

Social & Political Philosophy

1. Tuesday, January 21 OVERVIEW

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

Diamond describes a society that lacks a state and relies instead on informal enforcement of its rules. That gives us a start on the first question: we can see what the state is by looking at a society that lacks one. He also makes a specific case for the state that relies on an assertion about human nature. We will talk about his specific assertion. We should also note the general pattern of moving from assertions about human nature to conclusions about the need for the state as we will see it in other authors.

Jared Diamond, "Vengeance Is Ours."

Plato

2. Thursday, January 23 GLAUCON'S CHALLENGE

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 (in Book II), so we will be especially interested in it. What must be shown about justice in order to satisfy the challenge? Does justice really have to meet such a demanding test?

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

3. Tuesday, January 28 ORIGINS OF THE STATE

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, Bk. II esp. 368e-376e, pp. 43-52; Bk. III editor's introduction p. 60; and Bk. III 412b-417b, pp. 88-93.

4. *Thursday, January 30* 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.

5. *Tuesday, February 4* 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.

Republic, Bk. IV 434d-445e, pp. 110-21.

6. *Thursday, February 6* TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GUARDIANS

First, why do the guardians 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 Bk. V 471c-480, pp. 146-56; Bk. VI 484a-492a, pp. 157-165 and 502d-511e, pp. 176-85; and Bk. VII, pp. 186-212.

7. *Tuesday, February 11* 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.

Thomas Hobbes

8. Thursday, February 13 THE STATE OF NATURE

According to Hobbes, the 'natural condition' of humanity is full of conflict. That is the central part of his justification of the state. He identifies three causes of war: competition, diffidence (i.e. a lack of confidence), and glory. We will talk about how these three explanations work. There are at least two things to bear in mind when thinking about this. First, Hobbes has to identify a source of conflict that the state can solve. Second, it is an obvious fact that human beings can have social life without having a state; Hobbes is in trouble if he is committed to denying this.

Leviathan, ch. 13.

Note First papers are due on Friday, February 14.

9. Tuesday, February 18 THE LAWS OF NATURE

Hobbes's moral philosophy is a curious mixture. On the one hand, he repeatedly said that the notions of right and wrong are irrelevant in the state of nature. On the other hand, he spent two chapters on what he called the laws of nature; these certainly seem to be standards of right and wrong. It is pretty clear that the laws of nature are inadequate in the sense that they do not offer meaningful protection. At the same time, they do seem to define the rules of contracting (aka 'covenants') that Hobbes took seriously. We will pay special attention to the beginning of each chapter. How does Hobbes argue that people have a right to all things? And when he argues that the Fool is mistaken in thinking it is sensible to break his covenants, is he showing that sensible people would keep their word, even in the state of nature?

Leviathan, chs. 14-15.

10. *Thursday, February 20* 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.

11. *Tuesday, February 25* LIBERTY OF SUBJECTS

The chapters on liberty and punishment concern the use of force between subject and sovereign. The chapter on liberty begins with a claim that subjects should think of their liberty as defined solely by the law. But then he adds that subjects have some surprising rights to act against the law: they are at liberty to resist punishment and, while they are not permitted to rebel, once they have done so, they are permitted to continue fighting to defend themselves.

Leviathan, ch. 21.

12. *Thursday, February 27* THE RIGHT TO PUNISH

Hobbes begins by saying that the sovereign does not get the right to punish from the social contract. But he also thought the sovereign is authorized to punish in the social contract. How does that work? Does punishment involve a return to the state of nature between subject and sovereign or is it part of the relationship established in the social contract?

Leviathan, ch. 28.

John Locke

13. *Tuesday, March 4* LOCKE ON RIGHTS

Practically speaking, Locke's description of the state of nature is not all that different than Hobbes's. But Locke's moral theory is quite different. Locke has natural rights that offer protection against violence. This gives

Locke a problem that Hobbes did not have: explaining how punishment could be permitted. We will talk about how he tried to solve that problem.

Second Treatise of Government, §1-24 (chs. 1-4), §87-94 (end of ch. 7), and §123-31 (ch. 9).

14. *Thursday, March 6* LOCKE ON PROPERTY

Locke assumed that there were such things as private property rights and that property could be unequal. In chapter five, he attempted to answer two questions about these beliefs. First, given that we started with common ownership of the world, how did individuals come to own parts of it for themselves? Second, given that we are all equal, how could inequality be allowed? He tried to answer both questions with arguments involving labor: individuals gain property rights by laboring on natural resources and labor improves the value of things, such that everyone benefits when it is used to acquire private property.

Second Treatise, §25-51 (ch. 5).

15. *Tuesday, March 11* LOCKE'S 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? We will spell out Hume's objection and then see if Locke can meet it.

Second Treatise, §95-100 and §112-22 (beginning and end of ch. 8). Hume, "Of the Original Contract," especially pp. 474-82.

Note Second paper topics distributed.

16. *Thursday, March 13* RIGHT TO REVOLUTION

Locke, unlike Hobbes, thought the people retain a right to revolution, meaning they can replace the government at will. We will talk about the advantages and disadvantages of recognizing such a right. How would a society in which revolution is a plausible threat work?

Second Treatise, §211-43 (ch. 19).

17. *Tuesday, March 18* SPRING BREAK

No class.

18. *Thursday, March 20* **SPRING BREAK**
No class.

John Stuart Mill

19. *Tuesday, March 25* **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. 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.

Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch. 1-4. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 5.

20. *Thursday, March 27* **LIBERTY OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION**
Mill argued for extensive protection of individual liberty based on utilitarian principles. He took up two specific cases: liberty of thought and expression and freedom of action. Today, we will take up the first case. Mill maintained that liberty of expression is needed for the pursuit of the truth. Why did he think this was so when he evidently had such a low opinion of people's interest in discovering the truth?

Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 1-52.

Note Second papers due on Friday, March 28.

21. *Tuesday, April 1* **LIBERTY OF ACTION**
Today, we take up the other major case of liberty for Mill: liberty of action. Mill's case here is similar to the one he made for liberty of thought and expression: allowing individual liberty is the best way of achieving social progress even in a society of people who have little use for the liberty to be different.

On Liberty, pp. 53-91.

Robert Nozick

22. Thursday, April 3

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.

Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 26-35, 48-53.

23. Tuesday, April 8

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.

24. Thursday, April 10

SCHEFFLER ON NOZICK ON 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.

Scheffler, "Natural rights, equality and the minimal state."

John Rawls

25. Tuesday, April 15

RAWLS ON 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!

A Theory of Justice, §11-13, pp. 60-82.

26. *Thursday, April 17* **THE ORIGINAL POSITION**
 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; §24-25, pp. 136-50.
27. *Tuesday, April 22* **RAWLS'S 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.
28. *Thursday, April 24* **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 §28-29, pp. 167-83, §82, pp. 542-8.
29. *Tuesday, April 29* **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.
 Hart, "Rawls on Liberty and its Priority."
30. *Thursday, May 1* **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.

Waldron, "John Rawls and the Social Minimum."

31. Tuesday, May 6

REVIEW

We will talk about the final exam. The exam itself will be scheduled during exam week. It will not be given on this day.

Goals

Political philosophy is about the nature of the state. It tries to answer questions such as these. "Should we have a state at all?" "What is a just state or society like?" "What powers does the state have?" "Should individuals obey the state?" The course will cover some of the historically prominent answers that combine theories of human nature, ethics, and social life. The syllabus seeks to chart a path between a survey of different philosopher's views and specialized study of any one of them. We will give thorough attention to the central issues with each philosopher's political thought.

The materials make heavy demands on their readers' analytical and interpretive skills. Our discussions and writing assignments will focus on the arguments in these works. That is where your analytical skills will come into play. Since we are reading works from different periods in history, we will also have to work hard at interpreting material that is written in ways that are unfamiliar and that reflects the concerns of different kinds of societies.

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 Wednesdays, 2-4. My office phone number is 607-0906.

Assignments

Grades will be based on three 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 Friday, February 14 and Friday, March 28. The Final Exam is scheduled for Monday May 12 at 9am.

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

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.¹ The numerical average must be greater than half the distance between two grades in order to earn the higher grade.

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

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

To request academic accommodations of a disability, please speak with me and Dean Collin-Eaglin at 621-8017. This is never a problem, but it is best taken care of in advance.

Full citations

Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Edited by J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

- Diamond, Jared. "Annals of Anthropology: Vengeance Is Ours." *The New Yorker* 84 (April 21 2008): 74-87.
- Hart, H. L. A. "Rawls on Liberty and Its Priority." *University of Chicago Law Review* 40 (1973): 534-55.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.
- Hume, David. "Of the Original Contract." In *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller, 466-87. Revised edition. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987.
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- Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Edited by Elizabeth Rappaport. Hackett, 1978.
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- Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Revised by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Rev. ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Scheffler, Samuel. "Natural Rights, Equality and the Minimal State." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1976): 59-76.
- Waldron, Jeremy. "John Rawls and the Social Minimum." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 3 (1986): 21-33.

