

17.037/17.038 American Political Thought
Spring 2004

2/3/04 Student Lecture Notes

What is political thought, or political philosophy?

- Attempts of great thinkers to answer questions of their day.
- Example of the key questions:
 - o What are limits of government authority?
 - Balance between individual liberty v. the state
 - Citizens' social and political obligations
 - Balance between freedom v. equality
 - o What is the best way to organize political regimes?
 - Federalism
 - National identity
 - o What is the role of politics in daily life?
 - What level of participation is required?
 - How do we manage conflicts?

What is American political thought?

- American liberalism
 - o Strengths and simultaneous shortcomings (i.e., inequalities).
 - o Do liberal ideas dominate?

Theme of course: Role of ideas and ideologies in American politics