

PHIL 2200: MAJOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEORIES

Fall 2020

Instructor: Heather Stewart

Zoom / Remote

MWF 3:00-3:50

Email: hstewa27@uwo.ca [preferred]

Office Hours: via Zoom by appointment

What is this class about?

Together in this class, we will explore such questions as the following: What do we want society to be like? Do we need a central authority, or government, to ensure that society functions properly? What is the proper role of the government? From where does government derive its authority? What is the government allowed to do? When should individuals in the society obey the government, and why?

Thinking through these difficult questions will make you a better thinker, and perhaps, a better citizen and person. Together, we will challenge widely held assumptions, question our own beliefs, and, when given good reasons to, consider changing them. We will work together on skills of critical analysis, sound argumentation, and communication. And we will do so by thinking through questions that impact all our lives.

Course Format

This class is remote and synchronous. That means class will be conducted over Zoom, live at the appointed time (MWF 3:00-3:50 PM). The format will involve a combination of lecture, class discussion, and a variety of other interactive assignments and activities. Please plan to attend every class. See the attendance policy below.

Course Text

Michael Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority*

Other readings on Canvas and/or sent via email.

Assessment

1. Exams (60%): You will take a midterm exam (30%) and a final exam (30%). The final exam is (for the most part) not cumulative.

2. Quizzes (20%) We will have frequent short quizzes to test your comprehension of the theories and concepts from the course on a regular basis.

3. Assignments (15%) There will be a variety of different kinds of assignments over the course of the semester.

4. Participation (5%): A portion of your grade will depend on your ability to come to class (on time and prepared) and be an active participant in class discussion.

Philosopher Olivia Bailey has offered some of the many ways to participate in philosophical discussions, some of which include: restating someone else's claim in your own words, restating your own claim differently, reconstructing an argument in your own words, offering new or different reasons for someone else's argument, offering an objection to someone else's argument, offering a response to an objection that has been raised, recapping the discussion, inviting contributions from others, directing attention to relevant passages of the text, asking clarificatory questions, asking for a definition of a word that is in use, offering a case study or example, identifying an assumption, and more. I encourage you to look at Prof. Bailey's handout on participating in philosophy, which can be found here:

https://obailey.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/5/6/105611057/but_how_do_i_participate_.pdf.

Grading Policy:

Grading will be done on a standard letter-grade scale, as follows:

A 93.0-100.0

A- 90.0-92.9

B+ 87.0-89.9

B 83.0-86.9

B- 80.0-82.9

C+ 77.0-79.9

C 73.0-76.9

C- 70.0-72.9

D+ 67.0-69.9

D 60.0-66.9

F 59.9 and below

*Extra credit will not be offered. All students are expected to meet the same standards for each mark.

Policies and Expectations:

- **Preparedness:** We make philosophical progress through dialogue with one another. We can only have interesting dialogue if everyone is on the same page and has come prepared with the relevant background knowledge. Bearing that in mind, it is an

expectation of the course that you come prepared to discuss that day's readings. That means, you have read the readings (ideally twice!), prepared discussion points or questions, and are ready to share those with the class.

*Note: Reading, analyzing, and discussing philosophy is hard. Many of the texts will challenge you. Consider this like exercise for your brain – it might feel difficult during the process, but the result is that you will improve your skills with practice and by perseverance. And don't worry – we will work through the tough stuff together! All I ask is that you put in a good faith effort to work through and understand the text, make note of questions or points of confusion that you have, and come prepared to discuss with the class.

- **Sensitivity and Respect:** As noted in the “Note on Course Content” above, some of the course content will touch on issues of social identity, or might otherwise be deeply personal for you, your peers, or your instructor. While something might not register as sensitive content to you, it might be so for someone else in the class. For this reason, it is expected and required that you treat all content, discussion, and debate in this course with a maximum degree of sensitivity and respect. There will be zero tolerance for expressions of hatred or discrimination of any kind.
- **Disagreeing Respectfully:** You are not required or expected to agree with every position, perspective, or argument presented in this course. To the contrary, respectful engagement and debate are strongly encouraged as we work through difficult questions. That said, it is required and expected that you always engage with all positions, perspectives, and arguments with adherence to the principle of charity and frame your responses fairly and respectfully. If you have questions about what that means, do let me know.
- **Forum Etiquette:** At times throughout the term, I will open forums to provide additional opportunities for us to discuss a topic. While forum posts are not held to quite the same standard as essay writing, you should still engage professionally in the forums. Keep in mind that this is not social media or texts with your friends – make sure you are writing in complete sentences and in ways that are accessible and intelligible to your peers. Moreover, keep in mind that with written communication, some of the context and/or the tone of our comments can be lost in translation. Bearing that in mind, I ask that you try to frame your forum comments in ways that are not likely to be misinterpreted, or otherwise read as, something disrespectful. While I want everyone to feel comfortable raising questions, I also ask that you use judgement about what is appropriate to ask in the forum. If you are unsure about something (e.g., how to say something, or whether something can be interpreted as inappropriate), do not hesitate to ask me. Better to err on the side of caution!

- **Email Etiquette:** Conduct all email correspondence with me in a professional manner. Just like the forum, remember that this is not social media – use complete sentences and refrain from using slang in email correspondence. Also, when sending me an email, be sure to include the course number (PHIL 1160) in the email subject line, include an appropriate greeting (e.g., “Dear Prof. Stewart,” “Dear Heather”), and sign your name at the end (e.g., so I know who is emailing me!).
- **Zoom Etiquette:** Our meetings on Zoom are our stand-in for meeting face-to-face in the classroom. As such, our Zoom meetings are required. These meetings, and the discussions we have during them, constitute the substance of the course. Bearing that in mind, I not only expect you to be present on the Zoom call, but to be an active and alert participant. I know staying focused and engaged on Zoom can be challenging – more challenging than doing so in person. I strongly encourage you to minimize other distractions during class time (e.g., silence your cell phone and keep it out of sight), minimize other applications and turn off alerts (e.g., email and iMessage alerts) that might pop up on your screen and distract you. Finally, be prepared to refer back to the reading materials for that day. If you are able, I strongly encourage you to have a hard copy (i.e., a printed copy) of that day’s reading in front of you. This is helpful both for discussion (we can all look at the same passages together), and it is helpful for you to mark up the text as we go through (your exams will be open note!). If you are using electronic copies of the readings, please do have them in front of you still (a second screen can be helpful for this, should you have two devices – one for zoom and one for the reading to be pulled up). You should also have something in front of you on which to take notes (whether pen and paper, or that second screen).

Okay, but we are in the midst of a global pandemic...: In the bullet point above, I clearly stated that I expect your active attention and participation in the course, as well as your best effort to reduce outside distractions during our class time. And those things are absolutely true. But, that said, I also recognize that there is a lot going on in our world right now – a global pandemic, quarantining and social distancing, and the sense of isolation they can bring about, a reckoning with racial injustice, police and state-sanctioned violence against BIPOC, and an upcoming presidential election that is capturing much of our attention, and in many cases, our cognitive and other energies. Distraction is likely, and likely normal. Things are going to come up. You might have to miss class. Should any of these things arise, I do ask that you communicate with me, and that we work together to make arrangements or accommodations. I want to be flexible, understanding, and supportive, as much as possible, in these chaotic, confusing, difficult, and draining times. Again, your open communication with me about your needs, or when things come up, will be most helpful to making sure that I can support you, and help make sure you meet the requirements, and the learning outcomes, of the course. We are in this together. Do not hesitate to communicate with me should any issues arise for you.

Course Schedule

**Subject to change*

Readings from *The Problem of Political Authority* are designated as PPA. All other readings can be found on Canvas

- 8.24 Introduction, syllabus
- 8.26 Course introduction, student introductions, group assignments
- 8.28 Michael Huemer, “Why people are irrational about politics”

- 8.31 Layman, “Logic” (Optional: Schick and Vaughn, “Informal Fallacies”)
- 9.2 James Rachels, “The Utilitarian Approach”
- 9.4 James Rachels, “The Debate Over Utilitarianism”

- 9.7 Labor Day: no class

- 9.9 *utilitarianism continued*
- 9.11 Ursula LeGuin, “The ones who walk away from Omelas”
- 9.14 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (selections)
- 9.16 Torbjörn Tännsjö, “Moral Rights”
- 9.18 Jeremy Waldron, “Property and Ownership” (selections)

- 9.21 “Rawls and Nozick on Justice”
Megan Holstein, “A Primer on Positive and Negative Rights”
- 9.23 Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Some Ruminations on Rights”
- 9.25 *continued*

- 9.28 Rawls v. Nozick - selections from each
- 9.30 *continued*
- 10.2 W.D. Ross, “What Makes Right Acts Right?”

- 10.5 Derek Parfit, "Equality and Priority"
- 10.7 Michael Huemer, "Against Equality and Priority"
- 10.9 *continued*

10.12 Review

10.14 Midterm exam

Course Transition

10.16 PPA, "The Problem of Political Authority"

10.19 Jeremy Waldron, "A Right to do Wrong"

10.21 PPA, "The Traditional Social Contract Theory"

10.23 *continued*

10.26 *continued*

10.28 PPA, "The Hypothetical Social Contract Theory"

10.30 *continued*

11.2 PPA, "The Authority of Democracy"

11.4 *continued*

11.6 PPA, "Consequentialism and Fairness"

11.9 *continued*

11.11 PPA, "The Psychology of Authority"

11.13 *continued*

11.16 PPA, "What if there is No Authority?"

11.18 *continued*

11.20 PPA, “Evaluating Social Theories”

11.23 PPA, “The Logic of Predation”

11.25 PPA, “Individual Security in a Stateless Society”

Thanksgiving break: November 26-27th

11.30 PPA, “Criminal Justice and Dispute Resolution”

12.2 PPA, “War and Societal Defense”

12.4 PPA, “From Democracy to Anarchy”

12.7 Last day of class: wrap-up and review

For your information:

University Resources:

• Psychological services: I just brought your attention to all of the difficult, stressful, and/or confusing things going on in the world right now. Many, if not most, of us are dealing with varying degrees of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. If any of these things are becoming difficult to bear, keep in mind that you never need to deal with them alone. There are so many resources available to you through the University to help support your mental health needs. You can access Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) here:

<https://www.colorado.edu/counseling/>.

• Food Assistance: It is impossible to be a successful student (or to thrive more generally) if your basic needs are not met. Especially in these times of widespread economic instability, it is imperative to ensure that all of our students have access to nutrition. If you are experiencing food insecurity, please make use of the university’s food assistance program. You can find more information here: <https://www.colorado.edu/volunteer/food-assistance/about-food-assistance>

• Writing Support: For many, the demands and expectations of university-level writing are new and intimidating. The University Writing Center is an excellent resource for you, and the staff there can help you with all aspects of the writing process, from organization, tone, formatting, and more. If you are struggling with your writing – or just want an extra set of eyes to proofread your paper – I encourage you to make use of this resource. You can find more information here: <https://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter>. Philosophy Resources: There

are a lot of resources online, but they vary greatly in terms of their quality. If you are looking for supplementary resources on any of our topics, or want to explore topics in philosophy more generally, there are some reliable sites you should look to first: • SEP (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy): <http://plato.stanford.edu/> • IEP (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy): <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> • The UnMute Podcast • Philosophy Bites Podcast

Official CU Policies

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

Both students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote or online. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

REQUIREMENTS FOR COVID-19

As a matter of public health and safety due to the pandemic, all members of the CU Boulder community and all visitors to campus must follow university, department and building requirements, and public health orders in place to reduce the risk of spreading infectious disease. Required safety measures at CU Boulder relevant to the classroom setting include:

- maintain 6-foot distancing when possible,
- wear a face covering in public indoor spaces and outdoors while on campus consistent with state and county health orders,
- clean local work area,
- practice hand hygiene,
- follow public health orders, and
- If you are sick and live off campus, do not come onto campus (unless instructed by a CU Healthcare professional), or if you live on campus, please alert [CU Boulder Medical Services](#).

Students who fail to adhere to these requirements will be asked to leave class, and students who do not leave class when asked or who refuse to comply with these requirements will be referred to [Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution](#). For more information, see the policies on [COVID-19 Health and Safety](#) and [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#). If you require accommodation because a disability prevents you from fulfilling these safety measures, please see the “Accommodation for Disabilities” statement on this syllabus.

Before returning to campus, all students must complete the [COVID-19 Student Health and Expectations Course](#). Before coming on to campus each day, all students are required to complete a [Daily Health Form](#).

Students who have tested positive for COVID-19, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for or had symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and complete the [Health Questionnaire and Illness Reporting Form](#) remotely.

ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITIES

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.

PREFERRED STUDENT NAMES AND PRONOUNS

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal; those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.

HONOR CODE

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu); 303-492-5550). Students found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND/OR RELATED RETALIATION

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner violence (dating or domestic violence), stalking, or protected-class discrimination or harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, stalking, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance.

See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.