Patriotism: Ancient and Modern

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PLSC 555
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M/W 10:30-11:20

Course description:
This course is intended as an introduction to the concept of patriotism, its precursors—conceptions of civic duty, organic association, and polis patriotism—as well as its various modern conceptualizations and repudiations—such as nationalism, communism, cosmopolitanism, and multiculturalism—as seen through an examination of some of the major texts and thinkers of the Western political tradition.

Being a course in the history of political philosophy the overall goal of this class will be to understand the way in which political ideas have shaped political institutions through time and space and how they inform our lives today. More specifically, we will focus upon a particular set of ideas concerning the relation of the individual to the political community, the nature of political obligation, and various justifications for obedience to political authority. We will also explore the uneasy relationship between concepts such as patriotism and nationalism. Thus, the goal of this class will be threefold: First, to trace the different relationships that individuals have had with political authority over time; second, to understand the origin of the “nationalist choice” (exemplified in the contemporary nation-state system) and thus its potential alternatives (back then and now); and, finally, to draw implications for contemporary conceptualizations of membership in a community focusing on one case, the USA.

The modern nation-state system of international organization has proven remarkably durable under a wide range of challenges: communism, fascism, regional and supranational integration, globalization, to name just a few. However, the existence of a state did not presuppose any patriotic or national sentiments among the population two hundred years ago. States existed long before the “age of nationalism”; however, since the late 18th century, the cultivation of patriotic sentiments (through various means) has become an important part of statesmen’s repertoire to establish order and sovereignty within a territory. A central characteristic of this strategy is that it is usually presented as an implicit social contract among the members, that it involves self identification with an imaginary community that connects the ancestors of a group of people with the present and also with the future. Since then, national sentiments have countered dissent (i.e. avoiding conscription), enhanced the taxing abilities of states, fostered democratic politics, and prevented separatist movements. At the same time, the same patriotic sentiments have lead to inter- and intra-state conflict, many deaths, population displacements, and genocides.

Given the contemporary situation several questions come to mind: Is there any way that we can keep the positive elements of patriotism while disposing the negative ones? Can patriotism coexist with world peace abroad and multiculturalism at home? Is patriotism a virtue or a vice? What does political philosophy have to teach us with respect to the above questions?
Organization of the material:

The course is organized into four parts. The first is *flirting* with the idea of an ancient *Jewish nation*, but it primarily deals with the ancient ideals of patriotism and *civic* duty in the ancient Greek *polis*. The next part focuses on new forms of political legitimacy that emerged with the modern nation-state, focusing on Machiavelli’s reading of the Roman Ideal of Patriotism and Hobbes’s views on political obligation. The third part traces the origins of the modern *varieties of nationalism* (ethnic-objective vs. subjective-political) in the thought of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Herder. The last part deals with the contemporary debate with regard to patriotism, its relationship to cosmopolitanism and its moral foundations. The course concludes with a closer look at Patriotism of the American variety and an attempt to articulate a proposal for a liberal society that leaves room for patriotic sentiments, devotion to ideals, and potential for greatness.

**Texts:**

*The Ancients*

*The Book of Exodus*

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*

Plato, *Menexenus*

Plato, *The Republic*

Plato, *Apology*

Plato, *Crito*

Aristotle, *Politics*

Cicero, *On Duties*

*The Moderns*

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Government of Poland*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*

Herder, *Another Philosophy of History & Selected Political Writings*

*The Contemporary debate*

MacIntyre, *Is Patriotism a Virtue?*

Nussbaum, *Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism*

Kateb, *Is Patriotism a Mistake?*

Lincoln, *Gettysburg Address, Independence Hall Speech*

Berlin, *European Unity and its Vicissitudes*

Schaar, *The case for patriotism*

Most texts are available at the Yale Book Store. The rest will be available in a small packet of readings that you will be required to purchase from Tycos on Elm Street.

**Requirements:** There will be four short papers (3-5 pages each) one for each part of the course.
Course Outline:

Part I: Ancient ideals of Belonging

Many theorists of nationalism look back to antiquity, and specifically to the Greek polis, as an ideal form of political association which they are trying to revive or recreate in the contemporary societies. In order to be better able to evaluate the claims and aspirations of those thinkers we need to look back to the original texts that inform their arguments. What was the nature of political life in the ancient world? What obligations did political life place on the individual? What was the nature of the relation of the individual to the community? What formed the basis of political identification? Special attention will be given to the common claim that ancient societies constituted organic wholes, in contrast to the rise of the modern individual.

a. The Jewish nation (?)

Week 1

The book of Exodus

Recommended readings:


b. Polis Patriotism

Week 2

Thucydides, “Pericles' Funeral Oration” from the Peloponnesian War (Book Two, 35-46)


Recommended readings:


Week 3


368d-417b, 449b-503b, 595a-608b.
**Recommended readings:**
- Bloom, Allan. "Interpretive Essay," in his edition of *The Republic*

*Week 4*


**Recommended readings:**

*Week 5*


**Books I and III**

**Recommended readings:**

**II. Patriotism and Obligation in the Modern State**

An outcome of the Renaissance movement, which mainly entailed a rediscovery of ancient texts, was the attempt to apply ancient virtues to contemporary settings (medieval Christian ideals, feudalism, despotism, etc). However, these are not easily reconciled. The conflicts between the virtues of the pagans and the Christians were exemplified in the works of Machiavelli and Hobbes where the ancient political idea of collectivity collided with the modern ideal of individualism. Why should an individual obey the Sovereign? Let alone die for the preservation of its state? When does an individual have the right to defect from the social compact? What is the relation of the individual to the political community? What is the modern understanding of virtue and how does it differ from the ancient one? What is the role of the Prince in cultivating patriotism in a principality and how does this differ from Hobbes’s argument in the *Leviathan*? Can we even talk about patriotism in cases where the Prince is so closely identified with the state?
a. The [transformation of the] Roman Ideal

Week 6


Book I: § 42-43, §74-85, Book II: § 21-27, § 52-65


Dedicatory Letter, I-V, XI-XIII, XVII-XXI, XXIV-XXVI.

Recommended readings:

b. Patriotism: A new religion for a new Prince

Week 7


Dedication; Book One: Preface, 1-5, 24-28, 43, 49, 53; Book Two: 1-9, 16-21, 28, 31-33; Book Three: 1, 8-9, 19-27, 36, 41-43, 46-47.

Recommended readings:

c. The grounding of modern political obligation

Week 8

Introduction, Ch. X-XXVI, XXIX-XXXI, XLVI- XLVII, A Review and conclusion.

Recommended readings:

III. The Origins of Nations

In this set of readings we have more explicit treatment of nationalism. The sovereign nation-state is on the rise in Western Europe and competing accounts are formulated to account for the citizen’s sentiments and their origins/foundations. In Montesquieu we find a modern Herodotus that tries to understand human diversity and highlight the variation in mores, habits and national culture. The government of a people is hard to distinguish from the mores of its people for Montesquieu. On the other hand, Rousseau treats the nation as a prepolitical group that was produced by the same physical/external causes that pushed men out of the state of nature. For the Social Contract to materialize without conflict, its constitutive elements must feel similar in a nonpolitical way, without reflection. The nation is the answer to this question. Thus, for such a project to succeed there is a need for a Legislator that will found politics on the nation by “systematizing the unreflected feeling of the nation” (Cohler 1970: 174). Rousseau’s analysis is then contrasted with Herder’s ethnic-objective understanding of the nation. For Herder, humanity is naturally divided into ethnocultural groups. This is where the origins of the modern idea of nationalism lie.

a. The Spirit of the Nation and Civic Virtue

Week 9


Preface; Part I: Books 1-5, Part II: all; Part III: all; Part IV: Books 20, 21, 23; Part V: Book 24, Part VI: Book 29.

Recommended readings:


Week 10

Recommended readings:


c. Application: Poland

Week 11


Recommended readings:


d. Ethnic-Objective Nationalism: The Romantic Reaction

Week 12


Recommended readings:


IV. Patriotism: virtue or vice?

In an age of globalism is there any normative justification for the preservation of the nation-state model and the sentiments it is accompanied with? How can we reconcile the disjunction between particularism and universalism? Can one be loyal to his nation-state and be a citizen of the world at the same time? On what basis can one argue for the morality of national boundaries and the patriotic affects that accompany them? Does it make sense to talk about left- and right-
wing patriotism? More specifically, how is American Patriotism –if at all- unique among the western nation-state model of patriotism?

Week 13

a. The contemporary debate

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1984. *Is Patriotism a Virtue?* The Lindley Lecture (Department of Philosophy: The University of Kansas).


Recommended readings:


b. USA Patriotism: Devotion to Principles

Lincoln, Abraham. *Independence Hall Speech (1861), Gettysburg Address (1863)*

Berlin, Isaiah. “European Unity and its Vicissitudes”


Recommended readings:
