

University of Guelph

Philosophy 1000-01

“Major Texts”

Fall 2015

Mechanics & Logistics

Lectures: Wednesdays & Fridays 3:30 to 4:20 in **(MCLN)** McLaughlin 102.

Course Instructor: Dr. Karen Houle <<khoule@uoguelph.ca>>

Office: MacKinnon 337

Office hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:20 or by appointment

Wednesday Seminars: 10:30 (MCKN 119); 11:30 (MCKN 307)

Seminar Leader: Orsolya Csaszar Office: MacKinnon 368. Office hour: Wed 12:30 to 1:30.

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Thursday Seminars: 11:30 (MCKN 306); 1:30 (MCKN 314)

Seminar Leader: April Marratto Office: MacKinnon 360. Office hour: Thursday 3 to 4.

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*Note: if you email us, please put PHIL 1000 (with you name in brackets) in the subject line.

Overview of Themes Developed:

This course will examine the problem of authority from a philosophical perspective. Claims of authority arise from historical, epistemic, traditional, theological, cultural, legal or moral contexts. But what is it about history or culture or statistics or promises, exactly, that has a kind of truth that creates a bind that we are then bound to honour or reckon with? What gives a norm or a duty or a good argument the force it has to compel or constrain human action? What is the essence of these sorts of private or public 'laws' that obligate us to it? What, if anything, can we be said to have true and legitimate authority about, or over? What are we authorized to do, or prohibited from doing, and why? How did these restrictions on freedom arise? Can there be legitimate exemptions? Under what conditions? How can you tell the difference between punishable insubordination and virtuous, conscientious objection? When is it a principled rebellion and its hero worthy of our support and when is it a lunatic massacre headed by a criminal we should throw all our best arguments, military personnel and financial resources at stopping? Who or what is the best candidate to be tasked with having to tell the difference? Conscience? Supreme Court Justices? Knock down logical deduction? Opinion polls? Time? Nature? Evidence gathered from giant numbers of clinical trials? The Oracle at Delphi?

This cluster of problems has been a central theme in Western political philosophy since its inception. For instance, it was a theme throughout many of Plato's works (~400 BCE). Major works have been devoted to trying to explain the source or origin of obligations we sense, or claim to have; the nature of duty or law, and the ground of its legitimacy. What is it that makes an action something that we are required to do; what is it that makes an action or a state of affairs one we are allowed to disobey & stand against? What disqualifies or annuls the legitimacy of certain acts or states of affairs? What is it that gives us the right to refuse to be constrained or controlled by a law, or duty or expectation; to disobey or disrespect "the law" whether biological, moral, familial, traditional or legal? When, if ever, can we make an exception of ourselves?

In this course, we will examine various answers offered to these perennial questions starting with Plato. Students will learn a bit about what the Western philosophical tradition has argued about the essence of law and the fundamental nature of law-abidingness. For each author and text studied, we will identify new *concepts* that were developed by philosophers in order to explain and evaluate these questions. Students will be expected to be able to sketch the basic positions and arguments offered by the thinkers we study; will be expected to learn and understand the various concepts deployed in these texts, and especially, be able to apply them to thinking through contemporary issues where the same vexed problems of authority and legitimacy are at play.

Students will come to appreciate that the philosophical question of authority is far from a settled matter, but nevertheless, there are better and worse ways to move forward in the face of such intractable pluralism.

The sequence of perspectives we will follow:

1. An introduction to the philosophical problem of legitimate & illegitimate authority.
2. Plato (*Euthryphro*): The authority of “the gods” (theism); the authority of *true* wisdom (definitions as universal truths; logic & argumentation as demonstration of those truths).
3. Plato (*The Apology*): The authority of legal institutions & civil collectives of democratic societies of which one is a member; forms of disrespect of formal and informal civil codes and procedure. Civil disobedience. Emotion, story-telling & truth-
4. Plato (*The Crito*): The authority of Others: Do we owe anything to our friends? Do they owe us anything? Do we owe anything to the ones we love, such as a spouse, ones parents or children? Do they owe us anything?; Does public opinion (reputation) have any epistemic or moral authority?
5. Luce Irigaray (*Democracy Begins between Two*): Sexual difference authorizes legitimate relations between two, and in turn, civil society. Ego and narcissism vs twoness. Civil society = love.
6. Sigmund Freud (*Totem and Taboo*): A two-tiered developmental account of prohibitions and obligations (i.e norms); taboo and irrationality; the force and constraining power of the “psychic life” (i.e. animism, the unconscious): desire, repression, sublimation, neurosis and the fundamental ambivalence of feelings.
7. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*The Social Contract*) : The People (“Sovereignty”) is the only legitimate source of political right. The concept of ‘the General Will’
8. Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*): “The People” doesn’t include all peoples. Colonialism dehumanizes (the individual and the political world) even as it nation-builds. Restoring mental and political health to oppressed peoples will require violence, not “a rational confrontation of viewpoints.”
9. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (*The German Ideology*): A class-based system of private property is not the legitimate exercise of ‘The General Will:’ it is only the one-sided egoistic will of the ruling class. Individualism is a bourgeois idea. A legitimate state is a genuine community.
10. Michel Serres (*The Natural Contract*); Our violence upon, and against the Earth renders the original legal gesture of the social contract null and void. A new contract is required: “a contractual symbiosis between the global Earth and the totality of actors

Texts or Resources Required:

There are seven (7) small texts for purchase for this course. We will not be reading the entirety of these texts, but for each one, we will get an overview of the sequence of arguments made, and learn the relevant facts about the historical moment the texts arose from. We will focus on sections from each, but nothing prevents a student from reading it all. You can get away with borrowing them, or reading the assigned sections on-line, but you are going to want to be able to have a copy for the midterm and final exam.

Evaluation:

<u>Form of Evaluation</u>	<u>% Value</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Seminar contribution and activities	20%	all weeks
2 Critical reading responses	2 x 10%	one by week 6; one by week 12
Midterm exam	30%	TBA
Final exam (cumulative)	30%	TBA

Late mark policy: You will lose 2% a day up to the following Wednesday. All late papers must be submitted to Dropbox. Any documentation to support a late submission must come in **with** the submission.

Seminar contribution and activities: Each week you are expected to attend seminar. Attendance will be taken for purposes of administration. If you have to miss a seminar for legitimate reasons (medical or compassionate reasons) then notify your instructor, in writing, before the seminar, and then provide supporting documentation at the earliest possible time. Your grade will be affected if you miss seminars and don't account for those absences. All other unaccounted-for absences will mean you forfeit the grades you might have made up during that seminar. Various writing and in-seminar contribution tasks will be assigned over the course of the term. These will add up to **20%** of your final mark. You will get your grade out of 10 by halfway through the term.

Critical Reading Responses: Each week students have an opportunity to submit a one-page **minimum** to two page **maximum**, single-spaced response to the week's reading. You must do two of these over the course of the term: one before the end of week 6. These are due **in hard copy** no later than the end of class time on Friday.

The response must do the following: 1. Pick a sentence or two at the most of particular interest to you from the week's reading. Quote the material at the beginning of your paper. Be sure to note the page number. 2. Explain what it means in clear and plain language so that any reader could get the idea. This is called "exegesis". 3. Explain why it is of particular importance to the problem of authority. You may make a productive connection with another text studied but you are not required to go to secondary sources. 4. Use the idea you have focused on to make an insightful and cogent analysis of a current issue or problem of interest to you.

Evaluation breakdown: Exegesis (25% of the mark); Explanation in light of theme (25%); Application (50%)

These will add up to **20%** of your final mark.

Policies and Responsibilities.

Classroom comportment (lecture and seminar)

Out of consideration for your fellow students, please observe the following rules: 1. No cell phone use, including text messaging. 2. No personal conversations. 3. ~~Keeping at websites is considered distracting for~~ Keeping at websites is considered distracting for people around you. We reserve the right to remove you from the classroom if your behaviour is distracting to the instructors or other students.

E-mail Communication

As per University regulations, all students are required to check their **uoguelph.ca** e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) **in writing**, with your name, ID#, and e-mail contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-ac.shtml>

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester **Fall 2015** courses, without academic penalty, is **November 6, 2015**. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments and any work handed back to you from your seminar leader: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities which, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c14/c14-strightsrespon.shtml>

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins all members of the

University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Resources

The Undergraduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs. It can be found at:
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/>

If you find yourself in difficulty, contact the undergraduate advisor in your program, or the BA Counseling Office:
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/baco/contact.shtml>