Social & Political Philosophy

Philosophy 33—Revised
Spring 2008

Schedule

**PLATO**

*Monday, January 28*

**GLAUCON’S CHALLENGE**

Glaucon poses a challenge for justice. We’ll talk about the nature of his test. What must Socrates prove about justice in order to satisfy the challenge? Do we really have to meet such a demanding test?

**reading:** Republic, Bk. II, 357a–369b, pp. 38–44.

*Wednesday, January 30*

**ORIGINS OF THE STATE**

What problem does the state solve? That is, why would people who didn’t have a state want one? What did Plato believe was the primary cause of conflict in human affairs?

**reading:** Republic, Bk. II, 368e–376e, pp. 43–52.

*Monday, February 4*

**GUARDIANS**

The guardians are the rulers in Plato’s ideal city. Today, we will discuss some of his views about their selection and education.

**reading:** Republic, (1) Bk. II, 376d–386c, pp. 53–54; (2) Bk. III, editor’s introduction, p. 60; (3) Bk. III, 412b–417b, pp. 88–93.

*Wednesday, February 6*

**JUSTICE IN THE CITY**

Justice in the city is defined as everyone’s playing their particular role. How is that related to the question posed by Glaucon?

**reading:** Republic, Bk. IV 419–434d, pp. 95–110.

*Monday, February 11*

**JUSTICE IN THE SOUL**

Here is the answer to the question about why it’s best to be a just person: a just person is good in the same way and for the same reasons that a just city is. But is the analogy between the city and the soul a good one? Members in the city are supposed to regulate themselves, but that isn’t what parts of the soul do. Rather, some parts of the soul are controlled by other parts. But if the just city involves repression like that, it isn’t very attractive.

**reading:** Republic, Bk. IV, 434d–445e, pp. 110–21.

**ARISTOTLE**

*Wednesday, February 13*

**POLITICS AND NATURE**

We will discuss Aristotle’s claims that living well is the purpose of the and that the state is natural. What did he mean in saying these things?
**Monday, February 18**

**NATURAL HIERARCHIES**

Not only is the state natural, but so are the hierarchical relations among men and women and among freemen and slaves. I'm less interested in Aristotle's extremely bad reasons for thinking these things than I am in what they tell us about what he thought he had to show in order to justify these relationships. How should we think about things we can't justify but also don't know how to do without? In Aristotle's case, it was slavery; is that how we think of poverty?

**reading:** *Politics*, Bk. 1, chs. 1–2, pp. 1–5; (2) Bk. 2, ch. 7, pp. 41–5; (3) Bk. 3, ch. 6, pp. 75–7; (4) Bk. 3, ch. 9, pp. 79–82; (5) a few passages from Aristotle's other writings that I will distribute.

---

**Wednesday, February 20**

**THE STATE OF NATURE**

By contrast with Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes believes that conflict is natural for human beings. Chapter 17 summarizes his view: the state is needed to prevent inevitable conflict. Chapters 11 and 13 concern the causes of conflict (Chapter 12 does as well, for what it's worth. It's about the religious origins of states and why states with a religious basis fail.) Chapter 11 appears to be quite specific: some kinds of people prefer conflict to peace, others do not. Chapter 13, though, seems to be quite general: people in general fall into conflict without political authority. We will begin by discussing the general explanation, using some basic game theory, the prisoner's dilemma. Then we will ask whether the specific and the general stories can be combined.

**reading:** *Leviathan*, chs. 17, 11, 13.

---

**Monday, February 25**

**THE LAWS OF NATURE**

The definitions of right, law, and obligation. What are covenants and how do they work? The reply to the Fool in chapter 15. Is the reply to the Fool too strong? If Hobbes had really shown that it's in everyone's interest to keep their covenants, why would we need the state?

**reading:** *Leviathan*, chs. 14–15.

---

**Wednesday, February 27**

**JUSTICE**

Hobbes says: [1] there is no such thing as justice in the state of nature (13.13), [2] justice means keeping covenants (15.2), and [3] there are valid covenants in the state of nature (14.27). But he can't say all three at the same time. Justice, meaning, "giving each his own" is impossible in the state of nature as nothing is anyone's "own". But it is possible to keep covenants. Hobbes's discussion of the laws of nature is about the conditions under which justice, so understood, can exist.

**reading:** *Leviathan*, chs. 14–15.

---

**Monday, March 3**

**RIGHTS AND AUTHORIZATION**
Rights are officially defined as liberties, the absence of obligations. But Hobbes needs a broader understanding of what a right is. For instance, is the ability to appoint a representative best understood as a liberty? For that matter, is the ability to lay down a right best understood that way?

**Reading:** *Leviathan*, ch. 14 §6; ch. 16.

**Wednesday, March 5**

**SOVEREIGNTY**

Hobbes is said to have an “absolutist” understanding of sovereignty. Chapter 17 describes the social contract (at the end), chapter 18 gives the rights that sovereigns have, and chapter 19 argues that any kind of state will claim these rights. We will ask in what sense is a Hobbesian sovereign absolute and whether his arguments for absolutism are good ones.

**Reading:** *Leviathan*, ch. 17 §13–15; chs. 18–19.

**Monday, March 10**

**CONQUEST AND REBELLION**

Conquest and rebellion are two different cases of political violence. We’ll look at how Hobbes’s theory deals with them. Also, compare Hobbes’s treatment of hierarchical relations in the family with Aristotle’s. *First paper topics distributed.*

**Reading:** *Leviathan*, (1) chs. 20–1; (2) A Review and Conclusion, §1–7, pp. 489–91.

**John Locke**

**Wednesday, March 12**

**RIGHTS**

What natural rights do we have and where do they come from? Compare Locke’s answers with Hobbes’s.

**Reading:** *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. II–IV (§§1–24), pp. 7–18.

**March 17–19**

**SPRING BREAK**

No class

**Reading:** None

**Monday, March 24**

**PROPERTY RIGHTS**

Locke was trying to show how private property could have emerged from common ownership of the world. I will begin by explaining the background to that. Then we will talk about his explanation and whether it is successful.


**Tuesday, March 25**

**FIRST PAPERS DUE**

**Wednesday, March 26**

**SOCIAL CONTRACT**

How does Locke’s social contract work? Compare his limited state with Hobbes’s absolutist one.
John Stuart Mill

Monday, March 31
CLASSICAL UTILITARIANISM
The Utilitarians were reformers. They sought to replace the confusing mess of common laws and commonsense moral belief with one rational system: utilitarianism. We will talk about this motivation, what utilitarianism involves, and the persistent difficulty posed by its antagonistic relationship with commonsense moral beliefs.

reading: Readings from Bentham and Sidgwick that I will distribute.

Wednesday, April 2
MILL'S UTILITARIANISM
Mill's famous harm principle sharply limits what the government can do. Today, we will talk about his claim to have derived this principle on utilitarian grounds.


Monday, April 7
MILL'S LIBERTARIANISM
Discussion of apparent counter-examples to the harm principle.


Robert Nozick

Wednesday, April 9
NOZICK ON RIGHTS
Nozick argues for libertarian conclusions on the basis of a theory of rights, rather than utilitarianism. In fact, his theory of rights develops in opposition to utilitarianism.


Monday, April 14
NOZICK ON JUSTICE
Nozick maintains that there are only three classes of principles: those governing the acquisition of goods, those governing the transfer of goods, and those governing the rectification of violations of the other two. He tries to show that any principles of justice beyond these, such as the utilitarian principle, Rawls's "principle of fair equality of opportunity", or Rawls's "difference principle" objectionably limit liberty by maintaining what he calls "patterns" at the expense of innocent, free choices.

AGAINST LIBERTARIANISM

This reading is from an “informal” exposition of the principles of justice that Rawls supports. Nonetheless, it contains Rawls’s arguments against libertarianism. After discussing them, I will argue for “natural aristocracy.” See if it can be done! Second paper topics distributed.


RAWLS’S THEORY

Today, we lay out the machinery for Rawls’s own theory of justice. He will use this to defend an alternative to the utilitarian principle: the two principles of justice whose exposition we read about last time. It’s a complicated argument, so we need to do some setting up.

READING: A Theory of Justice §§1–4 (pp. 3–22); §§24–5 (pp. 136–50).

ARGUMENT FOR THE TWO PRINCIPLES

How Rawls uses the “maximin” rule of decision under uncertainty to argue that the parties in the original position would choose his principles of justice.


ARGUMENTS AGAINST UTILITARIANISM

There are three arguments against utilitarianism. The first is that it is inappropriate to use the principle of insufficient reason to assume that the probabilities of being any person are equal. The second and third arguments are less technical. They maintain that the parties would want to avoid making an agreement that they might not be willing to keep.


RAWLS ON LIBERTY

Has Rawls explained the priority of liberty?


SECOND PAPER DUE

RAWLS ON CONSEQUENTIALISM

Consequentialists think that we should do whatever actions would produce the best consequences. Utilitarians are consequentialists who measure consequences in terms of utility. The larger class shares many of the problems of the specific instance. Pogge asks whether Rawls’s method really leads to an alternative to utilitarianism.

Wednesday, May 7  
REVIEW AND EXTRAS  
We'll use this day to tie up any loose ends and to prepare for the exam.  
reading: None.

Monday, May 12  
FINAL EXAM, 2 PM.

Materials
I ordered the following editions through the Huntley Bookstore: Plato's Republic (Hackett, second edition, translated by Grube and Reeve); Aristotle's Politics (Hackett, translated by Reeve), Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan (Hackett, edited by Curley), John Locke's Second Treatise of Government (Hackett, edited by MacPherson), John Stuart Mill's On Liberty (Hackett, edited by Rapaport), and John Rawls's A Theory of Justice (Harvard University Press, original edition, not the revised one). Everything else will be made available through the Honnold-Mudd Library reserve system.

Comments on lectures and announcements will be posted on the web at the Sakai site for this course.

Instructor
My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Wednesdays, 2:30-4. My office phone number is 607-0906. I have decided that my life will be much better if I only answer email once a day. I will reply, but if you need an answer quickly, you're probably best off calling or dropping by my office.

Assignments
Grades will be based on three equally-weighted assignments: two papers and a final exam. The papers will be limited to 1800 words which is about five or six pages. They will be due on Tuesday, March 25 and Tuesday April 29. The Final Exam is scheduled for Monday, May 12 at 2 pm.

Seniors should make special arrangements to take the exam early. Your grades are due on Friday, May 9.

Late papers will be accepted without question. They will be penalized at the rate of one-half of a point per day, with grades based on the College's twelve point scale. Exceptions will be made in extremely unusual circumstances. Please be mindful of the fact that maturity involves taking steps to ensure that the extremely unusual remains extremely unusual.