PSC 200
Questions for Discussion

Some of these questions call for you to find the author’s answer; other questions call for your own answer; where applicable, you should find both the author’s and your answer.

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*

1. What is the state of nature? Is it a reasonable place to begin thinking about politics, as Locke says?

2. What does Locke mean by saying that being under law is a precondition of having freedom?

3. Is our consent the true basis of our obligation to obey the government, as Locke says?

4. Locke insists that the legislative power be superior to the executive and federative powers. As a practical matter, however, is it possible to maintain that superiority?

5. Why should we obey the executive in cases of prerogative?

6. Is Locke’s position on the right to resist tyranny sensible?

7. Would society be more or less stable if Locke’s teaching on the dissolution of government were widely known?

The following questions can also help to guide your reading and our discussion:

Chapter 1: What is political power?

Chapter 2: What is natural freedom? What is natural equality? What are the two primary teachings of the law of nature? For what reasons may punishment be used? What is the relation between the law of nature and municipal laws? What is the remedy for the “inconveniences” of the state of nature? How does absolute monarchy compare with the state of nature?

Chapter 3: How does an assertion of absolute power lead to a state of war? What is the state of nature? the state of war?

Chapter 4: What is social (political) liberty? Why may a man not enslave himself to another? What is slavery?

Chapter 5: Whose property is man? How is property rightfully acquired in the state of nature, and to what extent? What part of value does labor contribute? How does money arise, and what is its significance?

Chapter 6: What is paternal power? Why can government not be derived from it? In what respect are all men equal? What are the source and extent of parental obligation to children? Why is law a precondition of freedom? How is freedom linked to being rational? When does a parent lose power over his child? What is the extent of a child’s obligation to his parents?
Chapter 7: What is slavery? Why are slaves not part of political society? Why is absolute monarchy inconsistent with political society? What is the end of government?

Chapter 8: What is the beginning of political society? What is Locke’s argument for majority rule? What is a sufficient declaration of consent to obey the government? How long does obligation to the government last for one who has given express consent? tacit consent?

Chapter 9: Why does man leave the state of nature? What natural powers does he surrender and to what extent? What is the legislative power bound to do?

Chapter 10: What are the forms of commonwealth? Upon what does the form depend?

Chapter 11: What is the first and fundamental law of the commonwealth? Why is the legislative the supreme power? Why cannot legislative power be arbitrary? What weight does the law of nature have in society? Why are promulgated, standing laws and known, authorized judges essential? Why cannot the legislative power take property from someone without consent? What is the difference between absolute and arbitrary power, and how far does absolute power extend? Why cannot the legislative power transfer itself?

Chapter 12: What is legislative power? Why is separation of powers a wise practice? What is executive power? What is federative power?

Chapter 13: When may the people remove or alter the legislative power?

Chapter 14: What is prerogative? Who judges as to when prerogative is used rightly?

Chapter 15: What is despotical power? How does it arise? Who is rightly subject to it?

Chapter 16: What power does a conqueror in a just war acquire? Is a promise extorted by force the same as binding consent? With what two rights is every man born?

Chapter 17: What is usurpation?

Chapter 18: What is tyranny? In what forms of government can it be found?

Chapter 19: What is the difference between dissolution of political society and dissolution of government? How are governments dissolved? Why does Locke think that his teaching will not lead to frequent revolutions? Who are the true “rebels” in a political dispute? Why is peace not the sole end of government? Who judges as to when the government has abused its trust?

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*

Part 1

1. What detrimental results have followed the flourishing of the sciences and arts in society?
2. What is the relation between the sciences and human needs?

3. Would Socrates agree with Rousseau’s disdain for the sciences and arts? (You may not be able to answer this question until after we have read Plato’s *Republic*, but you should try to answer it then.)

4. When did Rome decline?

Part 2

5. To what do the sciences and arts owe their birth?

6. From what two sources should we seek counsel concerning conduct?

7. What injuries do the sciences inflict on society?

8. How does luxury lead to the dissolution of morals? How does the latter lead to the corruption of taste?

9. What is the “foolish education” Rousseau detests?

10. How is “distinction of talents” a problem?

11. Under what condition are the sciences and arts useful to society? Who should study them?

12. How does one learn what virtue demands?

Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

Preface

1. Is the state of nature hypothetical or historical?

2. What is wrong with prior definitions of natural law?

3. What two principles operate in the soul prior to reason?

Part 1

4. What are the characteristics of savage man?

5. What two properties differentiate humans from other animals?

6. What is the relation between human understanding and the passions?

7. How social are people in the state of nature?
8. Why was Hobbes wrong to say that man is naturally wicked?

9. Besides love of oneself, what natural sentiment is found in humans?

10. With what does Rousseau replace the Golden Rule?

11. Why is inequality not very significant in the state of nature?

Part 2

12. Who is the true founder of civil society?

13. What is “the first source of the evils” in the state of nature (p. 94)?

14. How do sentiments of preference lead to “the first duties of civility” (p. 96)?

15. What does Rousseau say is the happiest stage of human development?

16. How do rules of justice originate?

17. How does property originate?

18. Once property is introduced, what is the inevitable cause of slavery and a “state of war” (p. 101)?

19. How does politics originate?

20. Who makes the social contract?

21. How do citizens come to let themselves be oppressed?

22. What are the four sorts of inequality, and which one is fundamental?

23. How does despotism complete the circle of inequality?

24. When is moral inequality unnatural?

Rousseau, On the Social Contract

Book 1

1. What considerations does Rousseau attempt to reconcile?

2. What question does he claim to answer?

3. What is man’s first law?
4. Why does force not produce right?

5. Why is slavery illegitimate?

6. What is the state of war, and what are the consequences for the right of conquest?

7. What does a person do when he makes a social compact?

8. Why must alienation be total?

9. What do the terms “people,” “citizens,” and “subjects” mean?

10. What is the sovereign?

11. How can a person be “forced to be free”?

12. What change does man undergo upon entering the civil state?

13. What are the respective limits on natural freedom and civil freedom?

14. What is the difference between possession and property?

15. What is moral freedom?

16. What conditions authorize the right of the first occupant?

17. Why is the individual’s right to property subordinate to the community’s right?

Book 2

18. For what end is the state instituted?

19. Why is sovereignty inalienable?

20. Why is sovereignty indivisible?

21. What is the difference between the will of all and the general will?

22. What are the limits on the sovereign power?

23. Why is capital punishment legitimate?

24. What is a republic?

25. What is the role of the lawgiver?
26. Why is a small state stronger than a large one?

Plato, Republic

(Numbers below refer to page numbers found in the margins of Bloom’s translation.)

331a-e How does Polemarchus’s definition of justice differ from Cephalus’s definition?

331d-336a How does Polemarchus’s view of what it means to harm someone differ from Socrates’s view?

336b-354b Why is Thrasymachus initially angry with Socrates? Is Socrates correct in saying he has not refuted Thrasymachus’s position by the end of book 1?

375d-378b How does Socrates justify the censorship required for the education of the guardians?

389b-d Who is permitted to tell a lie?

414c-415c What is true and what is false in the “noble lie”?

416d-417b Why are guardians not allowed to have private property?

419a Why does Adeimantus object to the abolition of private property for guardians?

427c-445e What is justice in the city, according to Socrates? Is the analogy between city and soul sound? Is there harmony between the just man and the just city? Would the just man want to be a good citizen in the good city?

449a-462d As Socrates issues one shockwave after another, look to answer this question: how just is “the just city”?

472a-473b If Socrates’s republic were found impossible to create in deeds, would the Republic be a purposeless work?

475b-480a What distinguishes philosophers from others? When Socrates speaks of “an idea of the beautiful itself” (479a) and “the fair itself” (479e), is he speaking of anything that really exists or is truly meaningful?

507b-511e As you read about “the divided line,” note the diagram of it on p. 464 of Bloom’s translation.

514a-540c Is the story of the cave an accurate metaphor of the educational process? Could anyone be as wise as the philosopher needs to be in order to rule?
540a-b In a city built on the premise of one person-one function, could the philosophers perform two functions?

544d-e What does Socrates see at the root of corrupt regimes?

552a What is wrong with oligarchy?

557a-563b What is Socrates’s criticism of democracy? How strong do you consider it?

572b-573c What defines a tyrant?

580d-582a Does Socrates persuade you that only the philosopher is fit to judge among different kinds of pleasures?

595a-608b What is Socrates’s criticism of poetry?

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

**Book 1**

1. Why may “the political art” be the master science (chap. 2)?

2. Why does Aristotle claim that young people are not equipped to study politics (chap. 3)?

3. What is Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s doctrine of ideas (chap. 6)?

4. What does Aristotle mean by saying that “by nature a human being is political” (chap. 7)?

5. What is happiness (chap. 7)?

6. How does Aristotle defend the claim that goods of the soul are higher than bodily or external goods (chap. 8)?

7. What is the relation between happiness, virtue, and chance (chaps. 7-11)?

8. In what way does the politician need to study the soul (chap. 13)?

**Book 3**

9. What examples can you conceive for Aristotle’s categories of voluntary, involuntary, and nonvoluntary acts (chap. 1)?

10. What is choice (chap. 2)?

11. What is deliberation (chap. 3)?
12. What is Aristotle’s analysis of the careless person (chap. 5)?

13. Why do you think that Aristotle discusses courage first among the moral virtues (chaps. 6-9)?

14. What is moderation (chaps. 10-12)?

**Book 4**

15. What is the difference between liberality and magnificence? Do you think that the desire to be magnificent is praiseworthy (chaps. 1-2)?

16. Why is greatness of soul “a kind of ornament of the virtues” (chap. 3)?

17. Why does Aristotle say that the longing for honor would seem to relate to greatness of soul as liberality relates to magnificence (chap. 4)?

18. How does gentleness relate to anger (chap. 5)?

19. How does the virtue concerning associating differ from friendship (chap. 6)?

20. How does the virtue concerning boasting differ from irony (chap. 7)?

21. How similar is wittiness to tact (chap. 8)?

22. Why is a sense of shame not a true virtue (chap. 9)?

**Book 5**

23. What does Aristotle mean by claiming that “all lawful things are somehow just” (chap. 1)?

24. What is partial justice, and what are its forms (chap. 2)?

25. In what sense does distributive justice involve equality (chap. 3)?

26. Should personal merit be irrelevant in corrective justice (chap. 4)?

27. What is the reason for money to exist (chap. 5)?

28. What conditions are required for political justice to exist (chap. 6)?

29. Regarding political justice, what is the difference between natural justice and conventional justice (chap. 7)?

30. What is equity (chap. 10)?

31. Why does Aristotle claim that it is worse to do injustice than to suffer injustice (chap. 11)?
32. Why does Aristotle recommend the contemplative life to those capable of it (chap. 7)?

33. What happiness does a life of moral virtue offer (chap. 8)?

34. Why does Aristotle claim that laws should guide people toward virtuous conduct (chap. 9)?