PLSC 100: POLITICAL THEORY

Professor Robert Mayer  J-Term 2015

DESCRIPTION
Political theorists are concerned with the way things ought to be. Their task is to identify the best policy option in any given case. In this introductory course we will survey the political ideas of a number of important modern thinkers. Their views are scattered across the political spectrum, from left to right. Our task will be to grasp the contribution each makes to the history of political thought and to critically assess their ideas. This course is an option in the “Philosophical Knowledge” section of the core curriculum.

REQUIRED BOOK

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Seven tests, seven forum posts, and two short essays, plus attendance during seven online synchronous sessions. Instructions for these assignments are posted at the Sakai course web site.

Students will accumulate points over the course of the term. See the guide posted at the course web site for details. The maximum number of points students may earn during the term is 700. This total does not include extra-credit points. The cut-off points for the letter grades assigned at the end of the term are as follows: A=658; A-=637; B+=616; B=595; B-=574; C+=553; C=532; C-=511; D+=490; D=469.

PLAGIARISM
Any student who plagiarizes all or part of an essay in this course, or who cheats in any way, will receive zero points for the assignment. The infraction will also be reported to the Dean’s Office. For details, see the statement posted at the course web site.

COURSE WEB SITE
Many of the materials you will need to complete this course are posted on Sakai, Loyola’s online learning system. The web address is https://sakai.luc.edu. At the course web site you will find a copy of the syllabus, reading excerpts, reading guides, and assignment instructions, plus a calendar and the discussion forum.

SYNCHRONOUS SESSIONS
The online synchronous sessions will be conducted through Adobe Connect, which can be accessed from the Sakai course web site. See the course web site for a schedule of meetings, system requirements, and instructions. Students may earn extra-credit points for participating in these online class sessions.

OFFICE HOURS AND EMAIL
I will be available for consultation at the course web site through Adobe Connect on weekdays, from 6:00pm to 7:00pm CST, or at other times by appointment only. My email address is rmayer@luc.edu. I encourage you to contact me if you have questions about the course materials or the graded assignments. I will check my email frequently and reply to you as quickly as possible. Students should check the course web site and their Loyola email box daily during the J-Term for announcements and messages.
CORE CURRICULUM
This course is an option in the “Philosophical Knowledge” section of the new core curriculum. The course is designed to achieve certain “Learning Outcomes” and to enhance “Skill Development.”

LEARNING OUTCOMES
Students in this course will gain an understanding of theoretical questions and traditions. Readings and assignments will teach students:

- to grasp different approaches to normative questions;
- to compare and contrast several major schools of political thought;
- to articulate the implicit assumptions underlying normative claims;
- to understand the historical or theoretical context of a theorist’s text.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT
This course will reinforce two skills associated with the Core: “Critical Thinking and Dispositions” and “Ethical Awareness and Decision-Making.”

Students will develop critical thinking skills by learning:

- to undertake the close reading of primary texts
- to identify assumptions implicit in a text
- to compare and contrast different texts
- to assess alternative interpretations of texts;
- to make arguments in defense of particular normative positions.

Students will gain ethical awareness by learning:

- to identify the norms guiding a theorist’s work;
- to compare and contrast alternative ethical positions;
- to evaluate ethical claims;
- to assess various political practices.
WEEK #1

DECEMBER 29  THOMAS HOBBES

READING #2: Hobbes Excerpt (posted on Sakai).
LECTURE: Hobbes and Nature (posted on Sakai)
FORUM POST: Due before 4:00pm CST (post on Sakai).
ONLINE CLASS: From 7:00-8:00pm CST (through Adobe Connect).
ONLINE TEST: Available at 8:00pm CST (on Sakai).

DECEMBER 30  JOHN LOCKE

READING #1: Klosko, *History of Political Thought*: pp. 113-164.
READING #2: Locke Excerpt (posted on Sakai).
LECTURE: Locke and Nature (posted on Sakai).
FORUM POST: Due before 4:00pm CST (post on Sakai).
ONLINE CLASS: From 7:00-8:00pm CST (through Adobe Connect).
ONLINE TEST: Available at 8:00pm CST (on Sakai).

DECEMBER 31  NO CLASS

JANUARY 1  NO CLASS

JANUARY 2  JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

READING #2: Rousseau Excerpt (posted on Sakai).
LECTURE: Rousseau and Nature (posted on Sakai).
FORUM POST: Due before 4:00pm CST (post on Sakai).
ONLINE CLASS: From 7:00-8:00pm CST (through Adobe Connect).
ONLINE TEST: Available at 8:00pm CST (on Sakai).

JANUARY 3  NO CLASS

JANUARY 4  NO CLASS

ESSAY #1: DUE BEFORE 1:00PM CST
WEEK #2

JANUARY 5  
EDMUND BURKE

READING #2:  Burke Excerpt (posted on Sakai).
LECTURE:  Burke and the Right to Vote (posted on Sakai).
FORUM POST:  Due before 4:00pm CST (post on Sakai).
ONLINE CLASS:  From 7:00-8:00pm CST (through Adobe Connect).
ONLINE TEST:  Available at 8:00pm CST (on Sakai).

JANUARY 6  
JOHN STUART MILL

READING #2:  Mill Excerpt (posted on Sakai).
LECTURE:  Mill and the Right to Vote (posted on Sakai).
FORUM POST:  Due before 4:00pm CST (post on Sakai).
ONLINE CLASS:  From 7:00-8:00pm CST (through Adobe Connect).
ONLINE TEST:  Available at 8:00pm CST (on Sakai).

JANUARY 7  
GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL

READING #2:  Hegel Excerpt (posted on Sakai).
LECTURE:  Hegel and History (posted on Sakai).
FORUM POST:  Due before 4:00pm CST (post on Sakai).
ONLINE CLASS:  From 7:00-8:00pm CST (through Adobe Connect).
ONLINE TEST:  Available at 8:00pm CST (on Sakai).

JANUARY 8  
KARL MARX

READING #2:  Marx Excerpt (posted on Sakai).
LECTURE:  Marx and History (posted on Sakai).
FORUM POST:  Due before 4:00pm CST (post on Sakai).
ONLINE CLASS:  From 7:00-8:00pm CST (through Adobe Connect).
ONLINE TEST:  Available at 8:00pm CST (on Sakai).

JANUARY 9  
NO CLASS

JANUARY 10  
NO CLASS

ESSAY #2:  DUE BEFORE 1:00PM CST