

PHIL. 2200: Major Social Theories

Fall, 2009

Class Meets: TR 11:00 - 12:15, Hellems 245
Professor: Michael Huemer
Email: ikd3lob02@sneakemail.com
Web page: <http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/>

Office Hours: TR 1:50 - 3:25
Hellems 266

What Is This Course About?

This course is about what is the best organization for society. We will cover some of the major theories that thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition have given in response to that question. The course will have 6 units, addressing the following sorts of questions:

First unit: Introduction, political beliefs. What is this course about? How do people choose political beliefs? What differentiates liberal and conservative values?

Second unit: Political authority. What gives the government the right to rule? Why must we obey the law?

Third unit: Democracy. What's so great about democracy? Are we obligated to vote? Who really controls public policy?

Fourth unit: Marxism. Why are capitalists so rich? How is communism supposed to work? What actually happened in communist countries?

Fifth unit: Distributive justice. How should wealth be distributed? What is yours and what is mine? Is equality intrinsically good?

Sixth unit: Anarchism. How would socialist anarchy work? How would capitalist anarchy work? Can law exist without the state?

What will you learn from the course? a) You will learn some of the most important theories about the proper structure of society and the state. b) You will become more familiar with how philosophers reason carefully and logically about social questions, rather than relying on emotions, authority, or tradition. c) You will better understand how society works.

Text

The required readings are on electronic reserve at the library. Go to <http://libraries.colorado.edu/search/p?SEARCH=huemer>. You will need your *identikey* and *password*. You may want to print everything now to have it for the rest of the semester. If you don't understand how this works, see the FAQ at <http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/reserves/faqstudents.htm>.

If you prefer, you may get the readings in pdf format on a disc from the professor, for \$1.

Who Should Take This Course?

There's only one good reason to take this class. That is because you want to learn more about the theories of the just and good society. If you don't care about that, don't take the class.

Warnings and requests: Don't take the class if you are unable to regularly make it here *on time*. Be forewarned that the objective nature of my exams means that if you don't do the readings and come to class, you will bomb the tests. Lastly, if you love political correctness, if you need someone to pump up your self-esteem, or if you think there's no truth and all beliefs are equally good, then

you shouldn't take a class from me.

The benefit of the course is that you will learn to think more critically and rationally about social questions, and perhaps one day even improve society.

Other Guidelines

1. To contact me: send email to the address listed above, and I will probably respond the same day. Or call between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. Leave a message, since I screen my calls.
2. Come to my office to talk about philosophy and society, or play chess. I will try to answer any questions you have, but you needn't have a specific question to come.
3. During class, do not hesitate to comment on or ask about anything we discuss. Feel free to say whatever you think (that has to do with philosophy). Don't be afraid to contradict something that's been said, and don't be afraid of "asking a stupid question." It is from debate and asking "stupid" questions that you learn most.
4. The course web page, <<http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/>>, includes information about the class, including this syllabus and course lecture notes. There is also some philosophical entertainment.

Course Requirements & Grading

- **Unit Tests (65% of final grade):**

There will be a quiz and five tests. The quiz counts for half as much as a test. See schedule below for dates. The tests will be 20 questions, multiple choice & short answer, objective questions about what was said in the readings and in class.

- **Short Papers (25%):**

There are three writing assignments, described below.

- **Participation (10%):**

This is based on the professor's subjective sense of how well you contributed to class discussion and how regularly you attended class.

Note about grades: Grades are based on observable performance, rather than effort or virtue. Please do not ask for a higher grade because you tried really hard, or because you really need it. Also, do not obsess about your grade. After you graduate, no one will ever look at your grades again. You should come here to increase your understanding, not to get a grade.

Writing Assignments

General Guidelines

- < *Length:* Assignment #1 should take a page, #2 and #3 should be at least 2 complete pages, and not more than 5. Do not manipulate margins, font size, etc., to make it look longer.
- < *Due Dates:* are written on the schedule below. Keep track of them; don't expect me to remind you.
- < *Late papers:* Will lose 10% credit (one letter grade). ; Papers more than a week late won't be accepted at all! ; ;
- < *If you can't come to class:* You may send it by email. Must be *received before 10 a.m.* on the due date. Acceptable formats: rtf, txt, pdf, or pasted into an email message. *If you send something I can't read,*

your paper will be late!

- < *Grading*: You will lose points if your paper is late, too short, doesn't do what the assignment asks, or does not evidence understanding of the material that it's about.
- < *Writing Guide*: I have posted a guide to writing at <<http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/writing.htm>>. If you want your papers to be good, read that. All papers should conform to paragraph 29 in the guide.
- < *Plagiarism*: Don't give me something written by someone else. If you use ideas or information from someone else, cite the source. If you use someone else's words, they must be in quotation marks or set off, and the source must be cited. If you plagiarize a paper, you'll get an F in the *entire course*, and be reported to the dean. ; ; ; If you are unsure what plagiarism is, see <<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>>
- < *Topic*: See descriptions below.

Assignment #1

Find an editorial, letter to the editor, (substantial) blog posting, or other published opinion piece about a social or political issue. Explain how it exemplifies one of the specific forms of irrationality discussed in the article "Why People Are Irrational About Politics."

1. Identify the kind of irrationality, with reference to a specific section in the "Why People Are Irrational" article. (For example, you might find someone engaging in "anecdotal reasoning," which is described in *section 6, part d*)
2. Explain why you think the editorial (etc.) exemplifies that form of irrationality, using specific quotations from the editorial.
3. Explain why what the author is doing is bad, or a mistake.
4. Attach a copy of the editorial to your paper, with relevant quotations highlighted or underlined.

Assignment #2

What would be the best way in which our society could be improved? Your proposal could be an improvement in political structure, specific laws, the general culture, or whatever else you think of. Discuss (a) how your improvement would work, (b) why you think it is so good, and (c) what objections an opponent might make, and why they would be mistaken.

Assignment #3

Find an editorial, letter to the editor, (substantial) blog posting, or other published opinion piece about a social or political issue. Do not use the same one used for assignment #1. This time, explain how the author of the editorial (etc.) is either relying on or disputing some important theory discussed in this course.

1. Identify the theory that the author is using/disputing, with reference to a specific article in the readings. (For example, you might find someone relying on the idea of *the social contract*, which is described by *John Locke in his Second Treatise of Government*)
2. Briefly explain the theory.
3. Explain why you think the editorial (etc.) uses or contradicts that theory, using specific quotations from the editorial.
4. Attach a copy of the editorial to your paper, with relevant quotations highlighted or underlined.

Schedule

This shows what you should read for the class discussion on each day. Also note the **test dates** and **due dates**. All readings are indicated by the author's last name. Some days have *more than one* assigned reading.

Unit 1 Introduction: About Political Beliefs		
T, Aug 25	Introduction, course requirements.	
R, Aug 27	Irrationality.	Huemer, "Why People Are Irrational..."
T, Sept 1	Liberal & Conservative Values.	Lakoff, "Metaphor, Morality, and Politics."
R, Sept 3	Quiz, unit 1. Start Social Contract.	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> .. Declaration of Independence.
Unit 2 Political Authority		
T, Sept 8	Social Contract.	Hume, "Of the Original Contract," pp. 469-76. Huemer, "The State," pp. 10-18.
R, Sept 10	Utilitarianism. Writing Assign #1 due.	Hume, "Of the Original Contract," 479-82, 486-7. Huemer, "The State," pp. 2-5.
T, Sept 15	Fair Play.	Rawls, "Legal Obligation ..." Huemer, "The State," pp. 5-9.
R, Sept 17	Philosophical Anarchism.	Simmons, "Philosophical Anarchism." Optional: Huemer, "TV Contract"
T, Sept 22	Test.	
Unit 3 Democracy		
R, Sept 24	Authority of Democracy.	Christiano, "The Authority of Democracy," pp. 266-77, 280-4, 287-90. Nozick, "Tale of the Slave."
T, Sept 29	Utility of Democracy.	Mill, <i>Considerations on Representative Government</i> . Sen, <i>Development as Freedom</i> .
R, Oct 1	Voting.	Merritt, "Top 10 Reasons to Vote." Lomasky/Brennan, "Is There a Duty to Vote?"
T, Oct 6	Elitism.	Dye/Zeigler, <i>The Irony of Democracy</i> .
R, Oct 8	Test.	
Unit 4 Marxism		
T, Oct 13	Exploitation.	Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital."

R, Oct 15	Marx vs. Modern Economics. Writing Assign #2 due.	Huemer, "The Theory of Economic Value."
T, Oct 20	Communism.	Marx/Engels, <i>Communist Manifesto</i> Marx, "After the Revolution."
R, Oct 22	Totalitarianism.	Courtois/Malia, <i>Black Book of Communism</i> . Optional: http://www.gmu.edu/departments/economics/bcaplan/museum/faqframe.htm
T, Oct 27	Test.	
Unit 5 Distributive Justice		
R, Oct 29	Rawls' Theory.	Rawls, <i>Theory of Justice</i>
T, Nov 3	Criticisms of Rawls.	Dworkin, "The Original Position." Harsanyi, "Can the Maximin Principle ...", sections 1-5 + postscript Nozick, "Distributive Justice."
R, Nov 5	Libertarianism.	Nozick, "Entitlement Theory." Nagel, "Nozick..."
T, Nov 10	The Value of Equality. Writing Assign #3 due.	Parfit, "Equality and Priority."
R, Nov 12	Against Equality.	Huemer, "Against Priority..."
T, Nov 17	Test.	
Unit 6 Anarchism		
R, Nov 19	Socialist Anarchism.	Bakunin, "Revolutionary Catechism."
T, Nov 24	<i>No Class - Fall Break</i>	
R, Nov 26	<i>No Class - Fall Break</i>	
T, Dec 1	Police, Courts, & Law.	Friedman, <i>Machinery of Freedom</i> , Ch. 28-29, 39.
R, Dec 3	Monopolies & Defense.	Friedman, <i>Machinery of Freedom</i> , Ch. 6-7, 34.
T, Dec 8	Objections.	Wellman, "Samaritanism..." Birch, "A Fatal Instability."
R, Dec 10	More Objections.	Cowen, "Law as a Public Good," sections 3-5. Friedman, "Law as a Private Good." Cowen, "Rejoinder to David Friedman."
Sat, Dec 12, 7:30 pm	Test.	