

Philosophy of Law

What is law?

Monday, August 26

OVERVIEW

After going over the course as a whole, I will say a bit about the first section, on the nature of law. What does it mean to ask “what is law?” and who would care about the answer?

Wednesday, August 28

AUSTIN’S LEGAL POSITIVISM

John Austin’s (1790-1859) version of legal positivism identifies laws as a sovereign’s commands. His theory consists in a set of interlocking definitions. We are supposed to be persuaded by the way these definitions enable us to speak clearly about legal phenomena. Today’s class will discuss the major parts of Austin’s theory. Later, we will see how Hart developed *his* version of legal positivism by criticizing Austin’s version. Read Austin, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*, lectures I (pp. 18-37) and VI (pp. 164-71).¹

Wednesday, September 4

LEGAL REALISM

According to Austin, the law is made by a sovereign legislator. Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935) and Jerome Frank (1889-1957) think that a more realistic theory would put more emphasis on the role of judges in making the law. They believe that people only ask the question “what is the law?” when they want a prediction about how the law will be applied; judges are the ones who apply the law. They also maintain that legislation often does not determine an answer to a particular case and, consequently, judges make decisions based on their social views. Read Frank, *Law and the Modern Mind*, chap. 5 and Holmes,

¹ John Austin, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*, ed. Wilfrid E. Rumble (1832; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

“The Path of the Law,” pp. 457-468. Note: we will not read the last ten pages of Holmes’s essay.²

Monday, September 9

HART ON AUSTIN AND THE REALISTS

H.L.A. Hart’s (1907-1992) positivist theory develops out of criticisms of Austin and the realists. He maintains that there are significant examples of laws that do not fit Austin’s model of commands and that the understanding of legal obligation shared by Austin and the realists is defective. These criticisms motivate Hart’s own version of positivism according to which the law is best understood as a system of rules. Read Hart, *The Concept of Law*, pp. 79-91.³

Wednesday, September 11

HART’S POSITIVISM

Hart’s positivism holds that laws are rules. Austin’s sovereign is replaced by what Hart calls the rule of recognition. The idea is that this rule will indicate which other rules are laws and which ones are not. We will talk about what the rule of recognition is and whether it addresses the problems with Austin’s version of positivism. Read *The Concept of Law*, pp. 91-110.

Monday, September 16

FULLER ON LAW AND MORALITY

The positivists identify law through formal or procedural means. In Hart’s case, if a rule was adopted following the rule of recognition, then it is a law. Lon Fuller (1902-1978) argues that this is not enough as there are substantive constraints on what could count as a law that he calls the law’s “inner morality.” As he sees it, a rule that was adopted by an appropriate positivist procedure might still fail to be law if it did not conform to the inner morality of the law. Read Fuller, *The Morality of Law*, pp. 33-46.⁴

Wednesday, September 18

HART ON JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION

Hart’s primary aim in this essay is to defend what he calls the separation of law and morality. This leads him into questions about how judges should behave. One question concerns the resolution of cases where the

² Jerome Frank, *Law and the Modern Mind* (New York: Coward-McCann Publishers, 1930); Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Path of the Law,” *Harvard Law Review* 10 (1897): 457-78.

³ H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, 2nd ed. (1961; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

⁴ Lon L. Fuller, *The Morality of Law*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

law is unsettled. Another question concerns what judges are supposed to do when they are called on to enforce immoral laws. Both questions seem to raise problems for legal positivism. The first suggests that the law is not a system of rules but rather operates more as the realists say it does, with judges basing their decisions on their views of social policy. The second seems to support a position like Fuller's. Read Hart, "Positivism and the Separation of Law and Morals," sections 1, 3, and 4; we will *not* discuss sections 2, 5, or 6.⁵

Monday, September 23 **DWORKIN ON HART**

Ronald Dworkin (1931-2013) disputes Hart's positivism on the grounds that judges have to use what he calls principles in order to decide cases. Since principles are not like rules, according to Dworkin, Hart's claim that law is a system of rules must be mistaken. We will talk about exactly what principles are and whether Hart's system could accommodate them. Read Dworkin, "The Model of Rules," pp. 22-29 and 37-46.⁶

Wednesday, September 25 **TEST DAY**

There will be an in-class test. You will be given passages from the reading and asked to explain their meaning and significance.

Applications

Monday, September 30 **THE SPELUNCEAN EXPLORERS**

Lon Fuller (1902-1978) presents a fictitious legal case in which five judges give different opinions. These opinions depend on each justice's view of the nature of the law. Justice Truepenny believes the law in this case is simple. Tatting searches for an answer in past court decisions and fails. Keen is a sophisticated advocate of using what he thinks of as purely legal reasoning. Handy takes the view that the judges should think more like politicians. Hanging in the background is something they all agree on: the sentence is unjust. Read Fuller, "The Case of the Speluncean Explorers."⁷

⁵ H.L.A. Hart, "Positivism and the Separation of Law and Morals," *Harvard Law Review* 71 (1958): 593-629.

⁶ Ronald Dworkin, "The Model of Rules," *University of Chicago Law Review* 35 (1967): 14-46.

⁷ Lon L. Fuller, "The Case of the Speluncean Explorers," *Harvard Law Review* 62 (1949): 616-45.

Wednesday, October 2

SCALIA'S ORIGINALISM

Antonin Scalia (1936-2016) makes the case for his originalist method of interpreting the law. There is a twist. It is not the original *intent* of the authors of the Constitution that matters but how the Constitution would have been *understood* at the time it was written. Read Scalia, "Common-Law Courts in a Civil-Law System," 16-47.⁸

Monday, October 7

DWORKIN VS. SCALIA

Dworkin proposes a series of distinctions concerning the meaning of originalism and argues that Scalia faces a dilemma: he can reach conservative conclusions only by adopting the less attractive way of understanding originalism. Scalia insists that he accepts "semantic" originalism as opposed to "expectation" originalism and that his version is "abstract" rather than "concrete." Where Dworkin and Scalia come apart is on the question of whether the original meaning of the Constitution should be understood in what Dworkin calls a "principled" way or whether it is "dated." Read Dworkin's "Comment on Scalia," Scalia's "Response," and the section of Dworkin's "The Moral Reading of the Constitution" titled "The Moral Reading" (pp. 4-6).⁹

Wednesday, October 9

THE LIVING CONSTITUTION

David Strauss defends the idea of a living Constitution. As he sees it, the meaning of the US Constitution is settled by common law methods of interpretation rather than its original meaning. In the first chapter we will read, Strauss explains how common law interpretation works and how it applies to Constitutional law. In the second chapter, he shows that most of what we take for granted about the interpretation of the First Amendment to the Constitution comes from judges rather than the original meaning of the amendment. Read Strauss, *The Living Constitution*, chaps. 2-3.¹⁰

⁸ Antonin Scalia, "Common-Law Courts in a Civil-Law System: The Role of United States Federal Courts in Interpreting the Constitution and the Laws," in *A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3-47.

⁹ Ronald Dworkin, "Comment," in *A Matter of Interpretation*, 115-27; Antonin Scalia, "Response: The Role of United States Federal Courts in Interpreting the Constitution and the Laws," in *A Matter of Interpretation*, 129-49; Ronald Dworkin, "The Moral Reading of the Constitution," *New York Review of Books*, 1996.

¹⁰ David A. Strauss, *The Living Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Punishment

Wednesday, October 16

RETRIBUTIVISM AND CONSEQUENTIALISM

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) gives a statement of the retributivist view that punishment is justified if and only if it is deserved. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) articulates the consequentialist position that punishment is justified if and only if it augments the total happiness of the community. Joel Feinberg (1926-2004) offers his assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the classic views on punishment. There are especially significant problems with each view's sufficient condition for justified punishment: retributivists think we should punish the deserving even at great cost and consequentialists have trouble explaining what is wrong with punishing the innocent. Read Kant, selections from *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Bentham, selections from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, and Feinberg, "The Classic Debate."¹¹

Monday, October 21

HART'S COMBINED THEORY

Neither consequentialism nor retributivism seems capable of standing on its own. Consequentialists give too little weight to desert and retributivists give too little weight to costs. Hart suggests that they are most compelling as answers to different questions about punishment. If so, they might be combined. His idea is that consequentialism answers the question "why we have a system of punishment at all?" while retributivism answers the question "how should punishment be distributed?" that is, "who should be punished and how much?" Read Hart, "Prolegomenon to the Principles of Punishment."¹²

Wednesday, October 23

CRITICISM OF COMBINED VIEWS

Alan Goldman argues that retributivism and consequentialism cannot be combined. In particular, he believes, the goal of deterrence

¹¹ 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); Joel Feinberg, "The Classic Debate," in *Philosophy of Law*, ed. Joel Feinberg, Jules Coleman, and Christopher Kutz, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010), 766-71; Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹² H.L.A. Hart, "Prolegomenon to the Principles of Punishment," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, 60 (1959): 1-26.

can only be met by inflicting penalties that are out of proportion to the offense. If so, we cannot pursue the utilitarian general aim of punishment while also adhering to the retributivist's rules about mistreating the innocent. Read Goldman, "The Paradox of Punishment."¹³

Monday, October 28

HAMPTON'S EDUCATIONAL THEORY

Jean Hampton believes that if punishment can be justified, it is because it communicates a message to the offender. The point is to educate the offender. If punishment did not improve the offender, it would merely involve the infliction of harm and that, she believes, is never justified. Read Hampton, "The Moral Education Theory of Punishment," pp. 208-21 and 235-38.¹⁴

Free Will

Wednesday, October 30

HARD DETERMINISM

Joshua Greene and Jonathan Cohen maintain that developments in neuroscience will force us to abandon our commonsense understanding of responsibility. Once we do that, they think, we will also have to abandon retributive theories of punishment. They have what is called a "hard determinist" position on free will, meaning they think that the causal determination of our behavior is incompatible with our being responsible for our actions. Read Greene and Cohen, "For the Law, Neuroscience Changes Nothing and Everything."¹⁵

Monday, November 4

LIBERTARIANISM

Benjamin Libet's experiments have convinced many people that we lack free will. These experiments seem to show that physical processes in the brain that cause our hands to move happen before we make the conscious decision to move our hands. In other words, our brains decide what we are going to do before we do. Libet himself, however, does not draw this conclusion. He believes our actions are free because we have the ability to veto the

¹³ Alan H. Goldman, "The Paradox of Punishment," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 9 (1979): 42-58.

¹⁴ Jean Hampton, "The Moral Education Theory of Punishment," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 13 (1984): 208-38.

¹⁵ Joshua Greene and Jonathan Cohen, "For the Law, Neuroscience Changes Nothing and Everything," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 359 (2004): 1775-85.

decisions that our brains make. We will want to talk about what the experiments show and what assumptions Libet is making about the nature of freedom.¹⁶

Wednesday, November 6 **COMPATIBILISM**

Stephen Morse doubts that advances in neuroscience require any new thinking about the criminal law. He has two arguments. First, he maintains that the law does not require freedom from causal determination. It only requires the rational ability to control one's actions. Second, he denies that neuroscience has undermined any commonsense ideas about responsibility. Read Morse, "Scientific Challenges to Criminal Responsibility."¹⁷

Monday, November 11 **TEST CASE**

We will talk about a real case today as presented by the radio show Radiolab. Here is their summary: "Kevin is a likable guy who lives with his wife in New Jersey. And he's on probation after serving time in a federal prison for committing a disturbing crime. ... Kevin's doctor, neuroscientist Orrin Devinsky, claims that what happened to Kevin could happen to any of us under similar circumstances - in a very real way, it wasn't entirely his fault. But prosecutor Lee Vartan explains why he believes Kevin is responsible just the same, and should have served the maximum sentence." The case exposes a difference between two different standards for criminal liability. According to the M'Naghten Rule, only knowledge of the law is necessary for rationality and thus criminal liability while the American Law Institute holds that the ability to control one's behavior is also a necessary condition. There is a broader question as well: if an identifiable brain defect excuses a crime like this, what are we going to say about other people who commit the same crime without having undergone surgery. Do we really think that their brains are not *also* the cause of their behavior? Listen to the Radiolab program and read the M'Naghten Rule and the American Law Institute's statement on the insanity defense.¹⁸

¹⁶ Benjamin Libet, "Do We Have Free Will?," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 (1999): 47-57.

¹⁷ Stephen J. Morse, "Scientific Challenges to Criminal Responsibility," in *Philosophy of Law*, ed. Joel Feinberg, Jules Coleman, and Christopher Kutz, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010), 839-53.

¹⁸ Radiolab, "Blame" (September 12, 2013); American Law Institute, "The Insanity Defense," in *Philosophy of Law*, ed. Joel Feinberg, Jules Coleman, and Christopher Kutz, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010),

Rights

Wednesday, November 13 **A CHOICE THEORY OF RIGHTS**

Rights are an important part of both morality and the law. Hart's article tries to say something about what rights are and also to show that there is at least one moral right: the equal right to be free. We will be more interested in the first part of his project than the second. There, Hart advances a choice theory of rights. This holds that what is essential to having a right is control: the person with a right can choose whether to require the other party to perform its duty. Read Hart, "Are There Any Natural Rights?"¹⁹

Monday, November 18 **A BENEFIT THEORY OF RIGHTS**

Raz defends the benefit theory of rights that Hart criticized. We will be especially interested in how he responds to the third party objection in the fifth section, on promises and agreements. Read Raz, "On the Nature of Rights"²⁰

Privacy

Wednesday, November 20 **PRIVACY AND THE PRIVATE LAW**

According to Samuel Warren (1852-1910) and Louis Brandeis (1856-1941), there is a common law right to privacy. Their argument for this conclusion rests on judicial decisions. They argue that the decisions make sense only if there is a right to privacy since contractual and property rights cannot explain why judges reached the conclusions that they did. Read Warren and Brandeis, "The Right to Privacy."²¹

836-39; House of Lords, "The M'Naghten Rules," in *Philosophy of Law*, ed. Joel Feinberg, Jules Coleman, and Christopher Kutz, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010), 835-36.

¹⁹ H.L.A. Hart, "Are There Any Natural Rights?," *Philosophical Review* 64 (1955): 175-191.

²⁰ Joseph Raz, "On the Nature of Rights," *Mind* 93 (1984): 194-214.

²¹ Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis, "The Right to Privacy," *Harvard Law Review* 4 (1890): 193-220.

Monday, November 25

DOUBTS ABOUT THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Judith Jarvis Thomson disputes Warren and Brandeis's view of privacy. She holds that what we call the right to privacy is just another way of referring to other, more basic rights. So it is these other rights that are fundamental. Read Thomson, "The Right to Privacy."²²

Monday, December 2

SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Thomas Scanlon describes what he sees as our interest in privacy. He also argues against Thomson that there is a right to privacy that is not derived from other rights. Read Scanlon, "Thomson on Privacy."²³

Wednesday, December 4

REVIEW

We will talk about the final exam. The exam will have two parts. In the first part, you will be asked to explain selected passages from the readings throughout the term. In the second part, you will write an essay on the part of the course not covered by the paper topics. In addition, a short writing assignment will be given for those who mean to use the course to satisfy the writing intensive overlay requirement. This is an ungraded assignment that involves reflecting on your writing in the course.

MATERIALS

Readings will be available in the files section of the Canvas site for this class. You will also find notes on each class session there.

GOALS

The philosophy of law involves two broad kinds of questions. On the one hand, there are questions specifically about the nature of the law. We will discuss different attempts to say what the law is, paying special attention to their implications

²² Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Right to Privacy," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 4 (1975): 295-314.

²³ Thomas Scanlon, "Thomson on Privacy," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 4 (1975): 315-22.

for judges. The other kind of questions are ones that are addressed in other areas of philosophy but are particularly important in the law. Here, we will look at questions about punishment and rights. The discussion of punishment will address questions about the justification of punishment and the impact of scientific advances on our understanding of responsibility. We will talk about the nature of rights in general and the right to privacy in particular. Those who complete the course should have significantly deeper understanding of the law as a social institution, the specific practices that I listed, and techniques of analysis and argument.

The course emphasizes arguments and writing. Students who successfully complete this course will learn how to construct arguments, how to interpret analytical writing, how to raise objections to arguments, and how to write extended analytical essays of their own. There will be extensive opportunities to practice these skills through discussions during class sessions. Grades reflect how well these skills are exhibited in written papers and exams.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grades will be based on four assignments: one short test (worth 16% of the final grade), two papers, and a final exam (each worth 28%).

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Draft</i>	<i>Due</i>
Short Test	Wednesday, September 18	none	Wednesday, September 25, in class
First paper	Wednesday, October 2	Saturday, October 12	Saturday, October 19
Second paper	Wednesday, October 30	Saturday, November 2	Saturday, November 9
Exam	Wednesday, December 4	none	Thursday, December 12, 2-5 P.M., in class

Table 1 Assignment Schedule

INSTRUCTOR

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Mondays 2:30-3:30 and Thursdays 10-11; any changes will be posted on the Canvas site. My office phone number is 607-0906 and my email address is available through the Canvas site.

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 do not make too much of them.

GRADE CALCULATIONS

Table 2 gives Pomona College's four point scale. Table 3 shows how numerical averages will be converted to final letter grades. In a nutshell, the average has to be greater than halfway between two grades in order to get the higher grade.

<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Number Grade</i>	<i>Lowest Number</i>	<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Highest Number</i>
A	4.00	3.835	A	4.000
A-	3.67	3.500	A-	3.835
B+	3.33	3.165	B+	3.500
B	3.00	2.835	B	3.165
B-	2.67	2.500	B-	2.835
C+	2.33	2.165	C+	2.500
C	2.00	1.835	C	2.165
C-	1.67	1.500	C-	1.835
D+	1.33	1.165	D+	1.500
D	1.00	0.835	D	1.165
D-	0.67	0.335	D-	0.835
F	0.00	0.000	F	0.335

Table 2 Point Scale

Table 3 Numerical Thresholds

WHAT THE GRADES MEAN

The grade of A is given to work that is accurate, elegantly written, and innovative. It adds something original, creative, or imaginative to the problem under discussion. A papers are exceptional.

The grade of B is given to work that is accurate, well written, and has no significant problems. B papers are very good and 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.

The grade of C is given to 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.

The grade of D is given to work that has severe problems with accuracy, reasoning, relevance, or the quality of writing. Papers with these problems are not acceptable college-level work. Note that 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.

The grade of F is given to work that has not been completed, cannot be understood, or is irrelevant.

WRITING HELP

I should be your primary resource for help with your papers. That is 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.

In addition, there are some very good options outside the class. To begin with, the Philosophy Department has arranged for experienced philosophy student to work as what it calls writing mentors. There will be an announcement about this program early in the term. In addition, the College's Center for Speaking, Writing, and the Image (CSWIM) offers free one-on-one consultations at any stage of the writing process. You can make appointments through my.pomona.edu (look for "CSWIM") or by email (cswim@pomona.edu).

LATE PAPERS AND ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Late papers will be accepted without question. They will be penalized at the rate of 0.083 points per day, including weekends and holidays. Exceptions will be made

Syllabus

Philosophy of Law

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.