

Prof. Alan Charles Kors

I. The Spirit of our Seminar

The excitement of seminars—and I have been teaching them for many years—is that they are a chance for you to learn from each other, to try out your own analyses and comparisons of authors, and to hear your own voices in intellectual conversation with each other. Penn students are wonderfully bright and interesting, and seminars are an opportunity for you all to be colleagues in an historical inquiry.

Our seminar meetings will be organized around discussion. Your grade will be determined by discussion (50%), a brief early paper (10%), and your term-paper (40%), rounded in favor of discussion. Your individual comments will not be graded (that would be awful), but, rather, you'll be evaluated on the basis of informed, ongoing, responsive participation in discussion. By "informed," I mean informed by a close reading of our texts. By "ongoing," I mean both sustained throughout each meeting and sustained throughout the semester. By "responsive," I mean responsive to each other, taking each other seriously enough to respond to each other's observations and analyses.

I know full well that for some of you, talking in class is as easy as breathing, but that, for others, it is a hurdle to overcome. If talking in class is difficult for you, but the course interests you, please take it and come identify yourself in an early office hour. In all my years of teaching, I have learned all the ways (and tricks) of making it easy to participate.

We are a history seminar, doing intellectual history, not a seminar on philosophy or on political and moral theory. That is to say, our goal will not be to judge or to argue the merits and demerits of our authors (you always can choose to do that voluntarily on your own, apart from our seminar), but to understand how the world looks to different minds. The focus of our discussion will be analytic and comparative. We will be interested in what views an author holds of human nature and possibility, of society, of motivation, of ethics, of history, and so on. We get to ask questions about an author's beliefs that an author may not even ask himself or herself (for example, implicit views of human nature or of ethics). It may be that two of you who agree about what an author believes might hold two

different views of the author's rightness or wrongness. Our subject will be the former (analyzing an author), not the latter (judging an author).

Imagine, for the sake of argument, that we were studying Tibetan Buddhism or medieval political theory. To summon those thinkers to judgment by our own contemporary or personal views of the world would be to study ourselves, not other minds or schools of thought. Our task is to understand other minds and other ways of thinking.

"Classical Liberal Thought," in briefest form, is a belief in minimal government and maximal individual choice, socially and economically, consistent with peace and order. Looked at from afar, any movement of thought might seem to be all of one piece. Studied up close, however, what seemed uniform at first becomes complex and diverse. As one studies such things as Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Marxism, Islam, conservatism, or feminism, for example, the more that one reads, analyzes, and compares, the more internal debates and differences one sees in each, whatever the agreements. Our "classical liberals" disagree, often in ways that make them mutually incompatible, about rights, benefits, ethical criteria, safety nets, human nature, and human history. The function of our discussion will be to analyze individual thinkers and, as we read beyond the first of them, to compare our thinkers, looking both for agreements and, above all, for disagreements.

What judgment you make privately of our authors is neither my goal nor my business. My classroom is never a pulpit. My sole interest here is your analytic and comparative reading and discussion (from which I always learn new things). I give you my absolute word on that.

Each week, I will send out questions for discussion, which will be our starting point. I will ask you all each to choose ONE of our questions and, in a go-around at the start of class, to sketch out a brief answer (three to four minutes—you can read it from a written-out statement, or an outline, or extemporize). After this go-around, we will take a twenty-minute break and then reconvene for discussion, beginning with disagreements you might have with each other, and then proceeding wherever the discussion takes us. To encourage both fairness and spontaneity, I will create a queue (the British term sounds fancier than a line or list) in the order of hands raised, with the understanding that if you truly need to make a brief interjection about someone's comment or to ask a brief question of someone, you can cut in by signaling for such a comment. Trust me... it will work.

II. Syllabus

Reading assignments:

- 1/20: Introductory meeting
- 1/27: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty & Other Writings*, “On Liberty,” 1-93
- 2/04: Frederic Bastiat, *Essays on Political Economy*, 1-40, 105-151.
- 2/11: Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, 1-177
- 2/18: Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism in the Classical Tradition*, xiii-xxxi, 1-108, 147-151.
- 2/25: F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 36-238
- 3/04: Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (entire)
- 3/11: Spring Break (but please come back)
- 3/18: Wendy McElroy, *Sexual Correctness*, 1-107
- 3/25: F. A. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit*, 1-119
- 4/01: Peter Bauer, *From Subsistence to Exchange*, 1-108, 139-148.
- 4/08: Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, ix-xiv, 3-53, 88-119, 149-275
- 4/15: James Tooley, *The Beautiful Tree*, 1-276 (endnotes begin on p.277)
- 4/22: Tom G. Palmer (ed.), *After the Welfare State*, 1-136 (notes are pp. 143-75).
- 4/29: Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (entire); it’s long—read all semester

Books: Pennsylvania Book Center, 34th and Sansom Streets (not the U. of P. Bookstore)

Office Hours: Room 307, College Hall, Thurs. 2:30-4:30, or by appointment

Email: akors@sas.upenn.edu

Fairness: You all face the same deadlines, so plan your schedules accordingly. I do not give Incompletes except for medical or personal emergencies attested to by your School (College, Wharton, and so on) in an email to all of your professors; if that is unacceptable to you, you should not take the course.

Paper assignments:

I. Brief paper: Due at any time between 2/01 and 3/01 (send by email as .pdf file):

The paper is an exercise that will help me know if there are any problems that need to be addressed in your prose and in how you structure an argument, so I only want three pages (double spaced, 12 pt. font). Compare the Mill of *On Liberty* with the Mill of *On the Subjection of Women* (pp. 117-217 in our anthology). **What are the continuities of Mill's thought, and what are its discontinuities?** (For example, in *On Liberty*, he claims that he will appeal only to "utility" as an ethical criterion. In *On the Subjection of Women*, in the view of some readers, he makes other and different ethical appeals.) **What changes, if anything, in the nature of his arguments?** (Be sure to see section on "FORM," below.)

II. Term paper: 4,000 to 6,000 words, due by OR BEFORE Monday, May 5, 5 PM:

(Leave a hard in my History Department mailbox; keep a copy for yourself.)

In order to show that you can internalize, for purposes of understanding them, the perspectives of our diverse authors, choose any three authors from our syllabus, and, **using their actual arguments to confront the actual arguments of Ayn Rand in *Atlas Shrugged*, write their separate intellectual reviews of *Atlas Shrugged*.** (Yes, that means three separate essays; yes, that means you're writing as that author from our syllabus and not your own comparative essay; yes, it should be paginated consecutively as one long paper.) You should **not** retell the story of *Atlas Shrugged* **at all**. Rather, **focus on premises, principles, assumptions, values, and conclusions**, avoiding ad hominem, stylistic, and rhetorical criticisms (and avoiding jokes or even deep comments about the reviewers being dead).

Look above all for areas of disagreement.

Each reviewer should state his or her main argument clearly and concisely in a first paragraph, and then articulate and defend it at length. **Avoid direct quotation; a paraphrase is much better:** Don't make the thinker in question your co-author by use of direct quotation. **You may provide footnotes, or endnotes, or parenthetical references, but let me know, at the end of each substantive paragraph, on what parts of the texts you are relying.** Provide author, full title, and page numbers for the first reference to a text, and

then short title and page numbers after that. (Please see and take literally the section on “FORM,” below.)

Please remember that this was given out to you before you decided to take the class:

FORM: Provide a cover (title) page and number your pages. You must write with proper American-English syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. When in doubt, consult reference works (such as Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers...*; Bryan Garner, *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage*; or, the sacred text of editors, *Words into Type*). There's also a truly superb guide to clear writing: Strunk and E.B. White, *Elements of Style*. If you see an edition without the name of E.B. White—Strunk alone—don't get it! Please give yourself time to proofread, revise, and rewrite. Back up your work, and keep an extra hard copy for yourself.

Note well, please: I am available throughout the semester if you want any help with framing your papers or improving your prose, and I am eager to be of real assistance to you. Rough drafts will receive an F. As noted above, I do not give Incompletes except for medical or personal emergencies attested to by your School (e.g., the College, Engineering, or Wharton) to all your professors. Contact the School and have the School contact all of your professors.