

Govt200 Roots of American Order

1. **Course Number/Title:** Govt200, Roots of American Order

Prerequisites
Credit: 3 hours

2. Course Description: *The Roots of American Order* uses Russell Kirk's book of the same name to introduce students to American political thought. Kirk's work interprets the origins of the American nation and its constitutional order through an examination of the intellectual sources that shaped the American Founding.

Kirk employs the term "American Founding" more broadly. Rather than fixing the start of the American Founding at the date of America's declaration of its independence from British rule, Kirk focuses on the origins of a whole complex of constitutions and laws, political bodies, traditions, mores, and habits that supported the emergence of the American people and nation. Thus in Kirk's assessment, the emergence of a new American nation and government did not reflect a radical break from the past, it was instead an attempt to defend an existing political culture that had deep historical roots.

Further, Kirk denies that our political institutions can properly be understood – or can even properly function – if American citizens lose their connection with the living roots of our political order.

3. Course Goals: After completing this course, students will recognize the historical imperative to reflect deeply about and make the case for the connections in the American experience between past and present and between moral and political order as the basis for civic virtue and public service. Specifically, students will develop familiarity with the arguments of the American Founding – the primary sources from which they were derived and the ways in which they were employed in debates about the shape the American republic ought to take. They will leave the course with an ability to discuss the moral, institutional, and political significance of the arguments of the American Founding to contemporary American life.

4. Course Learning Outcomes: At the conclusion of the course, students will be able to

1. Describe the multiple ways in which religion influences political life; specifically, how specific passages from the Old Testament that were of profound importance in shaping the mind of early Americans;
2. Compare and contrast the various classical regimes similarities and differences; identify the role of the statesman in shaping the virtue of citizens; apply Cicero's concept of "natural law" to the intellectual construct of key Americans during the Founding period.
3. Compare and contrast the concept of 'virtue' in its classical, Christian, and modern (Machiavellian) meanings and apply it to American thinking about its peculiar destiny from its colonial to its Founding periods.
4. Distinguish between and justify both the rationalist and traditionalist interpretations of the American Founding, including the Declaration of Independence, and determine which provides for and encourages civic virtue.
5. Compare and contrast classical, Machiavellian, and Madisonian republicanism.
6. List and define the key principles of the Constitution of the United States.
7. Make Anti-Federalists and Federalists arguments against and for the proposed Constitution of the United States.
8. Characterize the historical and political issues relating to questions about the nature of the union, including the logic of arguments for nullification.

5. Course Concepts

1. Influence of Judeo-Christian history and values on the American colonialists;
2. Influence of classical (ancient Greek and Rome) philosophy, history and values on American thinking regarding the best regime, the most just relationship between the ruled and the rulers (ruling and being ruled);
3. Recognizing the differences between the ancient Greeks and Romans that bear on the gap between political philosophy and a practice of civic virtue; theory versus practice; the “lived” just life;
4. Ancient concepts of virtue contrasted to the emergence of “divine” virtue as represented by Christianity within the Roman Empire; the political conundrum for both the pagans and the Christians of the city of Man and the city of God (lived on earth);
5. Divine virtue co-opted by Machivelli, on the one hand, and Protestants, on the other hand. Both claiming a new “order” that repositions the role of the effective, virtuous, or elected individual as opposed to the Christian kingdom;
6. American religious toleration—its history, experience, and endurance as a political value: From Roger Williams, John Leland, to Justice Kent in *The People v. Ruggles*;
7. The affect of the European Enlightenment on America: from Montesquieu to Edmund Burke;
8. American concepts of “natural law” and how they are formulated in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers;
9. The Constitutional Convention participants and Publius manufacture the American machine to avoid the pitfalls of the ancient republicanism: Solon, Machiavelli, Madison; and
10. The American Constitutional Achilles heel: disagreement over the terms of unification and secession. Is unity prior to minority rights in the just regime?

6. Required Texts

Russell Kirk. *The Roots of American Order* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003). Purchase online at www.isi.org/books. ISBN: 1-88292-699-4. (Herein referred to as “*Roots*”.)

Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999); Vol. 2 of *Liberty Fund’s Select Works of Edmund Burke* series. Purchase online at www.libertyfund.org. ISBN: 0-86597-165-X. (NOTE: Also available as a PDF file at Liberty Fund’s Online Library of Liberty website: <http://oll.libertyfund.org>.)

Bruce Frohnen, ed. *The American Republic: Primary Sources* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund). Purchase online at www.libertyfund.org. ISBN: 0-86597-333-4. (Herein referred to as “*TAR*”.)

Peter J. Steinberger, ed. *Readings in Classical Political Thought* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000). ISBN: 0-87220-512-6. (Herein referred to as “*CPT*”.)

The Harper Collins Study Bible (New York: Harper Collins, 2006). ISBN-13:9780060786830.

7. Recommended Reading

8. Additional Resources

Lectures on Russell Kirk's *The Roots of American Order* are located in "Resources." Lectures are provided by Gleaves Whitney, a student of Russell Kirk's work. Mr. Whitney is the director of the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies at Grand Valley State University, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. You may visit the Hauenstein Center to learn more about Mr. Whitney and his relationship with Russell Kirk at:

<http://www.gvsu.edu/hauenstein/index.cfm?id=3758D832-E86B-D462-8F23F01D797AD1EB>
ewsgathering)