

Spring 2011, Political Science 100
First Year Seminar: Family Ties
Class: T/Th 11:00-12:15

Prof. Elizabeth Markovits
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Office Hours: by appt., M-Th

Course Description:

What is family? In this course, you will engage with a number of works of literature and moral philosophy in order to reflect on the ways the family shapes private and public life and is, in return, shaped by them. How does the family create and then influence the individual? What does it mean to be part of a family? What do individuals owe their families and are those obligations fair? How do we form families? Can the family insulate individuals from politics and society—in good ways and bad? Is political order like familial order? Are the state and society a threat or support for the family? As one of the most universal human experiences, family has meaning for every person. However, we do not often think systematically about its meaning. In this course, you will have the opportunity to do exactly that, bringing your own experiences into conversation with a number of classic and contemporary texts.

At the same time, this course is also an opportunity to develop your intellectual skills in a small class setting. We will focus on three particular goals: reading, speaking and writing. First, this course will help you learn to read. Of course, you are thinking—duh! I got into Mount Holyoke, I know how to read, Professor! But we all need help learning how to read in an academic context. You'll find that it's quite different from reading for pleasure and we'll learn what's special about academic reading and strategies to succeed at it. Second, you will develop your ability to engage in reasoned argumentation. This is not simply a matter of speaking a lot in class. Instead, I will grade you on your ability to express yourself clearly and convincingly, to draw on appropriate evidence, and to engage with your colleagues. Finally, you will learn to write by writing a lot. The goal here is to help you learn to write concise, clear, and interesting papers that use textual evidence to support your claims and arguments and that follow standard scholarly practices for using sources.

To these ends, this course has four goals. By the end of the semester, you will:

- be able to critically reflect on the nature of the family and its relationship to both the individual and to other social groupings
- hone your ability to read texts in an academic setting
- develop your oral argumentation skills
- become a mature, skillful writer, using appropriate citation styles

REQUIRED TEXTS:

The following books are available at The Odyssey:

Sophocles, *Antigone* (Hackett)
William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (Simon & Schuster)
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage)
Adrian LeBlanc, *Random Family* (Scribner)
Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (Pantheon)

Also, there are electronic reserve readings on Ella.

I've also arranged to have the most recent film version of *King Lear* available as streaming video for you. You can access this through Ella. The movie is not mandatory, but it might help you understand the play.

Purchase of these *particular* editions of the text is essential for completion of the course requirements; if you have trouble procuring your own copy of these particular editions, please see me. Always bring your readings to class, since you cannot participate fully in the discussions without the text (*and thus cannot receive full attendance credit*).

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

All of your work in this class must comply with the MHC Honor Code.

Students who need test or classroom accommodations due to a disability must be registered in advance with Disability Services, have spoken with Dr. John Body or Elizabeth Hogan, and have a letter from them confirming the needed accommodation. Confidentiality will be reserved in all cases.

ATTENDANCE:

Because this course is largely based on our discussions in class, regular attendance is extremely important. Of course, things come up and you may need to miss class occasionally. You don't have to give me a written excuse or tell me beforehand that you will be missing class; I leave it to your judgment. **However**, your final overall grade will be dropped 1 letter grade for every 4 absences throughout the semester (so from a B to a C), in addition to whatever toll such absences have on your participation grade.

Arriving to class sessions on time is also important. Therefore, every three late entrances to class will count as one absence.

GRADES:

This course is designed to help you think analytically and creatively about politics. To help you measure your progress, your final grade will be based on the following:

Participation: 20%

4 short papers: 60% (15% each)

Reflection Paper and Writing Portfolio: 20% (15% reflection paper, 5% revisions)

PARTICIPATION:

The quality of the class depends on your willingness to join the discussion. You will receive two participation grades over the course of the semester; 10% (of your final grade) before midterm, and 10% after midterm, for a total of 20% of your final grade. Please refer to the “Discussion Guidelines” for more information.

WRITING:

You will write several essays in this class. The essay questions are on the syllabus and I will provide more feedback and guidelines for these papers in class. Since these essays constitute a major part of your grade, please read the “Writing Guidelines” carefully and contact me with any questions.

In addition to the four required papers for this course, you will also complete two reflection essays. In the first version (1-2 pages, maximum), write about your understanding of the term “family.” Trace, if you can, events in your past that have influenced your views of this term. I will take anonymous excerpts from each paper to distribute in class. If you do not want me to include your excerpt, please let me know.

As part of the writing portfolio you turn in at the very end of the semester, you will revisit your original paper. In a new essay (2-3 pages), reflect on this semester. Has your understand of “family” changed during the semester? If so, in what ways? If not, why? Be very specific here, referencing particular authors and passages to make your points.

To help you with all this writing, we have a SAW mentor: Dying Wu (wu22d@mtholyoke.edu). Dying will help with writing workshops for this class and will be able to give you one-on-one help with your writing and speaking skills. This is a great opportunity to develop a strong foundation for your academic work in the future.

LATE WORK:

I expect that all work will be completed on time—I do not grant extensions outside of family emergencies (in which case you must email me as soon as possible; you should also contact your Class Dean at the same time).

If you fail to bring a draft of a paper for a writing workshop (or to submit one *by the start of class* via email or a friend with a hard copy, if you happen to be too ill to attend class), you will lose one letter grade from your final paper grade.

For final paper submission (usually one class period after Writing Workshops), I will subtract one letter grade for each 24-hour period after the start of the class in which the paper is due. Thus, if your paper ends up at B+ quality, but it is turned in at the end of class or the following day, up until the class time, the recorded grade would be a C+. If you are absent from class the day an assignment is due, it is your responsibility to make sure I receive your work before or at the beginning of class (Important: email is acceptable—just make sure you attach the electronic file AND cut-and-paste the text into the main window to avoid any problems. If you use email, I will confirm receipt of your work via email; if you do not receive a confirmation, I have not received the paper).

- 1/27: Syllabus review. *All students are responsible for the information covered today.*
After class: Complete online tutorial, "Proper Use of Sources"
<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/>
- 2/1: **Reflection Essay due: What Is Family? (1 page)**
- 2/3: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, Ch. 1-3; 12 (pp. 1-6; 21-22)
Kongzi (Confucius), *The Analects*, Book I-2 (pp. 1-7)
Is there a natural order to the family? Does that order then grow into political order?
- 2/8: Sophocles, *Antigone*, entire (pp. 1-58)
Is it right to value certain familial relationships over others?
- 2/10: Sophocles, *Antigone*
Should state or family duty come first?
- 2/15: The Trial of Antigone
- 2/17: **Writing Workshop**
Paper 1 due: Which is more important, state or family? (2 pages)
- 2/22: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*,
"Parental Affection," "Duty to Parents" (pp. 187-195)
Revised paper due
Is filial duty important? Are there limits?
- 2/24: Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act I
Does Cordelia do the right thing?
- 3/1: Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Acts II & III, entire
Why does Lear go mad?
- 3/3: Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act IV & V
Can we trust family?
- 3/8: **Writing Workshop**
Paper 2 due: Cordelia's letter to Lear (2 pages)
- 3/10: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, "Of Paternal Power"
(pp. 30-42)
Are there legitimate limits to parental power?
Revised paper due

-SPRING BREAK-

- 3/22: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (pp. 1-100)
Do we need family to survive?
- 3/24: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (pp. 101-195)
What does it mean to mother someone?
- 3/29: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (pp. 199-324)
Is redemption possible? For whom?
- 3/31*: **Writing Workshop**
Paper 3 due: What do parents owe children? (2 pages)
- 4/5: Trial of Sethe
Revised paper due
- 4/7: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto"
According to the authors, how does capitalism reshape the family?
- 4/12: Adrian LeBlanc, *Random Family* (pp. 3-136)
How does social context shape our experience of family?
- 4/14: Adrian LeBlanc, *Random Family* (pp. 139-276)
How do gender roles shape our experience of family?
- 4/19: Adrian LeBlanc, *Random Family* (pp. 279-404)
How does family history stick with us?
- 4/21*: **Writing Workshop**
Op-Ed letter due (2 pages)
- 4/26: Public policy debate
Revised Op-ed letter due
- 4/28: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (entire)
- 5/3: Last class
- 5/10: **Writing Portfolio Due, including final reflection (2-3 pages)**