

COURSE OUTLINE

1. Course Number/Title: Govt4200, Roots of American Order

Prerequisites: None

Credit: 3 hours

2. Course Description: *The 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 start of 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.

Further, 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.
10. Analyze the rationale for the provisions for nullification and succession by states in a republic.

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;
 9. The Constitutional Convention participants and Publius manufacture the American machine to avoid the pitfalls of the ancient republicanism: Solon, Machiavelli, Madison; and
 10. The American Constitutional Achilles heel: disagreement over the terms of unification and secession. Is unity prior to minority rights in the just regime?

6. Required Texts

Bradford, M.E., *Founding Fathers: Brief Lives of the Framers of the United States Constitution*, 2nd edition. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 1994. ISBN-13 978-0700606573

Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999; Vol. 2 of *Liberty Fund's Select Works of Edmund Burke* series. Purchase online at www.libertyfund.org. ISBN: 0-86597-165-X. (NOTE: Also available as a PDF file at Liberty Fund's Online Library of Liberty website: oll.libertyfund.org.)

Frohnen, Bruce, ed. *The American Republic: Primary Sources*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund. Purchase online at www.libertyfund.org. ISBN: 0-86597-333-4. (Herein referred to as “*TAR*”.)

Kirk, Russell. *The Roots of American Order*. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003. Purchase online at www.isi.org/books. ISBN: 1-88292-699-4. (Herein referred to as “*Roots*”.)

Steinberger, Peter J., ed. *Readings in Classical Political Thought*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000. ISBN: 0-87220-512-6. (Herein referred to as “*CPT*”.)

7. Recommended Reading

The Harper Collins Study Bible. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. ISBN-13:9780060786830.

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>

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Number: Govt200
Title: Roots of American Order
Faculty: Jason Ross

Preliminaries: To contact Professor Ross, email jason.christopher.ross@gmail.com If you do not receive a reply within 24 hours, please email him again.

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 Topic (30% of final grade): For each session of this course, students should read the assigned texts, and submit a response (minimum 250 words) for 2 discussion topics per session. Topics are posted to correspond to each session. Written responses are required. Your response should reflect your comprehension of the assigned reading for that Session. Tip: Read the discussion questions before beginning your assigned readings. The questions are designed to help you focus on important questions raised by Kirk's argument.

2. A 1,750-2,250-word term paper exploring one of the topics below. A topic mutually agreed upon by student and instructor may be substituted. Selection of a substitute topic should be completed by the end of Session 5. (25% of final grade)

Suggested paper topics:

1. Russell Kirk argues: “All the aspects of any civilization arise out of a people’s religion: its politics, its economics, its arts, its sciences, even its simple crafts are the by-products of religious insights and a religious cult.” At the same time, he finds roots of American order in Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Christian (both Catholic and Protestant) civilizations. How can this apparent paradox be explained?
 2. Was our nation founded in 1776 with the ratification of the Declaration of Independence? Using historical texts, explain why or why not.
 3. Some view the American Revolution as conservative but others as radical. Drawing from your readings, defend one of these claims.
 4. The idea of a “mixed constitution” has been central to political science since the work of Plato and Aristotle. Explain how the American Founders structured a system similar to and different from the mixed constitution.
 5. Many scholars have noted a paradox in the American founding: Americans were heavily Protestant but the Constitution and Bill of Rights appear to establish what is frequently referred to as a “secular” state (i.e. a state that does not require religious oaths or tests and that is explicitly prohibited from establishing a religion). Referring to your readings, how do you explain this paradox?
 6. Compare and contrast the republicanism defined by Publius in the Federalist with that of classical and renaissance republican arguments.
 7. How might Plato, Aristotle, or Thucydides have judged Lincoln as a statesman?
3. A final exam. (25% of final grade).

Assessment Percentages

Discussion topics	30%
Term paper	25%
Mid-term exam	20%
Final exam	25%
Total	100%

Yorktown University official grade and writing rubrics are located at
http://www.yorktownuniversity.com/grad_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.

Lectures:

Lectures 1 & 2 (8 audios)

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Chs. 1 and 2; Genesis 9:1-17; Genesis 17; Exodus Chs. 19-23; *TAR* 4-30, 34-8.

Discussion questions (choose three):

1. As we move throughout the course, we ought to ask with each new concept or reading how it illuminates the search for order in the American experience. As a framing exercise, what does Russell Kirk mean by "order"?
2. Kirk asserts that "all the aspects of any civilization arise out of a people's religion: its politics, its economics, its arts, its sciences, even its simple crafts are the by-products of religious insights and a religious cult." Describe what you think Kirk means by that statement. Then describe how it applies to contemporary America.
3. In reading assigned excerpts from *The American Republic: Primary Sources*, pay close attention to the early American use of the "covenant." What is implied in its use as a founding principle and how did it affect their concept of polity, rule of law, social relationships; and how did it differ from colonialists from other regions who didn't share their religion and political views?
4. Besides their adoption of the idea of "covenant" from Israel, what other ways did early Americans, particularly in New England, draw guidance from the Hebrew experience?

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.

Lecture:

Lecture 3 (4 audios) (40 mins)

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Ch. 3; “Fragments from Solon,” in *CPT*, 14-5; Thucydides 1:140-5, 2:35-54, 2:59-65, in *CPT* 36-47; Plato’s *Republic* Book VII-VIII, in *CPT* 262-90; Aristotle’s *Politics* Books IV and V (selections) in *CPT* 402-17; Aristotle’s *Constitution of Athens*, Chs. 1-14, available online at:

http://oll.libertyfund.org/Texts/Aristo8+tle0039/ConstitutionOfAthens/0232_Bk.html; Federalist 1, 9, and 10 in *TAR* 241-9. (approx. 5.5 hours)

Discussion questions (choose three):

1. How do Plato’s comments on the right rule (or right ruler) of the republic contrast with Aristotle’s, and which and why do you think one is superior to the other?
2. Is Solon a kind of Platonic philosopher-king? Why or why not?
3. Periclean Athens is often celebrated as one of the world’s crowning democratic achievements. Judging by your readings from Pericles, do you agree with this assessment?
4. How would Plato and/or Aristotle place Periclean Athens on their scheme of regime types and their forms of decay?
5. Compare and contrast the use of the concept “faction” in Aristotle’s *Politics* and in Federalist 10.
6. A key concern of Plato and Aristotle is who should rule. How does Publius in Federalist 10 address this question?

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.

Lectures:

Lecture 4 (5 audios)

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Ch. 4; excerpts from Cicero's *Republic* in *CPT* 443-460; *TAR* 110-154, 179-191.

Discussion questions (choose three):

1. How does Kirk describe the place of natural law in the context of Roman political thought and practice. Does the Roman perception apply to today's understanding of the role of natural law in terms of, say, human rights?
2. Compare and contrast Cicero's account of the decay of regimes with that of Plato and/or Aristotle (from your previous readings) and explain why either Aristotle's or Cicero's mixed regime is preferable.
3. Most Americans of the revolutionary era were keenly interested in the history of Rome because of the example it provided of a virtuous republic that was corrupted and decayed into an empire, and because they thought they saw the same process at work in their mother country of Britain. What types of evidence did American patriots offer to sustain their judgment about Britain's corruption?
4. How does the "law of nature" referred to by American patriots differ from the "natural law" as referred to by Cicero and explained by Kirk and what are the outcomes for that difference?

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 bifurcated interpretations of "virtue" and "order."

Lectures:

Lecture 5 (4 audios)

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Ch. 5; excerpts from Augustine's *City of God*, in *CPT* 463-504;

Discussion questions (choose three):

1. Using your assigned readings from the scriptures, do you agree or disagree with Kirk's explanation and the political implications of the term "kingdom of God"? Provide a detailed argument.

2. St. Augustine wrote *City of God* to defend Christianity against those who claimed that its rise was responsible for the fall of Rome. Briefly explain his argument.
3. Judging by the writings of Augustine, what are the political duties of a Christian? Is the Christian a “political animal”? Why or why not?

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. Machiavelli and Protestants recast those interpretations. This session describes the polarities and how they affected American views.

Lectures:

Lecture 5 (4 audios)

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Chs. 6-8; excerpts from St. Thomas Aquinas, in *CPT* 505-46; excerpts from Machiavelli, in *CPT* 547-622.

Selection of paper topic due
Mid-term examination

Discussion questions (choose three):

1. How does Aquinas explain the relationship between human and natural law?
2. What does Machiavelli mean by “virtue” (or “*virtù*”? What does he mean by corruption?
3. Of what value is religion, in Machiavelli’s estimation, to the health of the political order?
4. Both the Scottish Covenant and the English Bill of Rights, as addressed by Kirk, were attempts made by Protestants to respond to Catholic monarchs. How did these attempts differ? How, according to Kirk, were the influences of both felt in the American experience?

Session outcomes: 4:5.

Session 6: The American Colonial Experience – Religion and Politics

This session explores the American intellectual justification and experience with religious toleration.

Lectures:

Lecture 6 (3 audios)

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Ch. 9; TAR 42-88, 327-31, 348-9, 363-5.

Discussion questions (choose three):

1. What is the right of “conscience”? How is it similar to or different from what might be understood today as religious “tolerance”?
2. Compare and contrast the arguments Madison made against religious establishments with the arguments advanced by Roger Williams and John Leland.
3. In *The People v. Ruggles*, how does Justice Kent appear to understand the requirements of the Establishment Clause? How does this contrast with the currently dominant understanding of the requirements of the Establishment Clause?

Session outcomes: 4:6.

Session 7: America and the European “Enlightenments”

In many ways, the difference between American and European experience of the “Enlightenment” defines their differences today. This session uncovers the differing interpretations of Enlightenment thinking.

Lectures:

Lecture 7 (4 audios)

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Ch. 10; CPT, excerpt from *Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 87-155.

Discussion questions (choose three):

1. According to Burke, how did the principles of the French Revolution differ from those of the Revolution of 1688?
2. When Burke says (p. 151), “Government is not made of natural rights...” what does he mean by “natural rights”?

3. According to Kirk, how do the “Eighteenth-Century Intellectuals” – Montesquieu, Hume, Blackstone, and Burke – break from the spirit and principles of the Enlightenment?

Session outcomes: 4:7

Session 8: Declaration of Independence

This session will examine the philosophical and historical history behind the Declaration’s key concept, the “unalienable rights” of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

Lectures:

Lecture 8 (4 audios)

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Ch. 11 (Sections 1-2), 393-414; *TAR* 154-230.

Discussion questions (choose two):

1. What do Americans mean by “the laws of nature” in their statements of protest against British rule? How is this concept similar to or different from the natural law as advanced by Aquinas? How is it similar to or different from the constitution of Britain?
2. What does the “Essex Result” have to say about “alienable” and “unalienable” rights? What does this indicate about the meaning of the “unalienable rights” of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration?
3. Contrast the arguments made by Thomas Paine and John Adams about the right structuring of a constitution.

Session outcomes: 4:8.

Session 9: Constitution

This session considers the question of how the Federalists and by inference the Founders devised a regime that would avoid the pitfalls of its historic predecessors.

Lecture: none

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Ch. 11 (Sections 3-4), 415-440; *TAR* 231-320, 366-74; 382-95.

Discussion questions (choose two):

1. How does the republicanism described by Publius in the Federalist differ from that described by Machiavelli in excerpts from the *Discourses*?
2. Note in the Federalist essays the disdain with which Publius treats the “petty republics of Greece”. Some questions follow:
 - i. What is Publius’ diagnosis (esp. in Fed. 10) of the ills of the republic as a form of government? What is his strategy to respond to these ills?
 - ii. Publius goes a long way (in Fed. 39) to defend the proposed constitution on “republican principles”. What are the republican principles that the proposed constitution embraces? According to Publius, in what ways does the proposed constitution deviate from republican principles?
3. Why is a separation of powers necessary? How, according to Publius, is a separation best ensured in practice?
4. What were the grounds of Brutus’s fear of the nation government proposed by the Constitution? How did Publius respond?
5. What is so “radical” about the question Justice Wilson addresses in *Chisholm v. Georgia*: “do the people of the United States form a Nation?” What is the significance of his answer?

Session outcomes:4:9.

Session 10: American Disorder – Civil War

In this session, the test of each state’s “safety net,” the possibility of nullification of federal law or, as a last resort, secession, is considered, both on its theoretical and its practical merits.

Lectures: none

Assignment

Required Reading: *Roots*, Ch. 12; *TAR* 518-22, 565-81, 594, 600-664, 702-22.

Term paper Due

Discussion question: (choose two)

1. On what did Lincoln pin his hopes for a revitalization of the American peoples’ attachment to their government? Do you agree or disagree with his argument?

2. On what grounds did Calhoun justify nullification?
3. Do Calhoun's arguments indicate an oversight or other shortcoming within Madison's defense of an extended republic in Federalist 10?
4. On what grounds did Justice Taney defend his ruling in *Scott v. Sandford*?
5. What theories of union do Lincoln and Douglas defend, respectively?

Session outcomes: 4:10

FINAL EXAMINATION