

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THOUGHT

Course Syllabus, Study guide

PS 003, section 1, Fall 2009

Course code: 41224

(T Th 730-845, DMH 149A)

Kenneth Peter

Phone: (408)924-5562

Email: kpeter@email.sjsu.edu

Office: Clark 402F

Office hours:

Tue, Thurs 9:00-10:00

Wed 2-3

Tue 12:30-2:30

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Many useful supplementary materials are posted on my website for this course:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/people/kenneth.peter/courses/pols003/>

I. Greensheet:

1. Course description.

Content:

Many of the political ideas which we take for granted were once new and controversial. This course seeks to reawaken many of the important debates which shaped our political heritage. By reading, discussing, and criticizing the substance of historical political ideas we gain the perspective necessary to question our own hidden assumptions, and perhaps to reform or change them.

This course will focus on four broad categories of political thought, each of which pursues different ends and utilizes different styles. The course will first look at the relationship between individual citizens and the societies in which they live. Is there a fundamental conflict between being a good person and being a good citizen? Next, the course will examine political ideals. What political arrangements would do the best job of fulfilling human potentials? Third, the course will examine theories of political power. How should we deal with the darker side of politics--the violence and coercion that lies behind the state? Finally, the course will conclude with politics and equality. How have reformers sought to justify greater equality in the human condition, especially for groups that have historically been deprived of equal social and political status?

Approach:

Political theory, while taught within political science departments, shares many similarities with literature, history, philosophy, and the humanities. It cultivates a kind of thinking more than it disseminates a body of knowledge. Students learn to criticize ideas, analyze texts, create theories, and construct arguments, among other things. Memorization skills and objective knowledge play little role in it. For these reasons, the course is well suited for students who wish to cultivate their writing, their analytic skills, their ability to appreciate literature, as well as their understanding of ethical, social, and political problems.

This course will require extensive reading, writing, and discussion--all designed to encourage you to think analytically, critically, and systematically about the ideas at hand. Many weeks, you will read 50 pages or more of moderately difficult material--from primary sources and not from textbooks. Sometimes this material is written in a style that is antiquated and difficult to understand. You will be rewarded for discussing this material in class. You will be required to write essays criticizing the political theories and analyzing the texts from which those theories are drawn. The professor will offer substantial assistance to help students learn how to read this material and how to write about it.

2. What requirements does this course fill? What prerequisites are suggested?

This is a lower division course, and so no prior background is assumed, and there are no prerequisites. If you are not a political science major, don't worry. Substantial numbers of non majors (appx. 75%) take this course, and they seem to do as well, on average, as the majors.

For General Education, this course satisfies the C2 "Letters" requirement of the GE core.

For Political Science majors, this course is a required "core" course for the B.A. in Political Science. For Political Science minors, this course may be counted towards the 6 units of lower division courses required for the minor. Majors may count this course both for their major and for the GE Core.

For all students, basic writing skills such as those taught in high school composition and English 1B are useful. We will spend considerable time improving writing, but the course will be difficult if you are not already accomplished at writing original essays.

3. Student ethics and responsibilities.

1. *Reading.* This is a reading course. Students should read each scheduled assignment prior to coming to class. Most students find they need to reread part or all of the material after the lecture, since the lecture helps them to further understand it, but reading it prior to the lecture helps students to be able to ask questions and even to listen intelligently. You will find that you cannot simply read the primary source materials just once—you must refer back to the texts repeatedly while fulfilling the assignments.
2. *Time commitment.* Students surveyed upon completion of this class report that they spend 2-4 hours a week completing the reading for this course. The standard rule of thumb for college level work is 2-3 hours of outside work per unit, meaning that a 3 unit class would demand 6-9 hours of outside work, with lower division classes on the lower end and upper division classes on the high end. Surveyed students overwhelmingly find that this course does not demand 9 hours of homework a week, but they do find that it demands more time than they are used to with some other college courses. Much will depend upon your reading speed and comprehension with difficult texts.
3. *Penalties for missed or later assignments.* It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements for any planned absences which will interfere with assignments, and to contact Prof. Peter at the first available opportunity concerning emergencies which cause a missed assignment.
 - a. *In class exams.* Students who miss in-class exams due to a verifiable emergency or University activity that cannot be changed will be allowed to take an alternate exam during a make-up period. Dr. Peter may request or independently seek verification. Otherwise, the exam will not be made up and a 0 will be recorded.
 - b. *Writing assignments turned in late.* Writing assignments turned in late without a verifiable excuse (as for exams, see above) will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade if turned in before an intervening weekend. For each intervening weekend, there will be an additional 1/3 of a grade deduction. Late assignments will also have the lowest priority for receiving full feedback and commentary from the Professor. Papers turned in after the last day of class may not be accepted, resulting in a failing grade for the paper and possibly the course.
4. *Cheating and plagiarism.*

“Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at

http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/students/index.html.

All students are responsible for informing themselves about these rules

Plagiarism is a topic that can be confusing to uninformed students. For papers that you write outside of class, **you should credit every source you consult by listing it in a bibliography**, whether you quote the source or not. Any source you paraphrase, precis, quote or summarize must be directly credited with a footnote of some sort to prove that you are not attempting to take credit for someone else's work—note that this is not only direct quotes. In this course some footnoting shortcuts will be offered to make your job easier, but the basic principle of always giving credit to the sources you consult never changes.

Note in particular that use of the internet qualifies in the same way as consultation with any other source—internet materials must be fully cited if you have consulted them. Dr. Peter reserves the right to verify the originality of papers.

“Recycling” papers from other courses, even if they are your own original work, is not acceptable. If you have written a paper on a similar topic I am willing to consult with you to find ways to adjust course requirements to incorporate, expand, and build on your previous work.

5. *Collaboration.* Students may collaborate in their studies and are encouraged to do so. However, no collaboration during in-class exams will be allowed. In their studies, collaborating students should not go so far that they memorized answers "cloned" from a single model. A good way to study together without exceeding the boundaries of appropriate collaboration is to discuss possible answers orally but not to share written sample answers.
6. *Courtesy.* Proper classroom etiquette includes arriving on time and staying for the full lecture, refraining from distracting other students during the lecture, listening attentively until the professor dismisses the class, and treating the opinions of other students with respect. The professor reserves the right to deduct from the overall grade for particularly egregious examples of poor classroom etiquette, and to reward students for outstanding displays of collegiality.
7. *Attendance.* Regular, on-time attendance is especially important for these reasons:
 - a) Lectures help explain the original-source readings we do. Most students report that they have a difficult time understanding the readings without the help of the lectures.
 - b) Lectures often cover materials completely independent and/or supplementary to the texts.
 - c) Lectures provide an opportunity for questions, participation, and getting motivated to do the rest of the work.
 - d) Often, important announcements are made at the beginning of class--sometimes clarifying or changing assignments.
 - e) Participation credit is awarded to students who consistently and effectively participate. One cannot participate while absent.
 - f) If you are absent, it is your responsibility to get notes on what you missed. If an assignment or the syllabus was changed during your absence, you are responsible for finding this out.
 - g) If attendance in the class becomes a serious problem, Dr. Peter reserves the right to change course requirements and institute more in-class evaluations.
8. *Grading policy.* Incompletes, academic renewal, course drops, “WU”s vs “F”s.
 - a) Sometimes students “get in over their heads” and need alternatives to finishing the course. I will be happy to issue an incomplete if 1) a student has made arrangements for making up the course by coming to me and filling out the department incomplete form prior to the time of the final exam, 2) the student has completed 2/3 of the assignments, and 3) the student offers a good reason. However, be aware that you will have just one year to make up the assignments or the incomplete automatically turns into an ‘F’. University rules specifically prohibit professors from giving incompletes to students who need to attend a significant portion of the course to be able to finish it.
 - b) An alternative for students who do not qualify for the incomplete (for example, if you have done less than 2/3 of the assignments or you need to attend a lot of lectures) is to retake the course under academic renewal. You are limited to a certain number of courses over your college career, but this can be an excellent option in certain situations.
 - c) I will cooperate with any student wishing to drop the course for any reason. However, the University has adopted strict rules against dropping a course after the first few weeks unless you have very compelling evidence (death certificate, etc.) I disagree with the policy but cannot change it.

- d) I am required to issue “WU”s (Withdrawal Unauthorized) to students who do not drop the course but who stop coming to class and doing the assignments. I give “WU”s to those students who “disappear” after doing no graded assignments, and “F”s to those students who “disappear” after doing at least one graded assignment. But both grades are equally bad, so avoid them both!
 - e) Check the Catalog for the latest academic rules that might affect you.
9. Disabilities. “If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with DRC to establish a record of their disability.”

4. Assessment of student learning

Criteria: To see the specific criteria I use for assessing your progress, as well as for helpful suggestions on the assignments, see the relevant sections of the online supplementary materials. It is always a good idea to read these materials before starting on an assignment.

List of Assignments:

Midterms.

There will be two midterms, one for each of the first two units of the course. The midterms will use the same format and will emphasize short interpretations of passages of primary text. A study guide appears in the online supplementary materials with a list of quotations drawn from the readings. 7 of those quotations will be randomly selected and will appear on the midterm. Students will be asked to interpret and analyze 5 of the 7 in one paragraph each. Each paragraph should be a small essay structured in the following way: 1) give the context of the quotation, such as who wrote it and what part it played in the longer text from which it was drawn, 2) interpret the likely meaning of the quotation, given your understanding of the author and his or her theory that lies behind it, and 3) offer a critique, in which you agree or disagree with the substance of the quote, or else you offer a reason for why this quote is significant or meaningful to us today. (See examples in the online supplementary materials.)

Course Essays.

There will be two course essays, one for each of the last two units of the course. Each essay must answer the following four part question:

1. Take the theme of this unit (“Political Power” for unit 3, “Equality” for unit 4) and take an argumentative stand for or against some aspect of this theme. This will mean that you will need to narrow the theme down to a manageable argument. Write an opening paragraph that captures attention, outlines the paper, and concludes in a thesis statement stating the argumentative stand that you will seek to support
2. Write a series of body paragraphs supporting the stand you took in your opening paragraph. Base each body paragraph around ONE quotation drawn from the readings. Write at least 8 body paragraphs—this means a minimum of 8 quotations. In the 3rd unit paper you must use quotations and analysis from Machiavelli and Madison. In the 4th unit paper you must use quotations and analysis from Rousseau and 3 of these five authors: Marx, Douglass, de Beauvoir, Jefferson, and Vonnegut.

3. Conclude your essay by suggesting how the argument you made or the insight you generated has significance for us. How should our behavior or attitudes change if we accept your argument?
4. **IMPORTANT:** Construct the entire essay around the advice given in online the online supplementary materials.
5. Format your essays in this way:
 - The essay should be 5-7 pages (1250-1750 words) in length and typed/word-processed.
 - Use 1" margins on all sides.
 - NUMBER your pages.
 - Double space the lines.
 - Use 12 pt. font.
 - I read papers anonymously. Do not place your name on pages bearing text (no headers or footers.) Instead, use a title page for personal information that can be folded back while I am reading the essay. This also means that you should not bind the spine—staple the paper in the upper left corner only.
 - Proofread and edit your paper. Points WILL be deducted for grammatical errors, spelling errors, problems with sentence structure or style, paragraph structure, etc.

Oral Participation:

Oral participation will not be directly graded. Students who regularly attend and do not participate will be treated neutrally when it comes to the oral participation bonus. Students who regularly and constructively participate in class will receive a bonus to their final course GPA of up to .33 (1/3 of a grade.) This is often crucial, for example, in moving from a B+ to an A-, or an A- to an A in the course. Students who exhibit poor collegiality may have a deduction to their grade of up to one full letter grade or more, in extreme cases and after warnings from the Professor.

Grading Matrix

- 1st Midterm 100 pts.
- 2nd Midterm 100 pts
- 1st Course Essay 100 pts.
- 2nd Course Essay 120 pts.

TOTAL POINTS FOR COURSE: 420

Oral participation + or - 1/3 of a grade on the final calculation.

Total points in the course: 420. The percentage each student earns of the 420 points will be calculated and a letter grade determined on the basis of this percentage. The minimum letter grade (prior to oral participation) earned will be determined on the standard 90-100 = various As, 80-89 = various Bs, 70-79 various Cs, 60-69 various Ds, <60 = F.

In addition, Professor Peter will note if students improve substantially over the length of the course, so that an outstanding 4th assignment can be weighted slightly more heavily than a less-than-outstanding 1st.

5. Texts.

1. Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (Hackett.)
2. More, *Utopia* (Penguin.)
3. Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Hackett–Wootton Translation)
4. Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, (Hackett.)

5. Course reader, selected readings compiled by the professor.

6. GE Criteria: Student Learning

This course satisfies the “Letters” Category of the GE Core. So that you know exactly what this course must accomplish, and judge for yourself if we succeed, following are the requirements for all courses in this category. I omit those sections that do not pertain to this course:

Letters courses will enable students to:

- recognize how significant works illuminate enduring human concerns;

An example of an assignment that addresses this learning objective are the midterms, which ask you to contextualize, interpret, and critically analyze the significance of quotations drawn from a wide range of the most famous pieces of literature focused on politics—Plato, Thomas More, M.L.King, to name just a few. You will be asked to comment on the significance these works hold for understanding enduring political problems that continue to exist today.

- respond to such works by writing both research-based critical analyses and personal responses;

Examples of both of these forms of writing can be found within the midterms as well as the out-of-class essays required for this course. You will be asked both to offer a research-based critical analysis—incorporating information from lecture and elsewhere that serves to illuminate the context, intellectual history, and philosophical/literary form and content of the piece in question. In each midterm answer as well as in your critical essay, you will be asked to speak in your own voice and offer your own personal reaction to the text(s) you have just analyzed. You must answer the “so what” question: “What difference should it make to me or others if my analysis of this text turns out to be correct?”

- and write clearly and effectively.

Your writing in this course will be assessed for both form and content. It is expected to be clear, concise, and correct. 25% of the course essay is graded for mechanics, 25% for organization, 25% for effective use of course materials, and 25% for insight. In practice, form and content in a student essay cannot be separated any more than can form and content in a famous piece of literature. The best ideas fall flat when they are not presented effectively. Please see the online supplementary materials or the professor for additional advice. Be aware that you will be doing far in excess of the minimum of 1500 words required by the GE criteria.

II. Weekly Study Guide and Calendar:

A weekly listing of reading assignments and other assignments.

Unit 1: Liberty of Conscience

Week One August 25, 27

Reading: Read Plato's Apology (The 2nd Dialogue in the "The Trial and Death of Socrates: pp. 21-37.)

Organization of the class; Introduction to Political Thought
Introduction to the Greeks; Introduction to Socrates

1. With what is Socrates charged, and what do you think is the real reason he is on trial?
2. Why did Socrates defend himself the way he did? Would you have mounted a different defense? What techniques did he use as a speaker to get his points across?

Week Two September 1, 3

Reading: Finish reading Plato's Apology, read all of Plato's Crito, read the short selection from the Phaedo (pp. 38-58.)

1. What is your analysis of the outcome of the trial?
2. Explain what happened in the "penalty phase" of the trial. What did you think of the first penalty that Socrates proposed for himself?
3. Why didn't Socrates escape from prison when he had the chance?
4. Should we always obey the state even when we feel it is making a terribly wrong decision?
5. How does Socrates comfort his friends at the time of his death? If you have experienced the death of a loved one, how do you feel about the death of Socrates?

Week Three September 8, 10

Reading: J.S. Mill's On Liberty, Chapter II "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion" in reader. (Hint: Read the last few pages of the Chapter first. He summarizes his argument there. Then read the whole chapter to look for his (lengthy) examples.)

Questions:

1. Do you agree with the several reasons Mill gives for allowing others to speak and think freely, even when we are sure they are wrong?
2. What do you make of Mill's references to Socrates and Jesus? What are all the points he wishes to make by raising these examples?
3. What are the specific reasons Mill thinks we should always know both sides of an argument?
4. Examine the structure of Mill's essay. Granted, the paragraphs and examples are long, but can you outline the sequence of arguments he makes and see how they fit together?

Week Four **September 15, 17**

Reading: **Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail."**

Questions:

1. What literary techniques does King use to give his letter emotional impact in the reader?
2. How can we distinguish between just and unjust laws?
3. How does King tailor his rhetoric to walk the line between the two alternatives he finds on his right and his left?

Midterm for Unit 1 Thursday September 17.

Unit 2: Political Ideals

Week Five **September 22, 24**

NOTE: Tuesday September 22 was added at the last minute as a mandatory furlough day. Campus will be closed and I am not allowed to present a lecture on that day. However, the assignments remain the same—please keep up with the reading and I will attempt to get us caught up in lecture on subsequent days. Thursday we will discuss Pericles and perhaps begin More.

Reading: **(Tuesday) Pericles' "Funeral Oration" in reader.**
(Thursday) More's Utopia Book I two short sections:
 p. 43-47 Begins: "I once happened to be dining with the Cardinal".
 p. 63-68 Begins "That's exactly what I was saying-there's no room at court for philosophy."

Questions:

1. What sort of a speaker is Pericles? What techniques does he use to hold the attention of his audience?
2. What are Pericles's ideals of Athenian society?
3. How do the ideals of Athenian society espoused by Pericles compare with modern ideals?
4. How does More link economics and crime in Book 1?
5. What is the proper role of a King's advisor, according to More in Book I?

Week Six **September 29, October 1**

Reading: **More's Utopia, Book II**

Questions:

1. Why does More talk about such things as the street grids in towns? Is this a symbol for something else?
2. What do the Utopians do with gold? Why?
3. What is the Utopian attitude toward pleasure? What sort of ethical system do they have?
4. What do you think of the roles of men, of women, of slaves, of prisoners, of outsiders, in More's Utopia?
5. What do you think of the way More concludes Book II? What is the purpose of a utopia that, by definition, can never be achieved? How does More utilize the literary device: *irony*.

Week Seven **October 6, 8**

Reading: Ursula LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk away from Omelas” in reader.

1. Would you walk away from Omelas? How does a disutopia serve some of the same purposes as a utopia?
2. What does LeGuin mean with the phrase “the banality of evil” ?
3. How does LeGuin’s use of the short story impact the message she seeks to communicate? How is the form of this story related to its content?

Midterm for Unit 2 Thursday October 8.

Unit 3: Political Power

Week Eight ***October 13, 15***

Reading: Machiavelli, Letter to Francesco Vettori;
The Prince, Dedication, Chs. 1, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15-17.

Questions:

1. What examples of irony can you find in Machiavelli’s writing?
2. Does Machiavelli's statement that cruelty can be "used well" bother you?
3. Does Machiavelli admire Aogthocles? Compare this man from Chapter 8 to Cesare Borgia from Chapter 7.
4. Why must a Prince know how to be bad?
5. Is it better to be loved or feared?

Week Nine ***October 20, 22***

Reading: Machiavelli, The Prince, Chs. 18, 20-23, 25, 26.

Questions:

1. Why must a Prince be both a fox and a lion?
2. How should a Prince deal with fortune? How does Machiavelli’s depiction that “Fortune is a woman” strike you? Could feminist theory help us to understand potential weaknesses in Machiavelli’s theory here?
3. What is your interpretation of the book in light of the final chapter?

Week Ten ***October 27, 29***

Reading: Madison Federalist No. 10, 51 (in reader)
(Hint: don’t be thrown off by the somewhat archaic language. Make sure you understand Madison’s definition of faction, and the rest of No. 10 will be easier to understand. No. 51 is much easier to read and understand, incidentally. If you get discouraged with 10, go on to 51 and come back to 10 after lecture.)

Questions:

1. What does Madison mean by "faction" in Federalist No. 10?
2. What is Madison's attitude towards democracy and towards the people in Federalist No. 10? What does he mean by “refine and enlarge the public views”?

3. What is the view of human nature in Madison's No. 51? How are "checks and balances" a part of that view of human nature?
4. Without meaning it in a pejorative sense, could these papers be called "propaganda?" What is the purpose of these writings?

Unit 4: Equality

1st Course Essay (for Unit 3) due 7:30am Tuesday November 3

Week Eleven November 3, 5

Reading: Rousseau: Preface and begin Part I.

Questions:

1. How is human nature like the statue of Glaucus?
2. Does Rousseau claim that the 2nd Discourse is an accurate history of human development? Then what is its purpose?
3. What kind of a moral being is the original human being?
4. Where does language come from?
5. What does Rousseau think about "instincts" such as selfishness and compassion?

Week Twelve November 10, 12

Reading: Rousseau, finish Part I and all of Part II.

Questions:

1. Where does private property come from, according to Rousseau? Is private property a fair institution? How would you sum up the origin of inequality, according to Rousseau?
2. How the development of agriculture, industry, and urbanization change human nature?
3. How do human beings get into the ridiculous position of always pretending to be what they are not? Why can't we just "be ourselves.?"

Week Thirteen November 17, 19

Reading: Marx, selections from The Communist Manifesto, in reader

Questions:

1. How is Marx's Manifesto written? To what audience do you think it is meant to appeal?
2. What is class and how is it related to Marx's sense of history? Why does he spend so much time explaining the transformation from feudalism to capitalism, and so little time on communism? What does he say is wrong with capitalism?
3. Does the list of reforms at the end of the Manifesto seem radical to you? Is Marx really behind all the 20th century totalitarian Marxisms that have attempted to rule in his name?

Week Fourteen November 24 (Thursday is Thanksgiving)

Reading: (Tuesday) "Declaration of Independence" in reader.

1. What is the kind of equality discussed by the Declaration of Independence? What did Jefferson mean by "all men are created equal"?

2. What is a social contract, and how did Jefferson employ this idea to justify the break with England?

Week Fifteen December 1, 3

Reading: **(Tuesday) Frederick Douglass’s “Fourth of July Oration” in reader.**
(Thursday) Simone de Beauvoir’s “Conclusion” to *The Second Sex* in reader.

Questions:

1. What did the Fourth of July symbolize for Douglass?
2. Did Douglass want liberty, equality, or both?
3. What is the difference between being female and being a woman, for de Beauvoir?
4. What is the nature of equality for de Beauvoir? Are there ways in which her message would appeal to men?

Week Sixteen December 8 (Tuesday is the last day of class.)

Reading: **Vonnegut’s Harrison Bergeron (in reader)**

Concluding Course Lecture

Questions:

1. What is Vonnegut trying to say about equality in this (very) short story? Can equality be taken too far? What kind of equality is he talking about?
2. How will an understanding of political theory help you lead your *public* life?

FINAL EXAMINATION

2nd Course Essay (for Unit 4) due 9:30am Friday December 11.

The final exam = the 4th unit essay. The exam period is 7:15-9:30 on Friday December 11. If you want to turn in your essay before the end of the examination period you may do so. I will come to the exam room and collect essays from 9:15-9:30 at the end of the examination period.