Political Philosophy

Tuesday, August 30 **OVERVIEW**

We are going to talk about states. What are states and what questions about states does philosophy address? Societies with states are unequal in two ways that non-state societies are not. In state societies, some people have authority over others and some have significantly more material wealth than others. One of the chief tasks of political philosophy is to settle whether these kinds of inequalities are justified or not.

Thursday, September 1 **GLAUCON'S CHALLENGE**

Plato (c. 424–348 BCE) thought that his state was in unscrupulous hands in part because the complacency of respectable people 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, 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.[1]

Note First paper topics distributed.

[1] 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). 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). Stephanus numbers serve as a universal reference as most editions of Plato have them in the margins.

Tuesday, September 6 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 better than the other members of the city. Similarly, just individuals are ruled by the best part of their minds: their rational part. That is why Plato thinks justice is good: the best part is in control. Socrates starts with the political side of the analogy before turning to its psychological 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).

Thursday, September 8 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 members of 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 recognition of the guardians' authority, they are not like desires. Read *Republic* Book IV (434d–445e).

Note Paper draft due on Saturday

Tuesday, September 13 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, we will not be concerned with the details of each step. Rather, 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). Among other things, the tyrant is described as lacking freedom. One thing I would like to talk about is what Plato thinks freedom is. He clearly does not mean that being free consists in doing what you want; if he did, the tyrant would be free. So what does he mean? I would also like to talk about whether Plato has met 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

Thursday, September 15 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.[2]

Note Paper due on Saturday.

Tuesday, September 20 MORAL THEORY

Today's class concerns Hobbes's moral theory. He seeks to make two points about what he calls the laws of nature: they are valuable because they are the means to peace and what they require an individual to do depends on how others behave. Hobbes's point is that a society governed by the laws of nature is possible only under the state. In that sense, morality depends on

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

political authority. I want to pay special attention to the third law of nature, which requires people to keep their promises ("perform their covenants," in Hobbes's language). Are you required to keep your promises during a war, when there is no peace to be kept? Hobbes is conflicted about this question.

Thursday, September 22 **HOBBES'S SOCIAL CONTRACT**

We will talk about two things today. The first topic is Hobbes's preference for an absolute sovereign without any checks or balances. Could this be relevant to a democracy or is it the sort of power that only a monarch would claim to have? The second topic is the social contract. Hobbes maintains that the violent social contract described as a "commonwealth by acquisition" (ch. 20) is equivalent to the idyllic "commonwealth by institution" (ch. 18). If he can defend this equivalence, it would help him with the problem that, as a matter of historical fact, there have not been any social contracts.

Tuesday, September 27 **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.

Thursday, September 29 **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? In addition, Hobbes insists on a distinction between subjects and enemies: the former can be punished, but the latter are treated with what he calls "hostility." What does this difference amount to? Does Hobbes's definition of punishment offer real protection to subjects or not? Read *Leviathan* chap. 28.

Note Paper topics distributed

John Locke and David Hume

Tuesday, October 4 **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 equality and freedom to a political society in which some people have the exclusive right to punish others?" Locke starts with a natural right to punish that is held by people in the state of nature. He notes the obvious disadvantages of such a self-help system and uses them to explain why people would transfer their rights to punish to the state. Read Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* chaps. 1-4, 7, and 9.[3]

Thursday, October 6 **LOCKE ON PROPERTY**

Locke assumes that there are such things as private property rights prior to the state and that property could be unequal. In chapter five, he attempts 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 tries 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 draft due on Saturday

Tuesday, October 11 **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

---

3 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).

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*.[4]

Thursday, October 13 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 are 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).[5] 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 Paper due on Saturday

John Stuart Mill

Thursday, October 20 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

---

4 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).

5 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.

are either implicitly utilitarian or indefensible. Read selections from Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* and Mill, *Utilitarianism*.[6]

Tuesday, October 25 **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.[7]

Thursday, October 27 **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 though most people will not use it well. Read *On Liberty* chapters 3–5.

Robert Nozick

Tuesday, November 1 **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.[8]

---

[6] 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).

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

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

Thursday, November 3 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

Tuesday, November 8 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 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 approaches. Read Boxill, "The Morality of Reparation."[9]

Thursday, November 10 LIMITS OF ECONOMIC REPARATIONS

Boxill's argument concerns economic reparations. Debra Satz explores different cases of reparations and, in particular, the limits of economic reparations. She notes that it would sometimes be inappropriate to pay money to make up for having wronged another person and argues that something similar is true in many larger scale cases where reparations are at issue. When it comes to the case of reparations for American slavery, Satz thinks reparations are important for forward looking reasons rather than backwards looking ones. Be aware that Satz means something different by the word "compensation" than Boxill

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

does; her "compensation" is equivalent to his "reparation." Read Satz, "Countering the Wrongs of the Past."[10]

Note Paper draft due on Saturday

John Rawls

Tuesday, November 15 **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.[11]

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

Note Paper due Saturday

Tuesday, November 22 **THE ARGUMENT FOR RAWLS'S PRINCIPLES**

Rawls's argument turns on comparing 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, they would prefer his principles of justice over utilitarianism. Read *A Theory of Justice,* 130–39.

Tuesday, November 29 **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

---

[10] Debra Satz, "Countering the Wrongs of the Past: The Role of Compensation," *Nomos* 51 (2012): 129–50.

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

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.

Thursday, December 1 IMMIGRATION AND 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," 264-70).[12]

Tuesday, December 6 REVIEW

We will talk about the final exam. The exam itself is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 15 from 2:00 - 5:00 P.M.. A short writing assignment will be given for those who mean to use the course to satisfy the writing intensive overlay requirement.

MATERIALS

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

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?"

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

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

ASSIGNMENTS

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

INSTRUCTOR

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays 4-5; any changes will be posted on the Sakai site. My office phone number is 607-0906 and my email address is available through the Sakai 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 1 gives Pomona College's four point scale. Table 2 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.

Letter Grade	*Number Grade*
A	4.00
A-	3.67
B+	3.33
B	3.00
B-	2.67
C+	2.33
C	2.00
C-	1.67
D+	1.33
D	1.00
D-	0.67
F	0.00

Table 1 Point Scale

Lowest Number		*Letter Grade*		*Highest Number*
3.835	<	A	≤	4.000
3.500	<	A-	≤	3.835
3.165	<	B+	≤	3.500
2.835	<	B	≤	3.165
2.500	<	B-	≤	2.835
2.165	<	C+	≤	2.500
1.835	<	C	≤	2.165
1.500	<	C-	≤	1.835
1.165	<	D+	≤	1.500
0.835	<	D	≤	1.165
0.335	<	D-	≤	0.835
0.000	≤	F	≤	0.335

Table 2 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 Writing Center offers free one-on-one consultations at any stage of the writing process. You can make appointments through the Portal (look for "Writing Center" under "Academics") or by email (writing.center@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 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.