

Social & Political Philosophy

Wednesday, September 5 OVERVIEW

What is the state and why might we want to have one?

A natural way to begin answering these questions is by looking at societies without states.

Jared Diamond, "Vengeance is ours," *The New Yorker*

April 21, 2008.

Plato

Monday, September 10 QUESTIONS ABOUT JUSTICE

What is justice and why does it matter? Plato worried that the superficial answers given by respectable citizens, such as Cephalus and Polemarchus, led to doubts about justice, such as those presented by Thrasymachus and Glaucon. *The Republic* tries to meet Glaucon's challenge so we will be especially interested in it. What must be shown about justice in order to satisfy the challenge? Do we really have to meet such a demanding test?

(1) *Republic*, Bk. I-II, pp. 1-44; esp. Bk. II, 357a-369b, pp. 33-44. (2) The editor's introduction, pp. viii-xviii, and summaries at the beginning of each book, pp. 1, 32, 60 ... (see p. v).

Wednesday, September 12 WHY GUARDIANS?

The guardians are the rulers in Plato's ideal city. He explained their role by showing why an imaginary city that didn't have them would create them. What would drive people from that imaginary city to one that requires guardians? And has he explained why they must govern the *internal* affairs of the city? Finally, what is the purpose of the myth of the metals at the end of Book III? Is it acceptable for a society to rely on falsehoods?

Republic, (1) Bk. II especially 368e-376e, pp. 43-52; (2) Bk. III, editor's introduction, p. 60; (3) Bk. III, 412b-417b, pp. 88-93.

- Monday, September 17* **JUSTICE IN THE CITY**
 Socrates's answer to Glaucon turns on an analogy between the city and the soul. Here, he describes the parallel virtues or good qualities of cities and people. Why does the city have the virtues that Socrates attributes to it? What is the difference between the virtues of moderation and justice? They seem to be nearly identical. Finally, justice in the city is defined as everyone's playing their particular role. How is that related to Glaucon's question?
Republic, Bk. IV, 419-434d, pp. 95-110.
Note First paper topics distributed.
- Wednesday, September 19* **JUSTICE IN THE SOUL**
 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 control the other parts. But if the different classes in the just city repress one another like that, it isn't very attractive.
Republic, Bk. IV, 434d-445e, pp. 110-21.
- Monday, September 24* **TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT GUARDIANS**
 First, why do they have to be philosophers? Answer: philosophers have special knowledge. Second, why would they want to rule? Answer: they benefit from the education that gives them this special knowledge.
Republic, (1) Bk. V, 471c-480, pp. 146-56; Bk. VI, 484a-492a, pp. 157-165, and 502d-511e, pp. 176-85; (2) Bk. VII, pp. 186-212.
- Wednesday, September 26* **INJUSTICE IN CITY AND SOUL**
 Plato argued that different kinds of city would tend to decay into other, worse kinds. I want to use this to return to the subject of the analogy between the city and the soul. I also want to take up how Plato uses this to argue against injustice.
Republic, Bk. VIII-IX, pp. 213-63.
Note First papers due Thursday, September 27.

Thomas Hobbes

Monday, October 1

THE STATE OF NATURE

For Hobbes, the primary function of the state is to make social life possible. Without it, people would be at war with one another. What assumptions did Hobbes have to make about human nature to reach this conclusion? Are they realistic?

Leviathan, chs. 17, 11, 13.

Wednesday, October 3

JUSTICE AND THE LAWS OF NATURE

There is something very odd about Hobbes's moral philosophy. He said the following: [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 all three can't be true at the same time. I will try to explain how this might fit together. 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, contractually understood, can exist.

Leviathan, chs. 14-15.

Monday, October 8

HOBBS'S SOCIAL CONTRACT

Hobbes gave two versions of the social contract. One, the commonwealth by institution, involves a very peaceful process while the other, the commonwealth by acquisition, is extremely violent. Or, to put it another way, there is an idealized version of the social contract and a realistic one. I think what he was trying to show was that the sovereign would get the same powers out of either the idealized or the realistic version of the social contract. That, in turn, is supposed to blunt objections to states as they actually are.

Leviathan, ch. 17 ¶13-15; ch. 18, ch. 20.

Wednesday, October 10

LIBERTY AND PUNISHMENT

Hobbes insisted that the subjects can resist a sovereign that threatens their lives. But he also held that they authorize the sovereign's right to punish them. How is this possible?

Leviathan, chs. 21, and 28.

John Locke

Monday, October 15

RIGHTS

(1) What natural rights do we have and where do they come from? Compare Locke's answers with Hobbes's. (2) Locke was trying to show how private property could have emerged from common ownership of the world. The handout explains what the project was.

(1) *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. II-IV, §§1-24 and ch. IX, §§123-31. (2) Handout on property rights.

Note Second paper topics distributed.

Wednesday, October 17

PROPERTY RIGHTS

We will discuss two questions about Locke's account of property rights. First, what was he trying to show? Was it that laboring on something is a way of transferring ownership in that thing from or was it that laboring is a way of coming to own something that wasn't previously owned? Second, what is the relationship between Locke's claims about labor and the limits on ownership? I can only acquire property in something if there is "enough and as good" left for others. Things that are scarce cannot become my property even if I labor on them. But does that mean that others have a right to my labor if it is in scarce supply?

Second Treatise of Government, ch. V, §§25-51.

Monday, October 22

FALL BREAK

No class.

Wednesday, October 24

CONSENT AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Locke insisted that government can only operate by consent. How could this work in a real society where people grow up thinking they're obliged to obey the state? There are three different answers in the readings: the patriarchal theory Locke criticizes, the tacit consent theory Locke proposes, and David Hume's conventionalist alternative.

(1) *Second Treatise of Government*, ch. VIII, §§95-122.
(2) David Hume, "Of the Original Contract."

The Utilitarians

Monday, October 29

CLASSICAL UTILITARIANISM

The Utilitarians sought to replace what they regarded as 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. Both Bentham and Mill try to show that once we understand the psychology underlying our beliefs about justice and morality, we will realize that these beliefs are either implicitly utilitarian or indefensible.

(1) Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch. 1-4. (2) John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 5.

Note Second papers are due today, October 29.

Wednesday, October 31

SIDGWICK'S UTILITARIANISM

We will continue our discussion of the relationship between utilitarianism and beliefs about justice, natural rights, and morality. In particular, I would like to discuss Sidgwick's suggestion that utilitarianism is an 'esoteric' doctrine, that is, one whose truth ought to be hidden.

Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, selections.

Monday, November 5

MILL'S HARM PRINCIPLE

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.

(1) Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 1-52. (2) Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 26.

Wednesday, November 7

MILL'S LIBERTARIANISM

Last time, we talked about tensions between Mill's libertarianism and his utilitarianism. Today, we will speak more broadly about his two broad categories: liberty of thought and expression and liberty of action.

On Liberty, pp. 53-91.

Robert Nozick

Monday, November 12 NOZICK ON RIGHTS
 Nozick argues for libertarian conclusions on the basis of a theory of rights, rather than utilitarianism. In fact, he developed his theory of rights in contrast with utilitarianism.
Anarchy, State, and Utopia, pp. 26–53.

Wednesday, November 14 NOZICK ON JUSTICE
 Nozick maintains that principles of justice fall into three broad categories: 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.
Anarchy, State, and Utopia, pp. 149–64, 167–82.
Note Third paper topics distributed.

Monday, November 19 CRITICISM OF NOZICK'S THEORY OF RIGHTS
 Nozick's libertarianism depends on his theory of rights. Scheffler argues that this theory does not lead to libertarian conclusions. On the contrary, he claims, it more naturally leads to an alternative account of natural rights that is more friendly to the welfare state.
 Samuel Scheffler, "Natural rights, equality and the minimal state," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1976).

John Rawls

Wednesday, November 21 RAWLS 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 defend "natural aristocracy." See if it can be done!
A Theory of Justice §§11–13, pp. 60–82.

Monday, November 26

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 we encountered last time. It's a complicated argument, so we need to do some setting up.

A Theory of Justice §§1-4, pp. 3-22; §§24-5, pp. 136-50.

Wednesday, November 28

ARGUMENT FOR THE TWO PRINCIPLES

Rawls's argument turns on deciding between two rules for making decisions with limited information. Rawls argues that the parties in the original position should use the maximin rule rather than the rule that tells them to maximize expected utility. If they follow the maximin rule, he claims, would choose his principles of justice rather than utilitarianism.

A Theory of Justice §26, pp. 150-61.

Note Third papers are due Thursday, November 29.

Monday, December 3

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.

A Theory of Justice §§28-9, pp. 167-83.

Wednesday, December 5

RAWLS ON LIBERTY

Rawls proposes a rule that liberty can be limited only for the sake of liberty. Hart argues that this is inadequate since most political decisions involve sacrificing liberty one way or the other and there is no way to say which sacrifice is more extensive. Hart also questions why the parties in the original position would insist on liberty rather than material wealth. He argues they cannot know that this is what they really want.

H.L.A. Hart, "Rawls on Liberty and its Priority", *University of Chicago Law Review* 40 (1973).

Monday, December 10

WHAT ABOUT A SOCIAL MINIMUM?

The Difference Principle is a relative standard: it looks at how much some people have compared with what others have. A social minimum uses an absolute standard: it looks at how much people need and is not concerned with equality *per se*. Waldron makes the case for using the social minimum approach.

Jeremy Waldron, "John Rawls and the Social Minimum" *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 3 (1986).

Wednesday, December 12 REVIEW

What will be on the final exam. The Final Exam is scheduled for Tuesday, December 18 at 9 am.

Materials

I ordered the following editions through the Huntley Bookstore: Plato's *Republic* (Hackett, second edition, translated by Grube and 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). Everything else will be made available electronically.

Comments on lectures, announcements, and readings will be available through the Sakai website for this course: <https://sakai.claremont.edu>

Instructor

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Thursdays 10-12. My office phone number is 607-0906. 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 four assignments: three 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 September 27, October 29, and November 29. The Final Exam is scheduled for Tuesday, December 18 at 9 am.

Grading policies

I am committed to seeing that my students are able to do very high quality work and that high quality work will be recognized. I do not employ a curve and there is nothing competitive about grading in my courses.

Grades apply to papers, not to people. They have no bearing on whether I like or respect you. Nor do they measure improvement or hard work: one may put a lot of effort into trying to make a bad idea work or produce a very good paper with ease. Grades communicate where written work stands on as objective a scale as we can devise. That is all that they involve, so don't make too much of them.

What the grades mean

- A Work that is accurate, elegantly written, and innovative. It adds something original, creative, or imaginative to the problem under discussion. The grade of A is given to work that is exceptional.
- B Work that is accurate, well written, and has no significant problems. The grade of B is given to very good work. There is less of a difference between A and B work than you might think. Generally speaking, B papers are less innovative than A papers. This may be because the paper does not attempt to add much or because the attempt made is not fully successful.
- C Work that has problems with accuracy, reasoning, or quality of writing. The grade of C means that the paper has significant problems but is otherwise acceptable.
- D Work that has severe problems with accuracy, reasoning, relevance, or the quality of writing. Papers with these problems are not acceptable college-level work. A paper that is fine on its own may nonetheless be irrelevant. A paper is not relevant to my evaluation of work for this particular course if it does

not address the question asked or if it does not display knowledge of our discussions. This sometimes trips up those taking a course pass/no credit.

F Work that has not been completed, cannot be understood, or is irrelevant.

Final grades will be calculated using the College's 12 point scale as described in the Pomona College Catalog.¹ The numerical average must be greater than half the distance between two grades in order to earn the higher grade.

Letter	Number	Range
A	12	$11.5 < A \leq 12$
A-	11	$10.5 < A- \leq 11.5$
B+	10	$9.5 < B+ \leq 10.5$
B	9	$8.5 < B \leq 9.5$
B-	8	$7.5 < B- \leq 8.5$
C+	7	$6.5 < C+ \leq 7.5$
C	6	$5.5 < C \leq 6.5$
C-	5	$4.5 < C- \leq 5.5$
D+	4	$3.5 < D+ \leq 4.5$
D	3	$2.5 < D \leq 3.5$
D-	2	$1.0 < D- \leq 2.5$
F	0	$0.0 < F \leq 1.0$

Letter and number grades

Late papers and academic accommodations

Late papers will be accepted *without question*. They will be penalized at the rate of one-quarter of a point *per* day, including weekends and holidays. Exceptions will be made in extremely unusual circumstances. Please be mindful of the fact that

¹ Search for "Letter Grades" here: <http://catalog.pomona.edu/>

maturity involves taking steps to ensure that the extremely unusual is genuinely extremely unusual.

To request academic accommodations of a disability, please contact Dean Dan Tzuang at 607-2147 or dan.tzuang@pomona.edu.

