

POLS 399
Seminar in Political Theory: Smith, Bentham, and Mill
2:00-4:30 p.m. Tuesdays, BSB 1115

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Office hours: Mondays 1-4 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS

“Smith, Bentham, and Mill” is a seminar that treats three British theorists usually associated with the political-philosophical tendencies known as “classical liberalism” and “classical utilitarianism.” We will treat J.S. Mill (1806-1873) only briefly, through his famous essay *On Liberty* (1859). The bulk of the course will consist of readings by Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), with special focus on Smith. Our aim is to get behind and beyond quick classifications and labels (such as “liberal” and “utilitarian”), and to read this important body of work in a way that combines historical sensitivity with attunement to twenty-first century questions and concerns. POLS 399 is a seminar; it is essential that students read each meeting’s complete assignment *before* class, and that they faithfully attend each week’s session prepared to contribute. POLS 399 is also a writing-in-discipline course: students are expected to prepare weekly memos as well as two critical essays on assigned topics (essay drafts followed by individual conferences with the instructor are strongly recommended). Final grades will be based on memos (45%), two critical essays (40%), and attendance and participation (15%).

Memos

Each week, students will turn in a brief (300-500 word) memo. These must be written in sentence and paragraph form, and include informal textual citations. Good memos report on and briefly engage some of the reading’s main assumptions, arguments, and conclusions. Memos will be evaluated with a pass, pass-minus, or failing grade. If a memo is not turned in by the beginning of class on the due date it counts as a failure. Students who fail four or fewer of the fourteen memos will receive an "A" for their memo grade (above 95 with more than 10 good passes, below 95 if pass-minus grades must be counted). *With fewer than 10 passes, the memo grade declines steeply* ("B" for 9 passes, "C" for 8 passes, etc.). Students are advised not to miss any memos in the first few weeks. I’ll give extra guidance on the first ones; also, the grading scheme holds through the semester even if memo work is missed from illness or other necessity.

Essays

Two essays on assigned topics will be due on the dates designated below. Essays should be 1500-2000 words in length; late essays will be penalized. All writing must, of course, be your own and follow standard citation procedures.* Feel free to consult with me during office hours or by appointment for help with any writing questions or problems or other concerns.

***Plagiarism**

Plagiarism rates for memos and essays are rising in my classes; I assume that this is because of students’ increasing

reliance on the world wide web. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense; it is grounds for automatic course failure and can be grounds for dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see <http://www.uic.edu/depts/pols/Plagiarism1.pdf>. There has been a lot written on Smith, Bentham, and J.S. Mill, and much of it that is available on the internet is of exceedingly poor quality. **The internet is not a good resource for critical essay writing. You do not need to study anything beyond the syllabus in order to do excellent work for this course, and most of you are more likely to do excellent work if you ignore secondary sources altogether.** Read and reread the primary sources; if you feel that you must have additional guidance on the readings or you are curious about secondary debates, go to the UIC library, where there is a wealth of published material that you can consult. I'll be happy to help you to find sources of high quality, but I would prefer that you focus on the primary materials and first work through any comprehension difficulties with me and with your classmates.

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 24: Introduction

August 31: J.S. Mill, On Liberty (Hackett edition, UIC bookstore)

MEMO 1 DUE

September 7: Adam Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence (Liberty Fund edition, UIC bookstore), pp. 395-554 (report dated 1766)

MEMO 2 DUE

September 14: Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Liberty Fund edition, UIC bookstore), pp. 1-108

MEMO 3 DUE, Essay #1 assigned (due 10/11)

September 21: Theory of Moral Sentiments, pp. 109-211

MEMO 4 DUE

September 28: Theory of Moral Sentiments, pp. 212-342

MEMO 5 DUE

October 5: Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (Liberty Fund edition, UIC bookstore), pp. 1-159

MEMO 6 DUE

October 11: ESSAY #1 DUE IN MY OFFICE OR MAILBOX BY 4:00 P.M.

October 12: Wealth of Nations, pp. 160-375

MEMO 7 DUE

October 19: Wealth of Nations, pp. 376-555

MEMO 8 DUE

October 26: Wealth of Nations, pp. 556-758

MEMO 9 DUE

November 2: Wealth of Nations, pp. 758-950

MEMO 10 DUE, Essay #2 assigned (due 11/29)

November 9: Jeremy Bentham, Defence of Usury (electronic reserve)

MEMO 11 DUE

November 16: Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (excerpt) and “Pannomial Fragments” (electronic reserve)

MEMO 12 DUE

November 23: First Principles Preparatory to Constitutional Code (excerpt) and “Of Publicity” (electronic reserve)

MEMO 13 DUE

November 29: ESSAY #2 DUE IN MY OFFICE OR MAILBOX BY 4:00 P.M.

November 30: “Of Retrenchment,” “Self-regarding Offences,” “Auto-Icon” (electronic reserve)

MEMO 14 DUE

THERE IS NO FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THIS COURSE