

PHILOSOPHY 320
Social & Political Philosophy
Fall 2019

2nd Mid-Term Assignment

Due Wednesday, November 13

Write a 3-5 page response to one of the following topics. Turn in by uploading to Laulima as either a Word file or pdf file.

Democracy and Its Difficulties

What did James Madison mean by the “danger of faction” and what did Alexis de Tocqueville mean by the “tyranny of the majority”? Explain how the remedy for these difficulties, which the government of the United States adopted in its Constitution, is the notion of a Republic, defended by Madison in *The Federalist Papers*, the notion of political rights as defended by Locke and Rousseau, and also the notion of the separation of powers as suggested by Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws*. Why is it then so important that the President of the United States is not above the law? To what extent do you think these remedies are adequate in responding to the problems with democracy?

Liberty and Authority

What did John Stuart Mill mean by the “one simple principle” in his essay *On Liberty*? How does Mill argue for the freedom of thought and expression, and that we thus have good reason to welcome even unpopular views? What did Mill mean when he suggested that individuals should have liberty in their tastes and pursuits? How does Patrick Devlin argue against this in *The Enforcement of Morals* and how does H.L.A. Hart respond to Devlin’s argument in *Law Liberty and Morality*? To what extent would you agree with Mill’s “Liberty Principle”?

Rights

Why did Bentham think that the notion of *natural rights* is “nonsense on stilts”? What does he mean when he suggests that a natural right is a “son that never had a father”? What difficulties follow from Bentham’s notion of rights when he says “Right is with me the child of law”? What is Marx’s criticism of the *rights of man* in the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*? What might rights be if they are not natural and not the child of law?

Economic Justice

According to John Locke, how much private property should one be able to acquire? Are there any limits on wealth for Locke? What did Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, mean by the “division of labor” and how does he think this would lead to increasing the wealth of nations? Why does Smith argue against any government interference in the market? What does he mean when he suggests that an “invisible hand” guides the market toward the greater good? What then are the only three duties the sovereign (the government) has in what he calls the “system of natural liberty”? What is Marx’s critique of the “division of labor” in the section “Estranged Labor” from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*?

Postmodernism

What did Nietzsche mean by the “death of God” and how is this the beginning of what Lyotard referred to as the postmodern condition? Explain how Nietzsche’s conception of the philosophy influences postmodern thought. Why does Gianni Vattimo think that the “weak thought” position that follows from Nietzsche’s critique of the tradition of Western thought actually opens up a more liberating political position? How might the notion of human rights be developed from this postmodern position?