TRADITIONS OF INQUIRY:
WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY FOR?

SPEA V450

Spring 2015

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4 – 5:15 p.m.
PV 273

Canvas address:  https://iu.instructure.com/courses/1431311

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and by appointment

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Assistant:  Eugenia Marvin (IUB), euasher@indiana.edu

Course Objectives

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But, soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.

John Maynard Keynes, The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money

The most basic question of public policy is: What should government do? Should it provide for the common defense, enforce the laws and perhaps offer a few other services, but leave most activities to individuals, acting alone or in groups? Or should it try to ensure a certain quality of life for everyone, providing the services necessary for
them to achieve it? If so, what quality? Should it give as much room as possible for citizens to pursue their own interests, economic or otherwise? Or should it restrict what they do in the name of the common good? Should it be indifferent to the advantages – natural or acquired -- some people have? Or should it seek to offset them in order to promote justice? Should it protect private property? Or should it own or control it to protect the environment, or other public goods? How much – and what kind of -- disagreement should governments tolerate? And what can citizens legitimately do if they can no longer tolerate their governments?

Although not always acknowledged as such, these and similar questions have long preoccupied both thinkers about and participants in public policy. They also continue to figure prominently in today’s debates. The controversies over the Affordable Care Act, to take one example, have their roots in disputes about what the proper role of government in health care should be, whether or not people should be allowed to decide how much health insurance they want, how much people who are healthy should subsidize those who are not, and to what degree should health care be considered a public matter rather than a private one.

Furthermore, thinking about these questions inevitably affects – and is affected by -- thinking about other aspects of public policy: Who decides? Who does what? How much freedom? What is just? What is the common good? What is the most effective way to achieve it?

The aim of this course is to engage students, early in their study of public policy, with the fundamental issue of what should government do. They will read and discuss how this question has been addressed by great thinkers of the past, look at applications of their thoughts to areas of public policy in the United States and internationally, and reflect on their own ideas about the role of government – and the arguments and evidence they would use in behalf of their thinking.

There is no expectation that students will end this course convinced that public policy should – or should not – be used for particular purposes, or in particular ways. One semester is hardly enough to settle disputes that have been raging for millennia! But the students should expect to understand the contours of these debates, be familiar with important arguments on various sides of them, and be prepared to apply the insights they have gained to their own careers, as both students of public policy and practitioners.

This course will count for credit toward the Certification in Applied Research and Inquiry in Public Affairs, a SPEA program for students throughout Indiana University who are seeking courses that bring together the liberal arts and the study of public affairs.

Course Requirements

This course will be conducted as a seminar. Therefore, it is essential for all students to attend class and participate in the discussion. At the beginning of each topic,
the instructor will ask at least two students – chosen at random – to offer summary comments on the readings to be discussed. Students may be selected more than once.

At the conclusion of Book 1 of the required text, students will take a mid-term exam. At the end of the semester, students will take a final exam that will cover both volumes of the required text.

Students will also be required to submit a term paper, at least ten pages in length, in which they are expected to apply the ideas examined in this course – or related ideas -- to a contemporary problem in public policy. Further details will be provided separately.

Students will also be expected to participate in a class blog in which they will identify and post clippings from newspapers, magazines or other publications that deal with the question asked by this course: What is public policy for? Clippings may be about debates over this question occurring in the United States or in other countries, but must have been published no sooner than the first day of this class. Students should explain what ideas about the role of government are posed (implicitly, if not explicitly) in each clipping. Students who post at least eight clippings will receive an “A” for this requirement, with reduced grades for fewer clippings.

**Grading**

The grade each student receives in this class will reflect a balanced appreciation of the totality of his or her work. However, the various course requirements will count approximately as follows:

- Class participation – 10 percent
- Clippings – 10 percent
- Mid-term – 20 percent
- Term Paper – 25 percent
- Final exam – 35 percent

While the instructor encourages students to discuss the course, exchange ideas, and critique each other’s work as much as they desire, he also expects that all work submitted for grading will be done in a manner consistent with the university’s rules on plagiarism. A link to IU’s academic policies will be found on Canvas.

Students who have special needs that might affect their participation in this class should alert the instructor to them. He will try to make appropriate accommodations or direct students to IU resources that might be helpful to them. Information about the Writing Center is posted on Canvas.
Readings

The required text for this course is:


This is a survey of Western political thought from Greece to contemporary times. Although Professor Ryan quotes extensively from the original sources, for those interested in the primary materials, I would recommend the following book:


I have asked the IU book store to order both of these.

Both Ryan and Cahn are expensive. (Also, the publisher advised me after I placed the order that the Ryan book was being reprinted and would not be available until the end of January.) For those of you looking to get the Ryan book sooner and less expensively, I would recommend using an online retailer. (The book is also available in an electronic edition.) Also, the materials in the Cahn book are mostly in the public domain and available in other editions, libraries, and on the internet (Gutenberg Project and elsewhere), often for free. You can also rent Cahn, or use earlier editions.

Finally, a word about the “bias” of these books and more generally, the course. We will be looking mostly at Western political ideas. That does not imply anything about the value of ideas from other political cultures. Rather, the instructor selected this focus because most of you are products of, and will spend your careers in Western culture (which is itself not without considerable variety). In addition, important texts from other cultures are generally not as accessible (in more than one sense of that term) as Western texts are. Not least importantly, the questions thinkers from other cultures have asked are often identical to those of the writers we will be studying. So, understanding the one will be good preparation for understanding the other.

Nonetheless, since the instructor has studied political thought in other cultures (and teaches a graduate course on the role of civil society in international perspective), he will make reference to non-Western political ideas, as the occasion warrants. Students should feel free to do likewise. Also, one way of fulfilling the term paper requirement will be to look at non-Western approaches to particular issues we discuss in the course.

As with any course, the required readings are but a fraction of the works worthy of attention. Students who would like to read more about or by particular authors or on particular topics (Western or non-Western) should not hesitate to ask the instructor for recommendations. Since this is the first time this course is being offered, the instructor is very interested in student feedback on the readings, as well as the course more generally.
**Course Outline**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<td>January 13, 15</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td><em>Animal Farm</em></td>
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<td>Ryan, Introduction to Book 1</td>
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<td>January 20, 22</td>
<td>The Classics (I)</td>
<td>Ryan, Chapters 1 – 3</td>
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<td>Cahn, Plato &amp; Aristotle; Pericles</td>
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<td>January 27, 29</td>
<td>The Classics (II)</td>
<td>Ryan, Chapters 4 – 5</td>
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<td>Cahn, Cicero and Augustine</td>
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<td>February 3, 5</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Ryan, Preface to Part II, Chapters 6 – 8</td>
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<td>Cahn, Aquinas</td>
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<td>Dante, <em>De Monarchia</em></td>
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<td>February 10, 12</td>
<td>Humanism</td>
<td>Ryan, Chapters 9 – 11</td>
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<td>Cahn, Machiavelli</td>
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<td>Erasmus, <em>The Praise of Folly</em></td>
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<td>Sir Thomas More, <em>Utopia</em></td>
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<td>February 17</td>
<td>Mid-term Exam</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Authors and References</td>
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<td>February 19</td>
<td>Mid-term Reflection</td>
<td>Ryan, Preface to Book 2</td>
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<td>February 24, 26</td>
<td>Contractarianism</td>
<td>Ryan, Chapters 12 – 13, Cahn, Hobbes and Locke</td>
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<td>March 3, 5</td>
<td>Republicanism</td>
<td>Ryan, Chapters 14 and 16, Cahn, Montesquieu, Hamilton and Madison, Declaration of Independence, Constitution of the United States</td>
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<td>March 10, 12</td>
<td>Revolution</td>
<td>Ryan, Chapters 15 and 17, Cahn, Rousseau, Burke, Declaration of the Rights of Man, Paine, <em>Rights of Man</em></td>
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<td>March 17, 19</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<td>March 31, April 2</td>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>Ryan, Chapters 18 and 21, Cahn, Hegel, Marx and Engels</td>
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<td>April 7, 9</td>
<td>Modernism</td>
<td>Ryan, Preface to Part II, Chapters 22 -23, Cahn, Nietzsche</td>
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Croly, *The Promise of American Life*

Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”

Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Writings: 1929-35*

Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*

Selections from Schumpeter, Lippmann to come

**April 14, 16**

*Totalitarianism*

Ryan, Chapters 24 – 25

Cahn, Arendt, Hayek, Berlin, Taylor, Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man

**April 21, 23**

*Neo-Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism*

Ryan, Chapters 26 – 27

Cahn, Dewey, Rawls, Sandel, Nozick,


James Q. Wilson, “The Rediscovery of Character”

Irving Kristol, “Some Personal Reflections on Economic Well-Being and Inequality.”


Selection from Nisbet to come

**April 28**

*Post-Modernism*

Cahn, Foucault, Habermas. Held, Nussbaum, Young, Appiah, King Jr.

Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons”

Other selections on environmental issues to come
April 30

Final Reflections

Term Papers due

Final Exam