

Political Philosophy

Plato

1. Tuesday, January 16

POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Political philosophy concerns the state. The state is hierarchical. Its officials have authority over those who governed by it. In today's reading, Socrates (c. 470–399 BC) confronts the state's authority in a particularly dramatic way. He has been condemned to death for reasons that he believes are unjust and he has to decide whether to escape or accept the sentence. He takes a philosophical approach to making his decision: he considers *arguments*. We will be especially concerned with analyzing the three arguments he refers to: "the one who disobeys does wrong in three ways" (51e). Doing that should give you a good idea of what to expect the rest of the class to be like. Read Plato, *Crito*, paying special attention to 49d–53a.¹

2. Thursday, January 18

GLAUCON'S CHALLENGE

Part of Socrates's reason for accepting the state's authority is that he had been given a chance to persuade it. But what if the state is unwilling to listen? Plato (c. 424–348) thought that his own state was in the hands of unscrupulous people in part because the superficial complacency of respectable citizens like Cephalus and Polemarchus left room for doubts about justice such as those articulated by Thrasymachus in Book I and Glaucon in Book II. The *Republic* tries to meet Glaucon's challenge, so we will be especially interested in what he has to say. In particular, I will ask two questions. First, why does Plato think that Glaucon and Thrasymachus say essentially the same thing? Thrasymachus describes justice as fraudulent but Glaucon's description makes it seem reasonable. Second,

¹ Plato, *Crito*, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). The numbers and letters are called "Stephanus numbers." They refer to pages and sections of a 1578 edition of Plato's works edited by Henri Estienne (Stephanus in Latin). Most editions have the Stephanus numbers in the margins so they serve as a universal reference.

what does Plato think an unjust person is like? Is it someone who desires to “outdo others and get more and more” (359c) or is it someone who is indifferent to the rules (362b)? Read Plato, *Republic* Book I and the beginning of Book II, 327a-367e. Pay special attention to Book II, 357a-367e.²

3. *Tuesday, January 23* **JUSTICE IN THE CITY**

The answer to Glaucon turns on an analogy between the city and the soul. A just city is ruled by an ethical aristocracy: a class of guardians who are superior to the rest. Similarly, just individuals are ruled by their best part: their reason. (That is why he thinks justice is a good thing: the best part is in control.) Socrates starts with the political side of the analogy before turning to the individual side. He introduces the guardians by describing why they would be needed in what he calls a luxurious city. Then, in Book IV, Socrates describes the parallel virtues or good qualities of cities and people. We will spend most of our time discussing the account of the virtues of the city in Book IV. Plato says that a city with guardians in charge will have the four virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. But the guardians do not play the same role for all of these virtues. Plato says that the city’s courage and wisdom reside “in one part,” namely the guardians, while its moderation “spreads throughout the whole” (its justice too, I assume) (432a). We will want to understand why he draws this distinction. Read *Republic*, selections from Book II (368a-376e), and Books III-IV (412b-434d).

4. *Thursday, January 25* **JUSTICE IN THE SOUL**

A just person is good in the same way and for the same reasons that a just city is. In both cases, the rational part is in charge. This raises some sticky questions about whether the productive class can be just. They are characterized by the predominance of their appetites over the rational part of their souls. That is why they have to be kept in line by the guardians. Are they capable of self-regulation? If not, can they be called just if they are kept in their roles by the external force of the guardians? The analogy between the city and the soul seems to break down here. If the members of the productive class are like desires, then they have to be harshly repressed; if they are capable of some self-regulation or

² Plato, *Republic*, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

recognition of the guardians' authority, they are not like desires. Read *Republic* Book IV 434d-445e.

Note First paper topics distributed.

5. *Tuesday, January 30*

DEMOCRACY AND TYRANNY

Even if his ideal city were constructed, Plato thinks it would inevitably decay. In Book VIII, he describes a series of progressively worse kinds of government. Each form of government contains the seed of the next, more defective form. While this is brilliant, it is very long and hard to follow. We will pay special attention to the last two stages: democracy and tyranny (557-569). We will also be concerned with Plato's description of the completely unjust man, the tyrant, at the beginning of Book IX (571-580). The tyrant is described as a miserable figure who is fearful of the world and enslaved to his desires. Would this be enough to meet Glaucon's challenge to show that the completely just life would be better than the completely unjust one? Read *Republic* Book VIII and the beginning of Book IX (543-580c).

Thomas Hobbes

6. *Thursday, February 1*

THE STATE OF NATURE

According to Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), 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 Hobbes, *Leviathan* chap. 13.³

Note Paper draft due on Saturday

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, *British Philosophy: 1600-1900* (1651; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 1993).

7. *Tuesday, February 6* **RIGHTS IN HOBBS**

As Hobbes defines the term “right,” having a right means that you are at liberty to do something or, in other words, that you have no obligation not to do it. We will begin by talking about how he uses this definition of the term “right” to argue against what we would recognize as human rights (see 14.4). Then we will talk about another dimension of rights in Hobbes’s text. People not only *have* rights but they can *use* them to make contracts, appoint representatives, and create corporate persons. Read *Leviathan* chaps. 14 and 16.

8. *Thursday, February 8* **HOBBS’S SOCIAL CONTRACT**

Hobbes maintains that we can understand the state by thinking of it as if it had been established by a social contract. There are two features of Hobbes’s social contract that I want to discuss today. First, he maintains that his theory applies to each of the three kinds of state: monarchies, aristocracies, or democracies. But while it is fairly clear that Hobbes’s sovereign can be a monarch, it is less clear to me that his theory of sovereignty applies to a democracy. Second, 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. Why have two? And is there anything at all to be said for Hobbes’s view that the second one could be valid? Read *Leviathan* chap. 17, ¶13-15, chap. 18, and chap. 20.

Note Paper due on Saturday.

9. *Tuesday, February 13* **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* chap. 21.

10. *Thursday, February 15* **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* chap. 28.

John Locke and David Hume

11. Tuesday, February 20 LOCKE ON RIGHTS

Punishment forms the spine of today's readings. John Locke (1632–1704) defines political power in terms of the ability to make and enforce laws. His question is “how did we get from our natural state of natural equality and freedom to a political society in which some people have the right to harm others by punishing them?” Locke starts with a natural right to punish that is held by people in the state of nature. He notes the obvious disadvantages to such a self-help system which is why he thinks that people would transfer their rights to punish to the state. Read Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chaps. 1-4, 7, and 9.⁴

12. Thursday, February 22 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 the *Second Treatise*, §25–51 (chap. 5).

Note Paper topics distributed

⁴ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, The Philosophical Works and Selected Correspondence of John Locke (1680; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 1995).

13. Tuesday, February 27 **HUME ON PROPERTY**

Hobbes holds that property rights are a product of political authority. Locke holds that there are natural property rights prior to the state. David Hume (1711-1776) agrees with Hobbes that property rights are human creations and he agrees with Locke that they can exist without political authority. Hobbes sees people in the state of nature as being in a prisoner's dilemma that they escape only by creating an authority over them. Hume thinks they are like two people in a rowboat who want to get across a river: each one will row, provided the other does so, and so they will achieve their goals without involving a third party (see ¶10). For Hume, in other words, the conventional rules of property develop out of self-interested motives, much as the agreement to row across the river does. Who is right: Hobbes, Locke, or Hume? Read selections from Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*.⁵

14. Thursday, March 1 **LOCKE AND HUME ON CONSENT**

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 Locke's *Second Treatise* §95-100 and §112-22 (beginning and end of ch. 8) and the second half of Hume's essay "Of the Original Contract" pp. 474-82 (we will not discuss the first half).⁶ Pay special attention to Hume's arguments on page 475. He tries to show that there are necessary conditions on valid consent that the social contract could not meet. What are those conditions?

Note Draft due on Saturday

15. Tuesday, March 6 **A CHALLENGE TO POLITICAL AUTHORITY**

Everyone we have read to this point has assumed that people are permitted to grant the state authority. The question has been whether they have actually done so by, for example, agreeing to a social contract. Wolff thinks the original assumption is mistaken. As he sees it, giving the state authority

⁵ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, The Complete Works and Correspondence of David Hume. (1740; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 1995).

⁶ David Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, Revised edition (1748; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 466-87.

means agreeing to abide by its decisions even when you think they are wrong. But, Wolff thinks, it would be irresponsible to do such a thing and so accepting any state's claim of authority would be immoral. In thinking about Wolff's argument, it helps to compare the state's authority with other cases of treating someone as an authority. Read Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism*, chap. 1.⁷

John Stuart Mill

16. Thursday, March 8 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 Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) 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. Read selections from Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* and Mill, *Utilitarianism*.⁸

Note Paper due on Saturday

17. Tuesday, March 20 MILL ON LIBERTY OF EXPRESSION

Mill argued for extensive protection of individual liberty based on utilitarian principles. He took up two specific cases: liberty of 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. The important thing to bear in mind is that his argument is meant to defend individual liberty even when it is used poorly. Read Mill, *On Liberty* chapters 1-2.⁹

⁷ Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

⁸ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, *British Philosophy: 1600-1900* (1789; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 1993); John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, *British Philosophy: 1600-1900* (1861; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2000).

⁹ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, *British Philosophy: 1600-1900* (1859; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2000).

18. *Thursday, March 22* **MILL'S LIBERTARIANISM**

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. Read *On Liberty* chapters 3-5.

Robert Nozick

19. *Tuesday, March 27* **NOZICK ON RIGHTS**

Robert Nozick is a libertarian, meaning he believes that the state should be limited to preventing force, fraud, and the violation of contracts. He 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. Read Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 26-53.¹⁰

20. *Thursday, March 29* **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, objectionably limit liberty by maintaining what he calls "patterns" at the expense of innocent, free choices. Read *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 149-64 and 167-82.

Note Paper topics distributed

21. *Tuesday, April 3* **REPARATIONS FOR SLAVERY**

Nozick argues for a purely historical conception of distributive justice. According to him, the only way to tell whether a distribution of goods and opportunities is just or unjust is to see whether they were acquired and transferred properly in the past. If not, the injustice has to be rectified. Bernard Boxill uses a historical conception of justice to argue that the United States owes

¹⁰ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

reparations to the descendants of slaves. More specifically, he argues for two different conclusions: first, individuals owe reparations for any ill-gotten gains they have received from their ancestors and second, the collective of white Americans owes reparations for slavery. We will want to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the individual and collective conceptions approaches. Read Boxill, "The Morality of Reparation."¹¹

22. *Thursday, April 5*

WHO OWES WHAT?

How do we determine what is owed in reparations for a historical wrong like slavery? Nozick proposes what is called a counterfactual approach: make the current world as close as you can to how things would have been if, contrary to the facts as they actually are, the wrong had not occurred. Jeremy Waldron argues that this cannot give satisfactory answers to our question. Read Waldron, "Superseding Historic Injustice," 4-14.¹²

Note Paper draft due Saturday

John Rawls

23. *Tuesday, April 10*

RAWLS ON LIBERTARIANISM

This reading is from an informal exposition of the principles of justice that John Rawls supports rather than his official argument. Nonetheless, it contains Rawls's arguments against libertarianism. After discussing them, I will argue for "natural aristocracy." See if it can be done! Read Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 52-73.¹³

24. *Thursday, April 12*

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 work to set it up. Read *A Theory of Justice*, 3-19 and 118-130.

¹¹ Bernard Boxill, "The Morality of Reparation," *Social Theory and Practice* 2 (1972): 113-23.

¹² Jeremy Waldron, "Superseding Historic Injustice," *Ethics* 103 (1992).

¹³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Note Paper due Saturday

25. Tuesday, April 17

THE ARGUMENT FOR RAWLS'S 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 that they would choose his principles of justice rather than utilitarianism. Read *A Theory of Justice*, 130-39.

26. Thursday, April 19

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. Read *A Theory of Justice*, 144-60.

Immigration

27. Tuesday, April 24

OPEN BORDERS

Joseph Carens argues that the major theories we have been discussing are all committed to a highly permissive system of immigration. Libertarians cannot limit free movement and utilitarians do not regard national borders as significant. Finally, while Rawls certainly did not say that everyone in the world should be represented in the original position, Carens believes he is logically committed to that position and that a global original position would opt for basically open borders. Read Carens, "Aliens and Citizens," (you can skip the section titled "The Communitarian Challenge," pages 264-70).¹⁴

¹⁴ Joseph H. Carens, "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders," *The Review of Politics* 49 (1987): 251-73.

28. *Thursday, April 26* **CLOSED BORDERS**

David Miller argues that limits on immigration are a legitimate exercise of the right of self-determination. More specifically, he believes that a democratic society has the right to make decisions about public expenditures and its culture and that it can exercise these rights only by controlling immigration. In addition, he believes that unlimited immigration would have undesirable ecological consequences. He discusses objections to his argument at the end of the chapter. Read Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst*, chap. 4.¹⁵

29. *Tuesday, May 1* **REVIEW**

We will talk about the final exam. The exam itself is scheduled for Tuesday, May 8, 2:00 - 5:00 p.m. Seniors should make arrangements to take the exam this week; your grades are due Friday, May 4 at noon.

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 Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Robert Nozick, John Rawls, as well as contemporary philosophers who seek to make sense of the place of the state in the world. 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

¹⁵ David Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

interpreting material that is written in ways that are unfamiliar and that reflects the concerns of different kinds of societies.

MATERIALS

The readings for the class will be available in the resources section of the Sakai site for this class. You will also find notes on each class session there.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grades will be based on four equally weighted assignments: three papers and a final exam.

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 is less ambitious or because it 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

Final grades will be calculated using the College's 12 point scale: 12 (A), 11 (A-), 10 (B+), 9 (B), 8 (B-), 7 (C+), 6 (C), 5 (C-), 4 (D+), 3 (D), 2 (D-), 0 (F). I will use this table to convert the numerical score to a letter grade.

11.5	<	A	≤	12
10.5	<	A-	≤	11.5
9.5	<	B+	≤	10.5
8.5	<	B	≤	9.5
7.5	<	B-	≤	8.5
6.5	<	C+	≤	7.5
5.5	<	C	≤	6.5
4.5	<	C-	≤	5.5
3.5	<	D+	≤	4.5
2.5	<	D	≤	3.5
1.0	<	D-	≤	2.5
0.0	<	F	≤	1.0

Grade Calculation Table

INSTRUCTOR

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Wednesdays 1:30-3:30; any changes will be posted on the Sakai site. My office phone number is 607-0906.

WRITING HELP

I should be your primary resource for help with your papers. That's my job! That said, talking about academics with your peers is an extremely valuable part of the college experience. So I highly recommend discussing your papers with other members of the class.

If you want to go outside the class, the Philosophy Department has arranged for experienced philosophy student to work as what it calls writing mentors. Look for a poster outside of Pearsons 208 or sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/ydehrofy>. In addition, the College's Writing Center offers free, one-on-one consultations at any stage of the writing process. They have a Multilingual Specialist, Jenny Thomas, who is available to work with international and multilingual students. The Writing Center offers drop-in hours Sundays — Thursdays from 8-10pm and appointments through <http://writing.pomona.edu>.

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 the associate dean in charge of disability in the Dean of Students office. This is never a problem, but it is best taken care of in advance.