

# Department of Philosophy Colloquium Series

## Political Legitimacy, Moral Thresholds, and the Problem of Stratified Societies

Thursday,  
September 28  
4-6 p.m.

Ellis Hall  
Room 226



**Arthur Hill**  
(Queen's University)

Most accounts of state legitimacy endorse the threshold principle. According to this principle, particular states do not need to be perfectly just (or democratic, or self-determining, etc.) to have the right to rule. Instead, we should interpret requirements for legitimacy as stipulating that, for a state to justify its authority to the population it governs, it must meet or exceed a minimal standard of adequacy along the moral dimensions specified by these requirements. This paper investigates how we should apply the threshold principle in cases where the state meets the requirements for legitimacy vis-à-vis some, but not all, of its subjects. I argue that in some of these cases there are reasons to treat the state in question as partially legitimate. However, this conclusion presents us with a puzzle since, to perform its basic tasks, the state must enforce a legal order that applies to everyone within its jurisdiction. To resolve this puzzle, I propose that partially legitimate states have both (i) a primary obligation to reform their institutions to achieve full legitimacy, and (ii) a secondary, 'contrary-to-duty' obligation to engage in illegitimate coercion.

**Everyone Welcome!**

For accessibility requirements, please contact [philosophy@queensu.ca](mailto:philosophy@queensu.ca)

Please note that all in-person attendees must conform to the Queen's vaccine policy:

<https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/administration-and-operations/covid-19-vaccination-requirements>