

## Social & Political Philosophy

1. *Tuesday, January 20*      OVERVIEW

The state is a relatively recent invention. Diamond describes some of the major differences between societies that have states and those that do not (Diamond 2012, 10–19). State societies have more inequality than traditional societies do: some people have authority over others and some have significantly more material wealth than others. One of the chief tasks of social and political philosophy is to settle whether these kinds of inequalities are justified or not.

### Plato

2. *Thursday, January 22*      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, so we will be especially interested in it (Plato 1992). What must be shown about justice in order to satisfy the challenge? Does justice really have to meet such a demanding test? Read Books I-II, 327a–369b, pp. 1–44, especially Book II, 357a–369b, pp. 33–44.

3. *Tuesday, January 27*      JUSTICE IN THE CITY

Socrates's answer to Glaucon turns on an analogy between the city and the soul (Plato 1992). First, he describes the kind of city in which justice might appear: the luxurious city. The luxurious city needs a special class to be in charge; Socrates calls them guardians (Book II 368e–376e, pp. 43–52 and Book III 412b–417b, pp. 88–93). Then, in Book IV, Socrates describes the parallel virtues or good qualities of cities and people (Book IV 419–434d, 95–110). We will spend most of our time discussing Book IV. 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?

4. *Thursday, January 29* 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 are controlled by other parts. But if the just city involves repression like that, it isn't very attractive. Read Book IV 434d-445e, pp. 110-21 (Plato 1992).  
*Note* First paper topics distributed.
5. *Tuesday, February 3* DEGENERATION OF THE JUST CITY  
 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 as each kind of city is said to have a corresponding kind of individual personality. Read Book VIII, pp. 213-240 (Plato 1992).
6. *Thursday, February 5* THE ANSWER TO GLAUCON  
 The tyrant is the completely unjust man and has a thoroughly bad life. By contrast, there are three reasons why the life of the just philosopher is a good one. So justice wins. Right? Read Book IX, pp. 241-263 (Plato 1992).

## Thomas Hobbes

7. *Tuesday, February 10* 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. Read *Leviathan* chapter 13 (Hobbes 1993)
8. *Thursday, February 12* RIGHTS IN HOBBS  
 Hobbes talks a lot about rights in this chapter. We will pay close attention to exactly what he means by the term "right." How can Hobbes both say that everyone has a right of nature and also say that everyone is permitted to do

anything to anyone else? Why don't natural rights forbid murder and theft? And where does the ability to surrender rights come from? Read *Leviathan* chapter 14 (Hobbes 1993).

*Note* First papers due Saturday, February 14

9. *Tuesday, February 17* 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. Read *Leviathan* chapter 17, ¶13–15, chapter 18, and chapter 20 (Hobbes 1993).

10. *Thursday, February 19* 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. Read *Leviathan* chapter 21 (Hobbes 1993).

11. *Tuesday, February 24* THE RIGHT TO PUNISH

We will address two questions about punishment. First, 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? Second, Hobbes insisted on a distinction between subjects and enemies: the former can be punished, but the latter are treated with hostility. What does this difference amount to? Does Hobbes's definition of punishment offer real protection to subjects or not? Read *Leviathan* chapter 28 (Hobbes 1993).

## John Locke

### 12. Thursday, February 26 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. The reading will be selections from chapters 1-4, 7, and 9 of Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (Locke 1995).

### 13. Tuesday, March 3 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. Read *Second Treatise*, §25-51 (ch. 5) (Locke 1995).

*Note* Second paper topics distributed.

### 14. Thursday, March 5 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. Read *Second Treatise* §95-100 and §112-22 (beginning and end of ch. 8) (Locke 1995) and (Hume 1987, 474-82).

## John Stuart Mill

### 15. Tuesday, March 10 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 (Bentham 1993) and Mill (Mill 2000b) 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.

16. *Thursday, March 12*      LIBERTY OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION

Mill argued for extensive protection of individual liberty based on utilitarian principles (Mill 2000a, ch. 1-2). 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?

*Note* Second papers due Saturday, March 21.

17. *Tuesday, March 24*      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 (Mill 2000a, ch. 3-5).

## Robert Nozick

18. *Thursday, March 26*      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 1974, 26-35 and 48-53).

19. *Tuesday, March 31*      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 (Nozick 1974, 149-64 and 167-82).

*Note* Third paper topics distributed.

20. *Thursday, April 2*      **FREEDOM AND PROPERTY**  
 Libertarians such as Nozick put high value on both individual freedom and property rights. You can see why those go together: property rights give you the freedom to use things at your discretion. But property also limits freedom: the freedom of everyone else to use the things that are owned. This is particularly evident in the case that Waldron discusses: the homeless (Waldron 1991).

## John Rawls

21. *Tuesday, April 7*      **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 (Rawls 1999, §11-13, pp. 52-73). After discussing them, I will argue for “natural aristocracy.” See if it can be done!
22. *Thursday, April 9*      **THE ORIGINAL POSITION**  
 Today, we lay out the machinery for Rawls’s own theory of justice (Rawls 1999, §1-4, pp. 3-19, and §24-25, pp. 118-130). 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.
23. *Tuesday, April 14*      **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 (Rawls 1999, §26, pp. 130-139).
24. *Thursday, April 16*      **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 1999, §28-29, pp. 144-160 and §82, pp. 474-80).  
*Note* Third papers due Saturday, April 18.

25. *Tuesday, April 21*      TEST CASE: QALYS  
 To test Rawls's theory, we will look at a more concrete example: the distribution of health care resources. The Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY) is a unit designed to compare different uses of resources in health care. It involves giving a quality score to a year of life: a year at full health gets a high score while a year in poor health gets a lower score. The idea is that a rational allocation of resources would seek to maximize QALYS. Harris maintains this is unfair because people whose lives are already bad will receive lower priority for resources (Harris 1987).
26. *Thursday, April 23*      QALYS AND THE ORIGINAL POSITION  
 Singer, et. al., try to answer Harris by arguing that people behind the veil of ignorance would opt to use QALYS (Singer et al. 1995). Harris thinks that this possibility shows the original position is not a valid mechanism (Harris 1995).
27. *Tuesday, April 28*      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 1973).
28. *Thursday, April 30*      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 1986).
29. *Tuesday, May 5*      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. Our discussions will center on the theories of Plato, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Robert Nozick, and John Rawls. 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 two books through the Huntley bookstore: Plato’s *Republic* (Hackett, second edition, translated by Grube and Reeve) and John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, revised edition).

Comments on lectures, announcements, and all other 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 posted on the Sakai site. My office phone number is 607-0906.

## Assignments

Grades will be based on four equally weighted assignments: three papers and a final exam. The Final Exam is scheduled for Monday, May 11 at 1:15 pm.



## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 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.

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

## Sources

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