

Introduction to Political Theory
POS 103 (4645), Spring 2011
LC 23, 1:15 - 2:35

Professor M. Schoolman
Department of Political Science
Milne 218; Humanities 016

Office Hours:

Humanities 016
Tuesday, 11am – 1pm.

Milne 218
Tues., 3-5pm;
Thurs., 10am - 12:30pm.

Introduction to Political Theory
Course Description

The history of western political thought begins with the works of Homer and extends into the present day. It is arguably the richest literary tradition in the western world, meaning that it has formulated the questions and answers to the questions that have dominated western thinking throughout its history. This course will focus on one of the central questions in the history of western political thought – namely, what is modern democracy? In particular, we will be concerned with the nature of democratic culture and how it shapes a democratic people. Accordingly, we will ask, what, precisely, is a “democratic culture,” how is a democratic culture formed, and how does a democratic culture form a “democratic people”? Our focus will be on America during the nineteenth century, a time when democracy in America developed robustly from the fledgling democratic society characterizing it at the time of the American Revolution. While three of our most important readings will be by great American thinkers, Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau, the three readings by great European thinkers, Tocqueville, Marx & Engels, and Mill, bear centrally on our principal topics of investigation. Our course will combine lecture, discussion, and close reading of texts. (General Education: Humanities; Europe)

Course and Learning Objectives

The goal of this course is to teach students how to carefully read and interpret texts, identify key concepts on which theoretical arguments are based, and how to use these arguments and concepts to develop critical analyses and understandings of democratic societies and their politics. Students will be taught to think about the complex matter of what counts as politics and how the definition of politics changes for political theory as modern democratic societies evolve beyond the fledgling form they assumed in the early modern, revolutionary period. These objectives will contribute to teaching students how to formulate concepts and arguments of their own. This course fulfills the General Education requirement in the categories of Humanities and Europe. Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of what is understood to be quintessentially “human”: studying language, texts, thought, and culture; their definition, interpretation, and historical development; and their reflection of human values, beliefs, and traditions. POS 103 explicates the underlying assumptions, methods of study, practices, theories, and disputes appropriate to the history of political thought through readings on American and European history, politics, culture, and society.

Course Requirements and Grading

A student's grade for POS 103, Introduction to Political Theory, is based on the combined grades for examinations and class participation in the discussion sections of the course. There will be a midterm and final examination each worth 35% of a student's final grade. Students are also expected to attend and to participate on a regular basis in their discussion sections. Participation in the discussion section is worth 30% of the final grade; attendance will be taken each class. Every student is expected to participate in class on a regular basis, posing questions, answering questions, contesting or arguing on behalf of the views of other students in the course and, certainly, challenging the views of the instructor. As discussion section meets but once each week during the course of the semester, which means that a class absence amounts to missing a full week of class, students are discouraged from missing more than one discussion class during the term. Additional, unexcused class absences are grounds for deregistration and failure.

Students are permitted to bring beverages to class, although no food of any sort is permitted. Cell phones are to be turned off upon entering class. Students who use computers for note taking are not permitted to use their computers for any other application during class time. Students must arrive to class on time and be seated by 1:15pm. Students unable to arrive at class on time should not take this course, as the material missed in lecture cannot be made up.

Course Readings

Students are not required to purchase texts for this course as all readings are posted on Blackboard for POS 103, Introduction to Political Theory, Spring 2011. On Blackboard for POS 103 students will find:

Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Selections from volume II.

Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (an essay)

, "Song of Myself" (a poem)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (an essay)

, "Experience" (an essay)

, "The American Scholar" (an essay)

, "The Poet" (an essay)

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" (an article)

, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (an essay)

, "Estranged Labor"

Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (part I of an unpublished manuscript)

Henry David Thoreau, "On Civil Disobedience" (an article)

, "Slavery in Massachusetts" (an article)

Weekly Assignments

1/20. Thursday. Course Introduction.

1/25. Tuesday. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 1-26, Preface thru First Book, Ch. X.

1/27. Thursday. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 26-56, First Book, Ch. XIII thru Second Book, Ch. VI.

2/1. Tuesday. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 57-86, Second Book, Ch. VII thru Third Book, Ch. V.

2/3. Thursday. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 86-115, Third Book, Ch. 8 thru Fourth Book, Ch. VI.

2/8. Tuesday. Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, pp. 1-36.

2/10. Thursday. Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, pp. 37-72.

2/15. Tuesday. Whitman, "Song of Myself," verses 1 thru 30.

2/17. Thursday. Whitman, "Song of Myself," verses 31 thru end.

2/22-2/24. No Classes, Winter Break.

3/1. Tuesday. Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

3/3. Thursday. Emerson, "Experience"

3/8. Tuesday. Emerson, "The American Scholar"

3/10. Thursday. Emerson, "The Poet"

3/15. Tuesday. Midterm review

3/17. Thursday. Midterm Examination.

3/22. Tuesday. Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 1.

3/24. Thursday. Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 2.

3/29. Tuesday. Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 3.

3/31. Thursday. Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 4-5.

4/5. Tuesday. Marx, "The Jewish Question" (*Marx-Engles Readings*)

4/7. Thurs. Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" & "Estranged Labor"
(*Marx-Engles Readings*)

4/12. Tuesday. Marx, *The German Ideology*, part 1, pp. (*Marx-Engles Readings*)

4/14. Thursday. Marx, *The German Ideology*, part 1, pp. (*Marx-Engles Readings*)

4/19 - 4/21. No classes, Spring Break.

4/26. Tuesday. Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"

4/28. Thursday. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts"

5/3. Tuesday. Review & Summary. 5/5. Thursday. Final class, final questions.