regime that would avoid the pitfalls of its historic predecessors.

Assignments

Required Reading:

Kirk, *Roots*, Declaration and Constitution, Ch. 11 (Sections 1-2), 393-414 and (Sections 3-4), pp. 415-440.

Paper Eight

Session outcomes: 4:9.

Discussion Topics: Choose a topic. Submit a response and wait for your instructor's response. Comment on that response and choose a second topic.

1. Compose a "Deist" interpretation of the Declaration of Independence.
2. Is the statement that "the Founders believed in a religious basis for society" accepted today?
2. The system of Federalism is intended to secure local politics from encroachments from the central government. Has this system succeeded?
3. Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances are principles of the American Constitution. If the powers of the Constitution were balanced in 1791, are they "balanced" today?

Paper Eight

Session outcomes: 4:9.