

## **Philosophy of Community I (PL291.01)**

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Fall, 2006      Tuesdays, 4:30 - 6:00-ish

### Course Description:

During his acceptance of the Republican Party Nomination in '96, then Sen. Bob Dole -- in what was a direct slap at Hillary Clinton, in reference to a book she had published -- made the claim that it does not "take a village" to raise a child, but it takes a family (voicing a preference for strengthening families rather than expanding social services). In her address to the Democratic Convention that followed, Mrs. Clinton responded that in fact it really takes a network of family, teachers, doctors, police, government, etc. -- i.e., a village, a social network of supports beyond only the family -- to accomplish this successfully.

That exchange represents the two versions of classical liberalism that have defined the tension between what are today described as American Conservatism and Liberalism. That tension is at the root of the difficulty of understanding what America understands by the word "community" when that word is used to describe the collectivity of individuals who are counted as "Americans."

That exchange and the tension inherent in it, also points to a fundamental difference between modern, liberal thinking and classical thought: followers of liberalism (modern-day liberals *and* conservatives) believe that we are individuals first and that our social and political connections are choices we make; classical thinkers believed that we are social by nature and the individuals we become are shaped in and depend upon that social network and its commitments.

Keeping that difference in mind, the word "community" is used to designate many different groupings of people. At Boston College, for example, we are immersed in a number of communities: the "Boston College community" -- whatever that is; the academic community; the community of Brighton, etc. PULSE students are said to provide "community" service. The neighborhoods we come from are called communities, as are the religious denominations to which we might belong.

Some of these we have made conscious decisions to join; in others, we simply "find" ourselves already a member of them. But what is "community"? What role does community play in defining who we are, in shaping our self-understanding?

In this seminar, we will explore the nature of community in the American context. We will examine some of the historical, cultural, political and religious forces, which have shaped both American community and the American understanding of community.

We will approach these questions from a philosophical perspective with an opening discussion of Rousseau and Locke, then a historical perspective based on the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville. We are thus taking our starting point in two philosophers whose opinions were part of the intellectual climate in which this nation was born, then from an observer of what emerged in early America. With our other readings we will raise the questions from a modern, legal and cultural perspective with Mary Ann Glendon, from a political and cultural perspective with the book by Garry Wills, then from a religious perspective with two Papal Encyclicals on Social Justice.

Texts:

*Second Treatise of Government*, John Locke  
*Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
*Democracy in America*, Alexis deTocqueville  
*Rights Talk*, Mary Ann Glendon  
*Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII and *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II  
Garry Wills, *A Necessary Evil*

Requirements:

Presentation to begin two class meetings (more or less, depending on enrollment).  
Three written questions, each week that you are not presenting, based on that week's readings.  
Active participation in seminar discussions.  
A tension filled, intellectually challenging, *community building*, group-oral-final exam.

Schedule of Classes & Readings:

Sept. 5 - Introduction

Sept. 12 - John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapters I – IX (pp. 7 – 68) and Chapter XIX (pp. 107 – 124).

Sept. 19 - Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts" and Discourse on the Origins of Inequality."

Sept. 26 - Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Author's Preface and Introduction; Vol. I, Part 1: chapters 1-5.

Oct. 3 - *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part 2, chapters 1- 7

Oct. 10 - *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part 2, chapters 8 and 9, chapter 10 pp. 363 to the end, and "Conclusion."

Oct. 17 - Glendon, *Rights Talk*, Chapters 1 - 3 and Chapter 4 up to page 89.

Oct. 24 - Glendon, *Rights Talk*, remainder of Chapter 4 and Chapters 5 - 7.

Oct. 31 - Wills, *A Necessary Evil*

Nov. 7 - Wills, *A Necessary Evil*

Nov. 14 - Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* and Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus*

Nov. 28 - Bringing it all together: The Grand Synthesis

Dec. 5 - Final Exam