

**SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY
POLITICAL SCIENCE 275.01
INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY
FALL, 2005
M.W. 14:10-15:25; ROOM THORNTON 335;
3 UNITS**

POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJOR ROLE: CORE REQUIREMENT

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| Professor: | Joel Kassiola |
| Campus Office: | HSS 359; BSS College Dean's Office |
| Campus Telephone: | 415.338.1846 |
| E-mail: | kassiola@sfsu.edu |
| Webpage: | http://bss.sfsu.edu/kassiola |
| Office Hours: | Usually after class: 15:25-17:00 M.W. and 16:00-17:00 T.Th. and F.; and by appointment at Dean's Office (or by telephone 415.338.1846) |

Course Description:

Prerequisite: Political Science 200 or equivalent.

Competing traditions of political theory: the foundation of political thought; nature and scope of politics.

Fall 2005 Learning Objectives:

This semester Political Science 275's main learning objective will be to introduce students to the nature of one of the oldest forms of Western thought: political theory. This will be accomplished by engaging in theorizing about the nature of the good life, good society, and how to achieve them. These are the same goals that the founders of political theory: Socrates and Plato sought to achieve nearly 2,500 years ago.

As in all of my courses in political theory, Political Science 275 will aim to improve class members's ability to read and write—critically or philosophically—by discussing in class the meaning and acceptability of the challenging theoretical texts and by detailed assessment of written rationally persuasive essays.

The usual historical approach to this type of course consists of reading and discussing brief sections of the political theoretical works from Plato to Marx, wherein the works of the great political theorists that form the canon of the political theory tradition are discussed. These theorists include: Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx, and John Stuart Mill. Rather than take this long-standing approach consisting of reading theories by others—no matter how great--about politics, I believe it is more valuable and important for introductory students to think systematically and deeply in politics themselves.

Therefore, the reading by Leslie Paul Thiele, **THINKING POLITICS: PERSPECTIVES IN ANCIENT, MODERN, AND POSTMODERN POLITICAL THEORY**, Second Edition, will provide the class members critical themes to stimulate their political thinking, and to demonstrate the vital role of politics and political theory to both society and individuals. We shall use the ideas of the political theorists from the entire history of Western political theory: from the ancient Greeks (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), right through the medieval period (Saints Augustine and Aquinas) and the founders of modern political theory (Machiavelli and Hobbes), and culminating in the contemporary postmodern theories that emphasize the importance of Otherness and identity by focusing upon race, gender, and class (theorists of Difference, Feminism and Marxism).

The role of political values and value inquiry to the nature of political theory as well as the central political theory issue of human nature and the quality of life for citizens will be emphasized. Regarding the latter issue, one of the most important elements of our human nature is our morality, the quality of human life—are people flourishing or suffering from misery. In the second volume for the course, **SUFFERING, POLITICS, POWER: A GENEALOGY IN MODERN POLITICAL THEORY** by Cynthia Halpern, members of the course will consider how political theorists have reflected upon the political ideas that structure people's lives, for better or worse, throughout Western thought. While not a topic for casual conversation or even serious thought in contemporary society for many people, the quality of our political ideas and our reasoning about them are critically important to how people live—or even if they live! Thus, it should be recognized that clear and penetrating thinking about politics is necessary because it often involves matters of life and death, and the quality of people's lives. What could be more important?

Organization of Course

The course shall be organized like a seminar discussion group even though there shall be more members than the usual small number of students in a seminar. Students will be expected to do the reading before class and come prepared to participate in class discussion where we shall all try to learn from each other on the fundamentally important topics to the human condition that constitute the subject matter of political theory.

While serious and challenging, this course and the subject matter of political theory can change your thinking and your life! I look forward to an intellectually exciting semester of learning about and engaging in political theory.

Required Texts:

Halpern, Cynthia. **SUFFERING, POLITICS, POWER: A GENEALOGY IN MODERN POLITICAL THEORY.** Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. pb.

Thiele, Leslie Paul. **THINKING POLITICS: PERSPECTIVES IN ANCIENT, MODERN, AND POSTMODERN POLITICAL THEORY. Second Edition.** Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 2003. pb.

Course Themes and Readings:

1. *The Nature of Political Theory*

Thiele: Preface, Introduction and Chapter 1: pp. ix-x, xi-xv, 1-25.

2. *How to Write Rationally Persuasive Papers*

Kassiola, Joel: “Rationally Persuasive Writing is Like House Painting: It’s All in the Preliminaries” [to be distributed in class and also on Instructor’s webpage]

3. *Human Nature and Its Relevance to Political Theory*

Thiele: Chapter 2: pp. 26-45.

4. *Politics, Human Conflict and Power (and Authority)*

Thiele: Chapter 3: pp. 46-64.

Kassiola, Joel: “Power and Authority on the Belt Parkway,” [Available on Instructor’s Webpage]

5. *Modernity versus Postmodernity*

Thiele: Chapter 4: pp. 65-99.

6. *The Significance of Identity and Difference to Politics*

Thiele: Chapter 5: pp. 100-154.

7. *Ancient Soulcraft versus Modern Statecraft*

Thiele: Chapter 6: pp. 155-215.

8. *What is Irony and Why is it Politically Important?*

Thiele: Chapter 7: pp. 216-239.

9. *The Essential Importance of Political Theory to Humanity*

Thiele: Conclusion: pp. 240-243.

10. *An Introduction to the Subject of Politics, Suffering and Political Theory*

Halpern: Introduction: pp. 1-22

11. *Suffering in a Modern Secular World vs. the Pre-Modern Religious Perspective of Martin Luther*

Halpern: Chapter 1: pp. 23-54.

12. *Suffering and the Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes*
Halpern: Chapters 2-5; pp. 55-119.
13. *Suffering and the Political Theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*
Halpern: Chapters 6-8; pp. 121-166.
14. *Suffering and the Political Theory of Friedrich Nietzsche*
Halpern: Chapters 9-12; pp. 167-270.

Additional Information:

A. Components of Course Grade:

The components of the final grade for this course will be:

1. performance on written essays (50% +,-); Class members will be asked to write rationally persuasive essays defending their chosen position on issue of their definition drawn from the readings and class discussion.
2. open-book final examination (20%+,-); essay question(s) based on all of the readings and class discussion.
3. quizzes (20 % +,-); multiple choice questions based on selected portions of the readings.
4. reading questions (10% +,-); answers to four questions to be submitted prior to the class when readings are to be discussed:
 - A) What is one main idea or position in the assigned reading?
 - B) How does the author rationally support this idea or position with evidence?
 - C) What is your assessment of the author's view?
 - D) What evidence would you offer to support your own assessment?