

Social and Political Philosophy
Philosophy 320
Fall 2011 *Term Paper Assignment*
Due: *Wednesday, December 7*

Write an 8-10 page (double-spaced) paper in which you reflect on the relevance to current events on any topic covered in this course. The paper should include both an exposition of the thought of at least two of the philosophers covered in the course as well as your own thoughtful reflection.

Sample Paper Topics

The Social Contract

Examine the development of the notion of government by social contract in the writings of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. What did Locke find wrong in Hobbes' account, Rousseau find objectionable in Locke's theory, and what problems remain in Rousseau's social contract? Does the notion of government by social contract even make sense, and if so, what is the best social contract that can be achieved?

Civil Disobedience

What obligations does the individual citizen have to obey the laws of the state? Can there ever be a conflict between civil and moral law, and if so, to which does the individual owe his allegiance? How might Thoreau's essay *On Civil Disobedience* be read as a response to the arguments Socrates gives in the *Crito* regarding our obligation to obey the laws of the state? What are the keys to civil disobedience? Can civil disobedience be an effective strategy for advancing social change today?

Democracy and Its Difficulties

Philosophers since Plato have pointed out problems with democracy. What are the problems facing democracy and how might these problems be overcome? What are the keys to democracy?

What is Liberty?

What is the difference between "positive" and "negative" liberty as explained by Isaiah Berlin? How does the difference between Locke and Rousseau's understanding of the social contract illustrate this difference? What are the appropriate limits on individual liberty and government authority? To what extent would you agree with the "Liberty Principle" put forth by John Stuart Mill?

Human Rights

On what basis can human rights be said to be universal? Explain the difference between the early "natural rights" theories found in Locke and Rousseau and the "conventional" account of human rights in Bentham and Mill. With regard to the 1948 *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* are the social and economic rights listed in articles 22-29 just as important as the political rights listed in articles 3-21?

Economic Justice

How should the goods of a just society be distributed and what role should government play in this distribution? Should there be limits to the inequities between rich and poor? Should there be private property at all? On what basis is the acquisition of private property justified and what limits should there be on the acquisition of private property?

War and Peace

Does it make sense to consider whether or not wars can be considered just or unjust, or is it the case that wars are only won or lost and not properly classified as just or unjust? If there is such a thing as a just war, what are the principles by which it is justified? What are the conditions that Kant sets out through which the nations of the world can live in perpetual peace? To what extent is Kant's idea of perpetual peace realizable today?

Handling Citations

There are a number of ways of handling citations in your papers. One could just use footnotes or endnotes. An example of using footnotes is like the following: According to Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living.”¹ If you are citing the same text a number of times you can also just include the text reference in the sentence like this: According to Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living” (*The Apology*, 38a). Notice the format of the punctuation here. The period goes after the text reference—otherwise the reference is stuck in no-sentence-land between two sentences. If you use this format then you would have to include the text information, which otherwise was included in the footnote, in a bibliography at the end of your paper. Notice the difference in format of the footnote and bibliography. The difference between footnote and bibliography format is not as clear in citing Plato, since he has only one name. Let’s say I wanted to cite our textbook where Magee finds it “doubtful whether any philosopher has had more influence than Socrates.”² If I wanted to include the text reference in the sentence it would look like this: Magee finds it “doubtful whether any philosopher has had more influence than Socrates” (Magee, p. 23). Then, of course, the reference information goes into a bibliography.

Now let’s say you want to cite a longer quotation. In order to save valuable space you could then indent the quote and use single spacing. What seems most outrageous is that Socrates refuses to simply just shut up, which might perhaps have been enough of a counter-penalty to save his life. Socrates, however, has a good reason for this:

Now this is the most difficult point on which to convince some of you. If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the god, you will not believe me and will think I am being ironical. On the other hand, if I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for man, you will believe me even less. (*The Apology*, 37e-38a)

You could, of course, use a footnote for this citation. If you include the reference within the body of the text as illustrated above then note the difference in punctuation here as opposed to the earlier example. Notice here you don’t use quotation marks around the citation because it is obvious what is being cited. Also the text reference stands outside the period of the last sentence. Here are examples of bibliographic entries:

Bibliography

Magee, Bryan. *The Story of Philosophy: A Concise Introduction to the World’s Greatest Thinkers and Their Ideas*. London: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2001.

Plato. *The Apology*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: from Thales to Aristotle*, 2nd. ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.

Notice in a bibliography the last name goes first, then a comma followed by first name. Then a period and then the title of the text. Always use italics or underline whenever referring to the title of a book. Notice there are no parentheses in a bibliographic entry. Bibliographies are organized alphabetically.

¹ Plato, *The Apology*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: from Thales to Aristotle*, 2nd. ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 38a.

² Bryan Magee, *The Story of Philosophy: A Concise Introduction to the World’s Greatest Thinkers and Their Ideas* (London: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2001), p. 23.

Notice in a footnote, first name comes first followed by last name, then the title of the text, and then publisher information (Location: Publisher, publishing date) comes in parentheses.

