

Phil 144: Final Paper Assignment

Winter, 2021

Instructions

The paper (6–8 pages long) is due, as an attachment, via the “Assignments” tool on Canvas by midnight Wednesday, March 17, in MSWord format or in a format easily convertible to MSWord (e.g., Open Office, plain text, or RTF).

The following topics are suggestions. If you want to write on another topic, feel free to do so. It might be a good idea, however, in that case, to check with me first.

Note that the topics tend to have many sub-questions. You need not (and probably should not) try to answer all of them. (You *certainly* should not just answer them one after another in order — that would make a bad paper.) I put them there to suggest various directions for thinking about the topic, and in particular to head off superficial or excessively simple ways of thinking about it.

All of the topics below require you to make substantial use of material from at least two of our authors (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, and Hume). You can write about more than two if you feel it improves your paper (but you will not get extra credit just for including a third author). If you want to write about a topic which involves only one author, you should check with me.

You can also use other outside material if you think it helps your paper (though, again, I don’t necessarily recommend that). If so you must of course make it clear exactly what you are using and how. Also, it should still be clear that the paper was written for this course.

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If you have any questions about what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, you can ask me, or consult the resources listed on the Library website.¹ For possible consequences of plagiarism, see the Academic Misconduct Policy.²

The intent of the paper is to discuss the views or attitudes manifested in the reading, rather than your own opinions on the topic. That is: you should ideally come up with something interesting and original to say (not mere summary), but it should be something interesting and original *about* what our authors mean. (In particular: I don't expect or encourage you to reach a judgment about whether what they say is correct or not.) If you are upset by something one of our authors says, or find it ridiculous, you should use that as an excuse to try and understand better why someone would say such a thing. If you can't manage that, you should try to write about a topic which doesn't touch on the problem area.

For a good comparison paper, remember that the *comparison* should be interesting. This means, for example, that the paper should not read like two shorter papers (one on each author) stuck together. Also it should say something non-obvious about their similarities and differences. (It is always possible to make any two positions sound similar if one is vague enough. But that isn't interesting.)

If you're using the editions I ordered, you can refer to the readings just by giving the page number. If you use a different edition and/or some other source, please give at least enough bibliographical information that I can find it if necessary. There's no need for a separate bibliography or title page.

You can find answers to some commonly asked questions about my assignments and grading in my FAQ (<https://people.ucsc.edu/~abestone/courses/faq.html>).

Suggested topics

1. What role does *nature* play in the thought of our authors? Keep in mind that the words "nature" and "natural" may not mean exactly the same thing in different authors, and may be used in more than one sense by the same

¹<https://guides.library.ucsc.edu/citesources/plagiarism>.

²https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_misconduct.

author. What is the relationship between the natural and the artificial? Is the best condition for human beings — the best society, or the best way of life — a *natural* condition, according to them? If so, in what sense of “natural”? Do they think it is “natural” (and again: if so, in what sense?) for human beings to live in (what they call) a “state of nature”? And/or do they think it is “natural” for human beings to abide by the “law of nature”? What, according to them, is the relationship between the “right of nature” or “natural right(s)” and “human nature”?

2. Discuss and compare the views of our authors about the origin, structure, and political significance of the family. What, if anything, is the difference, according to them, between families as they exist within established commonwealths and families as they would have been or would be in earlier or more primitive or less organized states of society, and especially in the “state of nature”? To what extent and/or under what circumstances do they think families are held together by natural affection? By natural rights of dominion? By the needs of children? By the power of one or both parents? By gratitude? By property and/or the prospect of inheriting it? To what extent or under what conditions do they think both parents have or would or should have equal authority in a family? To what extent or under what conditions do they think the authority of one or the other parent is or would or should be greater? Assuming most families in their time were patriarchal, how do they explain that? What role, if any, do they think families played or would play in forming a commonwealth? In what ways, or under what conditions, do they think families resemble commonwealths or actually are small commonwealths? How are their disagreements about these various issues related to their disagreements about the past, present, or (hoped for) future roles of men and women in civil society?

3. Discuss and compare the views of our authors about the relationship between religion and political society. This may include both issues about what the relationship in fact is or has been in the past (e.g. during various periods described in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments) and issues about what the proper or best relationship would be. “Religion” may also enter into this in various different ways: as a philosophical doctrine about the nature and will of God (e.g. about a “divine law” that can be discovered by unaided human reason); as a set of (possibly rational, or possibly irrational) beliefs about God or the gods, perhaps based, or supposed to be based, on

miraculous revelation and/or verified by public miracles, perhaps partly due to deliberate fabrication (which some parties, e.g. priests or legislators, have undertaken for their own private good, and/or for the public good); as a human institution with its own structure and with its own (legitimate or illegitimate) claims to authority (a church, ecclesiastical power). How, according to our authors, might religion (in one or more of these senses) be necessary or helpful for the origination of a commonwealth? For the lawful exercise of political power within a commonwealth? As a basis for legitimate opposition to a commonwealth? How, and in what sense, do they think it might be dangerous? What kind of political control over religion do they think desirable and/or legitimate, and why? (Keep in mind that, for at least some of the above questions, Locke's views in the *Essay* and/or the structure he set up in the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* may be relevant.)

4. Under what conditions, according to our authors, and in what respects, and for what purposes, may one human being, or one group of human beings, legitimately act as the *agent* (or “representative” or, in Hobbes's terminology, “person”) of another (individual or group)? What rights and/or obligations result on each side of the relationship (the author and the agent, the represented and the representative)? In particular: what role(s) do they see for such agency (representation) in the initial formation and/or in the continued operations of a political community? Which political rights and obligations, according to them, result from such relationships? What, if anything, do they think serves to enforce them (i.e., to protect the rights from infringement or to ensure that the obligations will be fulfilled)? In what respects, or on what conditions, or for what purposes, on the other hand, do they think agency/representation is either a bad idea (ill advised), illegitimate, or simply impossible? To the extent that our authors disagree about these matters, how does this result disagreements over the possible and/or advisable ways of organizing political society?

5. Identify a problem we face in our own society today — a problem that arguably is the result of a wrong or failed political structure, or of wrong or failed political/moral education, etc. — and explain how our authors would explain the situation. If possible, get them to argue with each other about it: author X would say what we have done wrong A, whereas author Y would say, on the contrary, that A is fine, what we are doing wrong is B. Note: to do this well you have to get the authors to explain exactly *how* our

problems have come about, not just reiterate their general claims about what the right political structure is. (E.g. obviously Hobbes thinks we should have an absolute sovereign, but where exactly might he point to say: see, this is where not having an absolute sovereign has gotten you into trouble! And then you get Locke or Rousseau or Wollstonecraft to explain how the trouble we are in was actually caused by something else.)