

Political Science 59
The Politics of Moral Reasoning
Professor Dumm
Spring, 2011

This course is interested in the politics of the ordinary. It is a basic assumption of this course that how we reach decisions while going about our ordinary lives is worth examining for its own sake, but also because our decisions have ramifications for our larger political life together. Our guide in the formulation and execution of this course is a work by Stanley Cavell entitled *Cities of Words*, which will serve as the core text. That book is an attempt to reproduce a course he taught for years at Harvard called "Moral Reasoning." Since that course makes use of some classic works of political theory, we have an opportunity to explore issues in political theory through a slightly different lens that simply that of a history of political thought. Coupled with each thinker we examine is a work from the classic period of American film, which will serve as prompts for further discussions of their themes.

Requirements:

Attendance is mandatory, which is to say unexcused absences are not permitted, and will be penalized at my discretion. All reading and viewing is to be completed before the class meeting at which the pertinent discussion is scheduled. Thoughtful participation in discussion is encouraged, and up to 5% of your final grade will be determined by my evaluation of how well you participate in class (my criteria do not include how much you talk, but it does include how well). There will be three paper assignments each constituting roughly 33% of the grade. I realize that this adds up to 104%, which simply means I want to be free to exercise minimal discretion concerning final grades that are on the cusp between, say, a B plus and an A minus.

Books for purchase are on sale at Amherst Books in downtown Amherst.

Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words* (Harvard)
John Locke, *The Second Treatise on Government* (Hackett)
John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (Dover Thrift)
Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (Dover Thrift)

All other assigned readings are available online. Consult the syllabus.

Course films will be streamed on the Amherst Library website. Those students not enrolled at Amherst College will be given access to these films via password. The following are our films in the order in which they will be screened, along with the name of the pertinent thinker under examination.

— <i>The Philadelphia Story</i> (1940, George Cukor)	Emerson
— <i>Adam's Rib</i> (1949, George Cukor)	Locke
— <i>Gaslight</i> (1944, George Cukor)	Mill
— <i>It Happened One Night</i> (1933, Frank Capra)	Kant
— <i>Mr. Deeds Goes to Town</i> (1936, Frank Capra)	Rawls
— <i>Now, Voyager</i> (1942, Irving Rapper)	Nietzsche
— <i>Stella Dallas</i> (1937, King Vidor)	Ibsen
— <i>The Maltese Falcon</i> (1941, John Huston)	Freud
— <i>His Girl Friday</i> (1940, Howard Hawks)	Plato
— <i>The Awful Truth</i> (1937, Leo McCarey)	Aristotle
— <i>The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance</i> (1962, John Ford)	Thoreau
— <i>Unforgiven</i> (Clint Eastwood, 1992)	Nietzsche (again)

Course Calendar

1. 1/25 (T) Introduction
No Reading

2. 1/27 (TH) Moral Perfectionism
Reading: Cavell, Introduction, *Cities of Words* (Henceforth, *CW*)

3. 2/1 (T) Emerson
Reading: Emerson, "Self-Reliance," www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm Cavell, *CW*, 1. Emerson

4. 2/3 The Philadelphia Story
Reading: Cavell, *CW*, 2. The Philadelphia Story

5. 2/8 (T) Locke
Reading: Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, (P), Preface and Chapters 1 through 7. Cavell *CW*, 3. Locke.

6. 2/10 (TH) Adam's Rib
Reading: Cavell, *CW*, 4. Adam's Rib

7. 2/15 (T) John Stuart Mill
Reading: Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, (P), Chapters 1, 2 and 3, Cavell, *CW*, 5. John Stuart Mill

8. 2/17 (TH) Gaslight

Reading: Cavell, *CW*, 6. Gaslight

9. 2/22 (T) Kant

Reading: Kant, *Groundwork on the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp.19-32,
www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/kantgw.pdf Cavell, *CW*, 7. Kant

10. 2/24 (TH) It Happened One Night

Reading: Cavell, 8. It Happened One Night

11. 3/1 (T) Rawls

Reading: Rawls, excerpts from *A Theory of Justice* (to be announced), Cavell, *CW*, 9,
 Rawls

12. 3/3 (TH) Mr. Deeds Goes to Town

Reading: Cavell, *CW*, 10. Mr. Deeds Goes to Town

13. 3/8 (T) Nietzsche

Reading: Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer As Educator," from *Unmodern Observations* (M)
 Cavell, *CW*, 11. Nietzsche

14. 3/10 (TH) Now, Voyager

Reading: Cavell, *CW*, 12. Now, Voyager

SPRING BREAK

15. 3/22 (T) Ibsen

Reading: Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (P) Cavell, *CW*, 13. Ibsen

16. 3/24 (TH) Stella Dallas

Reading: Cavell, *CW*, 14. Stella Dallas

17. 3/29 (T) Freud

Reading: Freud. *Group Psychology...* (P), I, II, II, IV, VII.

18. 3/31 (TH) The Maltese Falcon

Reading: Freud, *Group Psychology...* (P), VIII, IX, X, XI, XII

19. 4/5 (T) Plato

Reading: Plato, Republic, Books VII and X, classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html Cavell,
CW, 17. Plato

20. 4/7 (TH) His Girl Friday

Reading: Cavell, *CW*, 18. His Girl Friday

21. 4/12 (T) Aristotle

Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I, VIII, IX, and X,
classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html Cavell, *CW*, Aristotle

22. 4/14 (TH) The Awful Truth

Reading: Cavell, *CW*, 20. The Awful Truth

23. 4/19 (T) Carl Schmitt

Reading: *Political Theology*, (P), I, II

Class will not meet on Thursday, 4/21. A make-up class – dinner – will be held at Professor Dumm's house at the conclusion of the semester.

24. 4/24 (T) The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance

Reading, *Political Theology*, (P), III, IV

25. 4/26 (TH) Nietzsche (Again)

Reading: "The Eternal Return of the Same," nietzsche.thefreelibrary.com/Thus-Spake-Zarathustra/8-1

26. (T) Unforgiven

Reading: Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*

27. 5/3 (T)

28. 5/5 Conclusion