

PHIL. 2200 (honors): Major Social Theories

Fall, 2013

Class Meets: MWF 10:00 - 10:50, Norlin M300D
Office Hours: MWF 12:00 - 12:50, Hellems 266

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Web page: spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/

What Is This Course About?

This course will have 6 units, addressing the following sorts of questions:

- 1 *Introduction, political beliefs*: What is this course about? How do people choose political beliefs? What differentiates liberal and conservative beliefs?
- 2 *Game theory & social conflict*: What causes violence and war? Why has it declined? Why do people cooperate and respect rights?
- 3 *Democracy*: What's so great about democracy? Should we vote? Who really controls public policy? Why do democracies sometimes fail to serve the people?
- 4 *Distributive justice*: How should wealth be distributed? What is yours and what is mine? Is equality intrinsically good?
- 5 *Marxism*: Why are capitalists so rich? How is communism supposed to work? What happened in communist countries?
- 6 *Anarchism*: How would socialist anarchy work? How would capitalist anarchy work? Can law exist without the state?

Texts

- a. Most of the required readings are available online through D2L, <learn.colorado.edu/d2l/home/52420>. I suggest printing everything now to have it for the rest of the semester.
- b. There is one required book which should be at the university book store: *The Problem of Political Authority*. Referred to in the schedule below as "PPA".

Educational Philosophy & Goals

- a. Philosophy in general is a search for truth. Philosophers try to figure out which beliefs are most likely to be true, and discard the others.
- b. The way we search for truth is through argumentation: we examine different sides of an issue, formulate logical arguments, consider objections, and look for replies to the objections. If you find this sort of thing fun, you will like the course; otherwise, you won't.
- c. The way I try to teach philosophy is by doing philosophy in the classroom – advancing arguments, addressing objections, and so on. I hope that you will then pick it up.
- d. As a result of this course, you should learn the most important theories about each of the topics addressed, understand the reasons why people hold these theories, be able to form more rational and accurate thoughts about these issues, and improve your ability to think clearly and logically in general.

Who Should Take This Course?

There's one good reason to take this class. That is because you want to learn more about how society works and how it should work. 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 help improve society.

Other Guidelines

1. *To contact me:* Send email to the address listed above. *Type it in carefully.* If I don't respond within a day, assume I didn't get it.
2. *Office hours:* Come to my office to talk about philosophy, play chess, etc. I will try to answer any questions you have, but you needn't have a specific question to come.
3. *Classroom discussion:* During class, you are encouraged to raise questions, comments, objections, etc. Don't be afraid of contradicting other people, expressing unpopular views, or asking a "stupid" question. You're here to learn, which you will do by interacting freely.
4. *Course web page:* <spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/>. Includes information about the course, including this syllabus and course lecture notes. You should download the notes and study them before each test.

Course Requirements & Grading

Unit Tests (65% of final grade):

There will be six unit tests. See schedule below for dates. The tests will be multiple choice & short answer, objective questions about what was said in the readings and in class.

Paper (25%):

See writing assignment page 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.

Schedule

This shows what you should read for the class discussion on each day. “PPA” refers to the book, *The Problem of Political Authority*.

Unit 1 Introduction, How We Think about Politics		
M, Aug. 26	Irrationality.	Huemer, “Why People Are Irrational...”
W, Aug. 28	Irrationality.	Huemer, “Why People Are Irrational...”
F, Aug. 30	Biases about Economics.	Caplan, “Economists versus the Public.”
M, Sept. 2	<i>No Class – Labor Day</i>	
W, Sept. 4	Political Expertise.	Menand, “Everybody’s an Expert.”
F, Sept. 6	Liberal & Conservative Values.	Lakoff, “Metaphor, Morality, and Politics.”
M, Sept. 9	Liberal & Conservative Values.	Haidt et al., “Liberals and Conservatives...”
W, Sept. 11	Review.	
F, Sept. 13	Test #1.	
Unit 2 Game Theory & Social Conflict		
M, Sept. 16	Violence in the State of Nature.	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> .
W, Sept. 18	Prisoner’s Dilemmas.	Dawkins, “Nice Guys Finish First.”
F, Sept. 20	Property Rights.	Friedman, “Positive Account of Property Rights.”
M, Sept. 23	Our Violent Past.	Pinker, <i>How the Mind Works</i> . Huemer, www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrZ2DJzbYYo .
W, Sept. 25	Commons & Public Goods.	Hardin, “Tragedy of the Commons.” Schmidtz, “Institution ...”, 204-7.
F, Sept. 27	Review.	
M, Sept. 30	Test #2.	
Unit 3 Democracy		
W, Oct. 2	Authority of Democracy.	Christiano, “The Authority of Democracy,” pp. 266-77, 280-4, 287-90. Nozick, “Tale of the Slave.”
F, Oct. 4	Utility of Democracy.	Mill, <i>Considerations on Representative Government</i> . Sen, <i>Development as Freedom</i> .
M, Oct. 7	Voting.	Merritt, “Top 10 Reasons to Vote.” Brennan, “The Right to a Competent Electorate.”
W, Oct. 9	Elitism.	Dye/Zeigler, <i>The Irony of Democracy</i> .
F, Oct. 11	Failures of Democracy.	PPA, pp. 208-228.
M, Oct. 14	More Failures.	
W, Oct. 16	Review.	
F, Oct. 18	Test #3.	

Unit 4 Distributive Justice		
M, Oct. 21	Rawls' Theory.	Rawls, <i>Theory of Justice</i> .
W, Oct. 23	Criticisms of Rawls.	Dworkin, "The Original Position." Harsanyi, "Can the Maximin Principle ...", sections 1-5 + postscript Nozick, "Distributive Justice."
F, Oct. 25	Libertarianism.	Nozick, "Entitlement Theory." Nagel, "Nozick..."
M, Oct. 28	The Value of Equality.	Parfit, "Equality and Priority."
W, Oct. 30	Against Equality.	Huemer, "Against Priority..."
F, Nov. 1	Review.	
M, Nov. 4	Test #4.	
Unit 5 Marxism		
W, Nov. 6	Marx's Theory of Exploitation.	Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital."
F, Nov. 8	Marx vs. Modern Economics.	Huemer, "The Theory of Economic Value."
M, Nov. 11	Marx's Theory of Alienation.	Marx, "Alienated Labor."
W, Nov. 13	Communism.	Marx/Engels, <i>Communist Manifesto</i> . Marx, "After the Revolution."
F, Nov. 15	Totalitarianism in the Real World.	Courtois/Malia, <i>Black Book of Communism</i> . Optional: < www.gmu.edu/departments/economics/bcaplan/museum/faqframe.htm >
M, Nov. 18	Review.	
W, Nov. 20	Test #5.	
Unit 6 Anarchism		
F, Nov. 22	Evaluating Social Theories.	PPA, Ch. 8.
M, Nov. 25		
W, Nov. 27		
F, Nov. 29		
M, Dec. 2	Socialist Anarchism.	Bakunin, "Revolutionary Catechism."
W, Dec. 4	Private Security.	PPA, Ch. 10.
F, Dec. 6	Private Courts.	PPA, Ch. 11.
M, Dec. 9	Private Defense.	PPA, Ch. 12.
W, Dec. 11	Transition to Anarchy.	PPA, Ch. 13.
F, Dec. 13	Review.	
M, Dec. 16 4:30 p.m.	Scheduled final exam time. Test #6.	

Writing Assignment for Honors Students

Timeline

By Oct. 15: Discuss with me (email or office hours) what your paper will be about. *Note:* This will prevent you from wasting your time by writing about something that isn't going to work out and then having to rewrite the entire paper.

Nov. 1: Give me a 1st draft of your paper. I will comment and return it.

Nov. 15: Give me a 2nd draft, taking into account my comments.

Dec. 11: Assuming I still had criticisms of your second draft, give me a 3rd and final draft.

Note: Yes, you really have to turn in the drafts. Talk to me in advance if there's any problem getting it done on time.

General Guidelines: *Pay attention to this!*

Format: At the top of page 1, include your name, the course number, and paper title. Number and staple all pages. Example:

/ Apu Nahasapeemapeitilon Phil. 5340	1
I Don't Know My Name	
Since the dawn of time, man has pondered the mysteries of philosophy, blah blah blah . . .	

Length: Between 1500 and 3500 words. Don't give me more; I won't read it.

Send it to me by email (see email address above on the syllabus). Acceptable formats: rtf, txt, pdf, doc, wpd, or pasted into an email message. *If you send something I can't read, or you use the wrong address, your paper will be counted late!*

Grading First draft will just be checked off; however, you can lose points for lateness, blatant incompleteness, or violation of these guidelines. The second and third draft will be graded for content.

Writing Guide: <spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/writing.htm>. Read that. All papers should conform to paragraph 29 in that guide. Some of the more important points:

- Have one and only one thesis. State it explicitly at the start.
- Focus on one argument for that thesis. Make it non-trivial, non-question-begging, and logical.
- Think about and address how someone might object to your argument.
- Write *clearly* and *directly*.
- Do not repeat yourself.
- Do not waste time with unnecessary verbiage or with discussion of anything not essential to making your overall point.

Topic

A. Pick some important thesis defended by one of the authors read in this course, and explain why it is wrong. *Or:*

B. Identify some important institution, policy, or norm that should be changed in an interesting way. Explain how it should be changed and how society would thereby be improved.

Notes:

- If you write about something discussed later in the course, read the readings on that subject before writing your paper.
- If you write about something not discussed in the course, you should read something about it first. You might start with the Stanford Encyclopedia <plato.stanford.edu/>. See also the Phil Index <search.proquest.com/philosophersindex?accountid=14503>.