

PHIL. 1200: Philosophy & Society

Fall, 2014

Lecture: MWF, 3:00 - 3:50, MCol E155
Professor: Michael Huemer
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Office Hours: MWF, 12:00-12:50, 2:00-2:50
Hellems 266

What Is This Course About?

The course will examine a number of controversial social and moral issues. We will try to determine in each case what is the best social policy or practice. There will be 6 units, addressing different questions:

- Unit 1: Introduction.* Course introduction. Why do people disagree about politics? How should we set social priorities? Should we trust political experts?
- Unit 2: Authority.* Why should we obey the law? What gives the government the right to tell everyone else what to do?
- Unit 3: Poverty, Distributive Justice.* What, if anything, should we do to help the poor, in our own country and the rest of the world?
- Unit 4: Drugs & Guns.* Do people have a right to own guns? Do they have a right to use drugs? What are the results of decriminalization?
- Unit 5: Race & Sex Discrimination.* Does America owe reparations to black people? Should minorities receive preferences in hiring and admissions? Are men discriminated against?
- Unit 6: Immigration & Animal rights.* Should immigration be restricted? Is meat consumption morally wrong?

We will read articles and chapters written by professional academics and intellectuals, defending a variety of positions on these issues. I will explain their arguments in class.

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.

Texts

There are two sources of readings:

1. Most readings are available online through D2L (<https://learn.colorado.edu/d2l/home/73283>). I recommend that you print them all now to ensure that you have them when you need them.
2. There is one required book at the book store, *The Problem of Political Authority*, which will be used

for the unit on authority. It is referred to as “PPA” in the schedule below.

Who Should Take This Course?

There is one good reason to take this course: because you want to learn more about social issues and how to think clearly about them. If you don't want that, you're in the wrong place.

Warnings and requests: Don't take the class if you are unable to make it here on time. Be forewarned that the objective nature of my tests means that if you don't do the readings and come to class, you will be pretty much screwed on the tests. Lastly, if you love political correctness, if you want someone to stoke your self-esteem, or if you think there's no truth and all beliefs are equally good, then you are not going to like this class.

The benefit of the class is that you will learn about some ideas and theories that are of fundamental importance to the society you live in.

Course Requirements & Grading

- *Unit Tests (90% of final grade):*

There will be six in-class tests. See schedule below for dates. About 20 questions, multiple choice & short answer. They will be objective questions about what was said in the readings and in class.

- *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 tell me you should get 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.

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, 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. Do not be afraid of contradicting other people, expressing unpopular views, or asking a “stupid” question. Remember, 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.

Schedule

This shows what you should read for the class discussion on each day. Also note the **test dates**. Some days have *more than one* assigned reading. In some cases, page numbers (“pp. ”) or section numbers (“§”) are given. “PPA” refers to the book, *The Problem of Political Authority*.

Unit 1 Introduction, Thinking about Social Issues		
M, Aug 25	Introduction, Irrationality	Huemer, “Why People Are Irrational...”, §1-4
W, Aug 27	Irrationality	Huemer, “Why People Are Irrational...”, §5-8
F, Aug 29	Public biases	Caplan, “Economists versus the Public”
M, Sept 1	<i>No Class – Labor Day</i>	
W, Sept 3	Political Expertise	Menand, “Everybody’s an Expert.”
F, Sept 5	Prioritization	Engel, “9/11 and Starvation” Lomborg et al., “Global Crises...”
M, Sept 8	Review	
W, Sept 10	Test #1	
Unit 2 Authority		
F, Sept 12	The problem of authority	Huemer, <i>PPA</i> , chapter 1
M, Sept 15	Social contract theory	Huemer, <i>PPA</i> , chap. 2
W, Sept 17	Democracy, consequentialism	Huemer, <i>PPA</i> , § 4.1, 4.3.5, 4.3.6, 5.1.1, 5.1.3, 5.1.4, 5.2, 5.4.1, 5.4.2
F, Sept 19	The failure of democracy	Huemer, <i>PPA</i> , § 9.4
M, Sept 22	The psychology of authority	Huemer, <i>PPA</i> , § 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.7, 6.8
W, Sept 24	What if there is no authority?	Huemer, <i>PPA</i> , § 7.1, 7.4
F, Sept 26	Review	
M, Sept 29	Test #2	
Unit 3 Poverty & Distributive Justice		
W, Oct 1	Feed the poor	Singer, “Rich and Poor”. “How Rich You Are”, www.givingwhatwecan.org/resources/how-rich-you-are.php
F, Oct 3	Redistribute wealth	Rawls, <i>Theory of Justice</i>
M, Oct 6	Objections to Rawls	Harsanyi, “Can the Maximin Principle...”
W, Oct 8	Entitlement theory	Nozick, “Distributive Justice” + “Entitlement Theory”
F, Oct 10	Entitlement theory + objections	
M, Oct 13	Against welfare	Huemer, <i>PPA</i> , pp. 148-60
W, Oct 15	Review	
F, Oct 17	Test #3	



Unit 4 Fun Things: Drugs & Guns		
M, Oct 20	Against guns	Dixon, "Why We Should Ban Handguns..."
W, Oct 22	For guns	Huemer, "Is There a Right to Own a Gun", §1-4
F, Oct 24	Guns, cont'd	Huemer, "Is There a Right to Own ...", §5-7
M, Oct 27	Against drugs	Wilson, "Against the Legalization..."
W, Oct 29	For drugs	Huemer, "America's Unjust Drug War"
F, Oct 31	The Portugal experiment	Hollersen, "Portugal, 12 Years After..." ONDCP, "Portugal Fact Sheet"
M, Nov 3	Review	
W, Nov 5	Test #4	
Unit 5 Discrimination: Race & Sex		
F, Nov 7	Slave reparations	Horowitz, <i>Uncivil Wars</i> Robinson, "America's Debt to Blacks"
M, Nov 10	Affirmative action	Dworkin, "Affirmative Action"
W, Nov 12	Racism, individualist view	Rand, "Racism"
F, Nov 14	Men's rights	Benetar, "The Second Sexism"
M, Nov 17	Objections to Benetar	Clatterbaugh, "Benetar's Second Sexism" Moore, "The Second Sexism..."
W, Nov 19	Review	
F, Nov 21	Test #5	
M, Nov 24	<i>No Class – Thanksgiving Break</i>	
W, Nov 26		
F, Nov 28		
Unit 6 More Discrimination: Immigrants & Animals		
M, Dec 1	For immigration restriction	Kershner, "There Is No Moral Right..."
W, Dec 3	For open borders	Huemer, "Is There a Right to Immigrate?"
F, Dec 5	The joy of eating dead animals	Lomasky, "Is it Wrong to Eat Animals"
M, Dec 8	Vegetarianism	Rachels, "Vegetarianism", sections 1-3
W, Dec 10	Vegetarianism, cont'd	Rachels, "Vegetarianism", sections 4-6
F, Dec 12	Review	
R, Dec 18 7:30 pm	Scheduled final exam time Test #6	

