

and moral discernment directed by natural law points toward the need for salvation revealed in divine law. It also reminds us that, even though ethical behavior is not sufficient for salvation, those who enjoy the fruits of salvation through divine law should strive to be moral (natural law) and good citizens (positive law).

CONCLUSION

Although the previous paragraph lists features that some consider compelling support for natural law, other philosophers in this chapter will think Aquinas' theory is flawed. Nietzsche would argue that the will to power, not reason, shapes life and should guide our ethics. The divine command folks agree with Nietzsche's emphasis on will's role in ethics but disagree vehemently with Nietzsche's notion that the will should serve egoistic purposes. Here, divine command theorists will be closer to Aquinas in the belief that God is the ultimate foundation of ethics. However, Kant objects to their attempts to ground ethics in an external authority, arguing that one's rationality is the proper foundation of moral autonomy. Aristotle, even though he is a big fan of reason, rejects Kant's deontological approach because it encourages rule following and tends to ignore the inward dispositional change needed for virtue development. Finally, the utilitarians want to ask everyone else, "Isn't anyone but us interested in the outcomes of our choices?"

The upshot of the summary above is that when our investigation of the moral life looks behind social expectations, cultural standards, and family upbringing, we find an ongoing and vigorous discussion that draws us into other philosophical topics. Answers to questions about how we know what is real, the purpose of life, and the structure of human nature will shape our ethical ideas. Perhaps more than any other area, though, political philosophy has a close kinship with ethics since both share concerns about justice. We now move from conversations about living the moral life to theories about how we should create moral structures for society.

WHAT DOES JUSTICE LOOK LIKE?

What would happen if every inhabitant of earth woke up one morning and had no recollection of any political, economic, or social system, and no one could recall how laws were made and enforced? In this situation, what institutions and laws would we create to ensure just treatment for all, and what reasons would we give for these political and social arrangements? You have probably not lost much sleep over these questions, but many philosophers have. This "starting from zero" scenario is so basic to political philosophy that it even has a name: the **state of nature**. The reason we might want to go to this imaginary state of nature is that we can get too comfortable with the way we have organized society and simply assume that what we do is what we should do. This can be dangerous, though, because political and social institutions shape our lives in profound ways, and it would be tragic if they imposed unjust influences on us.

The question of justice compels political and social philosophers to think about the state of nature. It forces us to consider what life was like prior to the emergence of the complex social systems of today and why, over time, we have organized ourselves into certain types of political and social units. It also raises the question of whether our current systems promote justice for people or hinder the endeavor to provide equity for all. Behind all these questions is the issue of human nature: What sorts of beings are humans? Since government

is about governing human beings, our ideas about human nature will influence the form of government we consider to be most just.

MARX: FIX THE SYSTEM

The state of nature scenarios we will examine in this chapter are attempts to clean the slate and build political ideas without interference from currently existing structures. However, our first political philosopher, *Karl Marx* (1818–1883), thinks this strategy is a dead end. Instead, useful political thought has to deal with the real world, not imaginary abstractions like the state of nature. Moreover, he argues that real history reveals nothing more than variations on the same theme: oppression of the poor masses at the hands of the wealthy few. As Marx puts it, “The history of all hitherto existing society is a history of class struggle.” Based on this view of history, he believed that the future, not the past, is a more reliable guide for creating a just society. He also was confident that he could already see this future, in which marginalization of the have-nots had become a sad relic of the past and justice for all reigned.

Because Marx’s philosophy is oriented toward the future, it makes sense to start with what he calls the **end of history**. If all prior history is a “history of class struggle,” the end of history is communism. For Marx, “end” has a twofold meaning. If history is characterized by class struggle, communism ends this conflict by eliminating economic classes. It is also the end of history because it is the goal toward which history strives. Marx is an optimist who believes that communism is inevitable, and when it arrives, it will bring an end to the miseries and deprivations that have plagued humanity for millennia.

The heart of communism is the classless society. The deep divisions between rich and poor no longer exist because of the *abolition of private property*. By this Marx means that all resources required to produce the goods society needs are no longer owned by individuals. Farmlands and factories, as well as all facilities for transportation, communication, and education, are state owned. Moreover, that which is produced by the state will be directed toward meeting the true needs of all the people rather than generating luxury or frivolous goods that designate higher status and perpetuate divisions between people.

Religion will be abolished because its present function—placating the poor with promises of future reward in another world—is no longer necessary. Education will be free for all, and educational opportunities will be determined by talent and aptitude, not political connections or the ability to pay. Inheritance rights will be eliminated so that economic inequalities do not reappear in future generations. While people will develop special skills according to their talents and aptitudes, no one will be defined by a specific work role. The aim, once communism is fully in place, is a society governed by a democratic process in which no voice is amplified by greater wealth. Marx’s overarching vision is that all people have common needs and a common claim to what they have produced by their work. Thus all should have equal access to the wealth, resources, and goods of the state. As he puts it, communism is a system in which the individual no longer stands in competition with society. Instead, communism allows a marriage in which individual interests match the interests of all. The cooperation of one with all replaces capitalist competition where the few win at the expense of the majority.

Marx’s idea of replacing competition with cooperation sounds appealing. Competition is enjoyable in limited doses, such as in athletics or spelling bees. However, if competition is at the heart of human society itself, losing the game has dire consequences. Any person with an ounce of humanity has to be disturbed by the fact that our planet produces enough for everyone to live and even thrive, yet people starve and live in deprivation because the wealth is unevenly distributed. For this reason alone, Marx’s philosophy grabs our attention. However, perhaps the one thing that causes people to question his vision is that competition, striving to win, pursuit of self-interest, selfishness, or whatever other description we might give it, has been with us throughout history. Even though we cooperate in many endeavors, cooperation still serves the purpose of competition; team members work together, but the ultimate goal is to beat the other team. Thus, even though Marx envisions a rosy communist future in which all live in harmony, receive a fair shake, and no one is subject to injustice, two nagging questions remain. Why does he think that the human impulse to compete will change so radically once communism is in

place? If it is possible to remake society so that everyone has adequate food, housing, education, and satisfying work, why haven't we done it before?

Marx agrees that history is the story of competition and selfishness, but it is not because human beings are inherently selfish. Instead, systems that divide people into economic winners and losers force us into a "survival of the fittest" mode and reward selfishness. He is convinced that an economic system built on sharing and cooperation creates different sorts of people. We have failed to recognize the person-shaping influence of economic systems because, in Marx's opinion, almost every political theory has been built on a mistake. Most philosophers begin by analyzing the wants, needs, and motivations of the individual and then create social theories based on their observations. This seems logical because societies are, after all, made up of individual human beings. If we understand individuals, we will understand how to build a society comprised of those individuals. However, Marx says that this gets it completely backward. We are instead inherently social beings, and human individuals cannot be understood in isolation from the social structures that surround them.

This leads to a second important feature in Marx's political philosophy. Generally, philosophers have believed that political and economic structures change over time because new and more enlightened ideas arise about how to better organize and govern society. For Marx, this also is completely backward. Our views about human nature, ethics, justice, and religion do not create political theories and institutions; these ideas are the *products* of the social context in which we live. More precisely, he argues that we are economic beings, and our intellectual, political, legal, religious, and educational ideas are shaped by whatever economic system dominates our age. Those who control the wealth use these systems to stack the deck in their favor and keep them in power. Thus, for example, the idea of working harder and smarter in order to succeed does not create capitalism. Instead, Marx says that those who pull the levers of capitalist power are the primary financial beneficiaries when others work harder and smarter. Ideology controlled by the wealthy props up the economic system that makes them wealthy.

Finally, Marx argues most political philosophers fail to recognize that history is governed by an evolutionary process. History's movement is not smooth and seamless but is marked by class warfare, in which one oppressive economic system is replaced by the next until we ultimately reach communism and the end of history. This historical evolution is called **dialectical materialism**, because Marx argues that it is the story in which material forces of production create class conflict and struggle. One facet of Marx's dialectical materialism is his belief that humans are purely material beings. There is no divine, transcendent world, and we have nothing like a soul that corresponds to an otherworldly reality. Every authentic human need is grounded in the production and consumption of material goods. The **means of production** is Marx's label for the processes by which our social systems produce goods.

Productive processes undergo transitions (i.e., the **dialectic**) throughout history because, over time, the means of production in a given age will advance beyond the capacities of a nation's social-political structures. For example, early slave economies were eventually replaced by feudalistic structures in part because the guild system, with a division of labor that allowed for greater specialization, was more economically productive than slavery. Later, the age of machines allows for greater efficiency than the guild system, which leads to the replacement of feudalism by capitalism, and the gradual replacement of traditional monarchies by new forms of government.

While the means of production are different in each system, these stages of economic history have two things in common. First, each is characterized by conflict between haves and have-nots—owners versus slaves in slave economies, feudal lords and guild-masters versus serfs and apprentices in feudalism, and the capitalist (bourgeois) versus the laborer (proletarian) in capitalism. The second commonality is that the haves control the social power in each stage. Educational systems, laws, religion, and ideas are not neutral. Instead, they reflect the interests of the wealthy and are designed to keep power in their hands. The combination of these two factors leads to oppression. The means of production—the systems by which we make things—is socialized. It cannot function without including everyone. However,

the products themselves are individually owned, and ownership of the fruits of production concentrates social power in the hands of the few.

The incongruity between a collective means of production and private ownership of property results in what Marx calls **alienation**. We create collectively, but the wealth created by the means of production is not evenly distributed among all who create. Capitalism only works when there is profit, and Capitalist Economics 101 reminds us that costs (including labor) must be lower than revenues for a business to survive. Profit, the difference between revenues and costs, is tied to **surplus value**, the value workers add to a product that does not come back to them in salary. Instead, the surplus value of workers' exertions is taken from them—alienated—and goes into the owners' pockets. Alienation also has other dimensions. The goods the worker produces are not theirs but are owned by someone else. Since creating is the essence of our humanity, alienation of individuals from what they produce dehumanizes them. Moreover, because both our labor and the products that result from it are alienated from us and controlled by others, we are not whole in ourselves. Thus capitalism alienates us from ourselves.

As noted above, capitalism became dominant in Marx's age because it is highly efficient, and thus is successful at generating greater wealth than any previous economic system. However, capitalism's success, Marx believed, would also be its undoing, because it is a beast with a voracious appetite. Capitalism's continued existence requires ever greater production and extension into new markets. Therefore, Marx predicted that as factories get bigger in order to compete, smaller capitalists will fail and be pushed down into the ranks of laborers. As the numbers of the poor grow, greater and greater wealth will be concentrated in fewer hands. Movement into new markets requires extensive transportation and communications systems, but this also connects workers with each other and raises awareness of labor's plight everywhere. As this happens, the voices of the poor will increasingly demand wholesale change. In short, Marx argues that capitalism creates "its own gravediggers" because it cannot be sustained over the long term. Capitalism demands continued growth, but this demand ultimately results in overproduction and will lead to

economic collapse. When it does, Marx is confident that communism will step in to fill the void and usher in a just society.

Marx contributes a number of thought-provoking ideas to political philosophy. Increased sensitivity toward the influence of culture on our values and thought patterns raises awareness that ideas and institutions can be tools to advance the interests of a privileged few. He also helps us recognize that our work is closely linked with our identity and sense of worth. However, the failure of communist experiments in various parts of the world makes it difficult to share Marx's optimism about communism's potential to create a prosperous, just, and equitable government. Moreover, his predictions about the disappearance of the middle class and the collapse of capitalism have been far off the mark, casting further doubt on his prophecies of a future communist utopia. Finally, many question whether Marx has properly understood human nature. Although he was adamant in his criticism of wealth inequality, he had nothing against wealth itself. His political philosophy is built on the belief that our true needs are met by the humane production and fair distribution of material goods. If you fix the economic system, you fix what ails humanity. This leads some political philosophers to conclude that one of Marxism's deepest flaws is its reduction of human nature to purely financial interests. Although *Plato* precedes Marx by many centuries, he would share this criticism.

PLATO: RULE BY THE RATIONAL

Plato's *Republic* is a very long dialogue between *Socrates* (who voices Plato's ideas) and a group of conversation partners. Over the course of this discussion, Plato weighs in on almost every important area of philosophy. However, at the core of the *Republic* is the question of justice. The book starts with various participants offering definitions of what a just person looks like, but Plato finds them all unsatisfactory and suggests that they shift the question to the nature of a just state. One reason for this shift is that Plato agrees with Marx's view that a just society is instrumental in the creation of just persons. Since society gives us a bigger target, perhaps it is best to investigate justice from this direction rather than starting with individual justice. However,

while Marx believes that a just state requires equal treatment of all, Plato's vision for a just government is, as we will see, very hierarchical.

Technically, the "state of nature" thought experiment doesn't come into existence until after Plato's day, but he begins his political discussion in a similar way. If we start from square one, what social functions naturally arise whenever humans live with each other? His friends readily recognize that every society requires some way of producing the goods that sustain life. We need to grow food, make clothing, transport goods, and satisfy other economic needs. Plato refers to those who engage in this activity as the **artisans**. The next question is this: What happens if the artisans do their job well? What if the economy thrives so some citizens don't simply survive on porridge in rickety hovels but enjoy sumptuous feasts in nicely decorated banquet halls? Obviously, others will be tempted to take what the well-off have. Because this endangers the nation, Plato's group concludes that society will need police and military functions to provide protection. Those who provide security are called the **auxiliaries**. Finally, Plato and his friends note that security functions assume that laws are in place to govern commerce, determine what constitutes a crime, and set limits on the military. This means that the republic needs law-makers and rulers, or, as Plato calls them, **guardians**.

This inventory of societal functions seems so obvious that we may overlook something profound: every nation on the planet has these structures. Economies are organized differently from one society to the next and will produce different items depending on factors like climate and resources. Militaries and police forces vary in size and command structure. Rulers might be elected representatives, kings, dictators, or tribal chieftains. Regardless of the differences, though, every political entity requires artisans, auxiliaries, and guardians, because these functions correspond to enduring human needs. In short, Plato believes that we recognize something in the state of nature that shapes the fundamental structures found in every society.

The *Republic's* discussion turns to the question of who should fill these various roles. One participant points out that nations function best if people stick to one task rather than moving between jobs. The obvious reason for this is efficiency. If we focus on one role, experience

and specialization allow us to be more productive. More important for Plato, though, is his conviction that the different roles require different moral qualities. We expect people to follow laws in our political system, but the idea that ethical qualities are a prerequisite for filling a social role seems unusual. However, remember that the *Republic's* goal is not just an efficient state; the purpose is to define a just state, and justice is a moral quality.

Plato argues that artisans ought to possess the virtue of *moderation*. At a basic level, we recognize that we function best at our work if we have enough to eat but not too much. We are also most content if our needs are fulfilled but we have learned to temper our expectations so we don't get hung up about acquiring luxuries. The ideal soldier also requires moderation to withstand the rigors of military life. In addition, though, they need *courage* to confront dangerous circumstances. If the guardians are to excel in their duties, they too will need to be moderate and courageous, but their responsibility for making the rules and policies that guide the entire republic demands something else as well. This something else is *wisdom*, which allows them to see the entire scope of a nation's needs and to discern the eternal truths necessary to anchor decisions in unchanging realities rather than transitory events.

Plato's friends agree that these virtues are vital for a good state, but they are puzzled. If moderation, courage, and wisdom are all so critical, where does justice come into play? That is, after all, the question that started this entire discussion. Plato argues that justice emerges when the other three virtues, and the groups that possess these virtues, are present in *the proper order*. As we saw above, Plato believes it is conceivable for a person to be both moderate and unwise, but not possible for one to be wise and, at the same time, cowardly and undisciplined. There is a proper hierarchy in the virtues, in which wisdom is greater than courage and temperance. Likewise, those who possess wisdom—the guardians—should rule over the auxiliaries and the artisans. When society is in the proper order, with rulers in control of the auxiliaries, and auxiliaries are respected and obeyed by the craftsman class, you have a just society. In this paradigm, justice is not equal treatment for everyone. Instead, justice is found when

each person performs the social role for which they are suited and the proper hierarchy of roles governs the republic.

With this picture of justice in place, Plato believes we are now in the right position to answer the question that kicked off this conversation: What is a just person? Plato argues that the *soul* has three functions—**appetite**, **spirit**, and **reason**. Appetite is the “wanting” part of the soul; it desires food, sex, comfort, and pleasures of all types. Spirit represents the drive and ambition within us, and reason is the capacity to think strategically and to contemplate eternal concepts. Plato then points out an interesting parallel: the soul’s functions correspond precisely with the three functions every society requires. The artisans fulfill the desires of the appetite by making comfy beds to sleep in and cooking tasty food. The auxiliaries have the spirit to face battle and other perilous situations. Rulers employ reason to govern wisely and benevolently. Therefore, when each of these three capacities of the soul is governed by its corresponding virtue so that appetite is temperate, the spirit is courageous, and reason functions wisely, we are a *just* person.

Only a just person is qualified to be a guardian, so it is important to think about how to prepare these individuals for ruling. In their early years, prospective guardians receive a general education, but morally questionable behavior by heroes and gods is censored from literature so that the morals of the young are not corrupted by bad exemplars. In early adulthood they receive the physical training that prepares them for military service, and those who lack the intellectual and moral qualities needed for ruling will stop at this level. Those who go on receive ten years of education in mathematics, which prepares them for dealing with the abstract and eternal concepts that are the main focus of the next five years of philosophical training. Philosophy directs the mind to the forms (which we discuss in chapters 9 and 11), the pure realities that transcend fluctuating and changing physical entities. For the few that make it this far, the next several years are spent in government administrative functions until the age of sixty, when they finally become guardians, or philosopher-kings.

A guardian’s preparation is physically and intellectually challenging, but these dimensions are only the support structure for an even

more important attribute of a ruler. Ultimately, it is the ethical component that qualifies one to be a ruler. After all, we know that the strong and bright are not necessarily morally good. In fact, without a moral guidance system, those who are smart and powerful are more dangerous than the weak and stupid. Thus Plato suggests anti-corruption measures to ensure that guardians are not just intellectually adept leaders but also are morally good rulers. First, since money so often corrupts, the philosopher-kings are allowed no private property. Instead, their room and board will be provided by the state and will be very modest. Second, since we tend to be biased toward family, spouses and children will be prohibited for guardians. These limitations, by the way, are also true for the auxiliary class. The logic behind this is that the auxiliaries’ and guardians’ primary loyalty is to the state as a whole. Thus, instead of having a unique connection to a small family group, these individuals should view all citizens as sons, daughters, and parents.

One big question remains for the *Republic*’s conversation partners. Even though they agree that Plato’s model would provide the best life for all citizens, only the wise truly understand why this model and its division of power is in sync with the very structure of reality. Thus the artisans will want some say in how they are governed, despite the fact that they are unsuited for the task. The auxiliaries, with their access to military might, could foment rebellion against this top-down approach and overthrow the guardians. How do we keep everyone in their rightful place and maintain a secure and prosperous republic governed by just laws?

Plato’s solution is that the guardians should tell the people a myth about how the republic got its three-class structure. This myth teaches that the god who created the city molded all citizens from the same earth, so all are related to each other. But this god mixed in gold with some to prepare them to rule, and combined silver with others to give them an auxiliary’s spirit. Those mixed with brass and iron have been selected by this god to be farmers and craftsmen. This myth, usually referred to as the **noble lie**, seems to be an ironic move for Plato, who is adamant in his quest for truth. Isn’t honesty at the heart of justice? However, two things make this lie justifiable,

or noble, for him. First, the myth, though not literally true, conveys the truth that different individuals are inherently suited for different tasks, and they are best situated if they stick to the roles that match their character. Second, Plato believes that a noble lie is the best way to preserve justice. While the guardians obey reason, the masses are not governed by reason. But they will obey the gods. Therefore, to get the lower classes to act in their best interests, the truth has to be packaged in a religious myth.

Modern readers often have several objections to Plato's political philosophy. One common complaint is that it is unapologetically elitist. This is undeniable, but we should note this is a different form of elitism. Plato advocates rule by an intellectual and moral elite, not government by hereditary nobility or a wealthy plutocracy, which, as history reminds us, offers little hope of yielding wise or moral leaders. If guardians' training and restrictions filter out those who seek despotic power or financial gain, this seems to increase the odds of finding good and benevolent leaders. He also argues that those who rise to power in the *Republic* do so by merit. Any guardian, male or female, must prove their physical, intellectual, and moral worth in a challenging process over a long period. In short, Plato would argue that government by the elite is a good thing as long as one is deemed elite because of their wisdom and justice.

Another concern people have with Plato's hierarchical model is that it involves the sort of social controls we find in totalitarian governments. He advocates censorship in the arts (which we will discuss in more depth in the next chapter) and education; a religious noble lie is used to control the masses; and the family is abolished for the upper classes of society. He even suggests a rigged "sex lottery" to ensure that society's best specimens are more likely to breed and produce offspring (who will be raised by the state without knowing their biological parents) for future leadership. Even if we agree that Plato's intent is benevolent, it is hard to deny that it is highly paternalistic and assumes that the masses need guidance from an enlightened elite to keep them from harming themselves. Finally, some argue that Plato's view of human nature is all wrong. Perhaps we are not rational souls but irrational animals that will kill in order to preserve our own lives.

If this view of humanity is more accurate, we will end up with a very different political system.

HOBBS: TAMING THE ANIMAL

Plato's political philosophy anticipates a rather smooth transition into life under government, but *Thomas Hobbes* (1588–1679) paints a darker picture of the state of nature. Imagine this thought problem. You are stranded on an island with ninety-nine other individuals. Everyone learns three things at the same time: no one can escape the island, each person possesses three poisonous darts that kill instantly if they penetrate the skin, and the island's resources will only support fifty people. What is your next move? I suspect that you will try to get away from others and find a hiding place. Of course, the problem with this strategy is that hiding people still metabolize, and it won't be long before you get hungry and thirsty. Now what? You become vulnerable to poisonous darts if you venture out to get food or water. If you do find food and water, others may kill you since you have what they need for their own survival. So your next step may involve making an agreement with someone else. You can stand guard, poisonous darts in hand, while your ally gets food and hydration for both of you. As time goes on, you will probably expand your alliance to include more people since there is safety in numbers.

If these responses to the island scenario sound likely, Hobbes tells us that this provides insight into our challenges in the state of nature and why we eventually form governments. The inclination to hide reveals a strong desire to preserve our life. For Hobbes, this drive for survival is at the heart of political philosophy. The obstacle for surviving in the state of nature is the scarcity of resources, which makes every other person a constant threat to our safety. They have the same desire for life and compete with us for the same scarce resources. In addition, people are generally equal in their ability to kill, an action they will take if they believe it is necessary to preserve their own existence. Because of these conditions, Hobbes describes the state of nature as "the war of all against all."

Our island scenario also points to a potential solution for this "red of tooth and claw" situation. We can improve our chances of survival

if we join with others. Alliances have two advantages. The obvious benefit is that numbers have survival value. This is why most animals congregate in herds, gaggles, and flocks. The second advantage is that we can increase the resources we need to survive if we are not constantly on the defensive. We are not very productive if we have only one hand on the plow because the other is on the sword. However, if one person keeps both hands on the sword while the other puts both to the plow, two people can multiply what is available in raw nature and can thrive.

The importance of alliances to survival leads Hobbes to define government as an agreement between individuals. This agreement allows us to escape the "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" state of nature and enjoy the heightened security of life in community. In view of our drive for survival, this arrangement sounds like a great deal, and Hobbes agrees. He also wants to make clear that it comes with a big trade-off. Life in the state of nature is tenuous, but it is also a life of absolute freedom. There is no right and wrong; no laws limit our choices or behaviors. However, when we band together with others for the sake of protecting, we do so only by forfeiting much of our freedom.

The trade-off of freedom for security is made necessary by a problem you might have spotted already. If I agree with another to plow and plant for both of us while my ally keeps watch with the sword, how do I know that my partner will not simply use the sword to lop off my head when the planting is done? This may not be a logical move for my partner, because I could now help protect the growing crop as well. However, people are not always logical, especially if they are fearful for their life. Moreover, my ally has no reason to believe that I won't do some head lopping of my own once planting is done and I can get my hands back on a sword.

The problem above makes us aware that contracts between people are not trustworthy if only the parties to the agreement are involved. If someone is accused of violating a business contract, it won't be very helpful for the injured party to complain to the individual who is alleged to have broken the contract. Both individuals have vested interests that keep them from being fair arbiters. Effective contracts

require a third party. Thus, a successful resolution to our contractual disagreement is more likely if the case is decided by an outside party like a judge who has no vested interest in the outcome and has the power to punish the offending party.

Hobbes believes government is similar to a business contract, except that it is an agreement of thousands or millions of parties, not just two. Thus, this political idea is called **social contract** theory (although this name comes into existence after Hobbes). The prospective citizens of a social unit "contract" to work together and avoid harming each other to increase their chances of survival. Hobbes calls the third party who oversees the agreement the **Leviathan**. This name comes from the Bible (see, for example, Job 41:1), where it refers to a sea monster. The image of a monster is fitting, because the Leviathan has almost absolute power over the citizenry. The sovereign's one limitation is a restriction on depriving anyone of their right to life, because the Leviathan's sole purpose is to preserve life. Apart from this, the ruler can decree any law he or she deems necessary. By agreeing to join the social contract, we give to the Leviathan our state-of-nature right to be our own lawmaker. We now have security, and the sovereign now has our freedom.

Hobbes is not naïve about the corrupting effect of giving such massive power to one individual, and admitted that sovereigns with sweeping authority were likely to cause suffering for the citizens. However, the Leviathan is the only thing that stands between us and a return to the state of nature. Hobbes believed that reasonable people should agree that the hardships and abuses we experience in the social contract are preferable to the uncertainty of existence in the state of nature. A monster that protects our survival is better than a "war of all against all."

One interesting development in Hobbes' philosophy is that a new political idea emerges. He believes that human beings have a natural right—the right to life—that government is obligated to honor and protect. In fact, survival is the sole task of civil government's existence. While many may see the concept of an inalienable right to life as a recognition of human dignity, other elements in Hobbes' view of human nature are less elevated. In the end, government exists because

we are amoral animals who endanger each other's lives. What we call civilization is essentially a zoo in which we are kept safe from each other by cages created through laws dictated by a zookeeper/Leviathan. Moreover, the zoo keeper is no different than the rest of the animals, and is even more dangerous because of monstrous power. This causes some political theorists to ask whether Hobbes' view of human nature fails to recognize aspects of our existence that transcend the animal impulse and call for a different approach to human governance.

LOCKE: GOVERNMENT BY CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED

One element that set Hobbes' philosophy apart from earlier political theories is that he didn't bring God into the conversation. One reason for his reluctance to connect God and politics is that most theorists of his day advocated the **divine right theory of kingship**, the view that rulers are granted their political authority by God's will and are thus accountable only to God and not to their citizens. Under divine right, if citizens question the authority and decrees of the king, they question God's will. Hobbes found this theory to be nothing more than a smoke screen that allowed rulers to oppress their citizens. *John Locke* is an ally with Hobbes in his opposition to divine right theories. However, he had a concern about Hobbes' alternative. While the Leviathan may protect our life, given the potential for despotic tyranny in this system, his social contract doesn't seem to offer the sort of life we really want. Extending our longevity is meaningless if our life isn't worth living.

To explain why human beings crave a certain type of life, Locke brings God back into the political discussion, but in a way that departs from divine right theories. Locke says that God gives certain rights to all people, and rulers have an obligation to honor those rights. While Hobbes' theory leaves all political power in the hands of the ruler, Locke's theory says that because people have God-given rights, political power ultimately rests in the hands of citizens, not a ruler. It is hard to convey how revolutionary this idea was at the time, but it's obvious that the royalty of his day were not big fans of his theory.

Like Hobbes, Locke builds his political philosophy from the state of nature. For him, however, the state of nature is not, as Hobbes sees it, a lawless situation that leads to the war of all against all, nor does he believe that law comes into existence only with the decrees of the Leviathan. Locke says that laws (and the moral principles they protect) are in place from the outset because the state of nature is governed by a *law of nature*. Stated otherwise, he proposes a version of **natural law theory** (which we examined in chap. 6) that argues that God endows all people with the rights of life, health, freedom, and property. He believes these rights are obvious to any rational individual because we intuitively desire these things and recognize that life just works better if others honor these rights. The law of nature, then, is reason's discovery of God's design for our moral ideal.

Property is a God-given right, so Locke takes on the tricky question of what gives an individual the right to claim something as their possession. He starts with the claim that our body is our most fundamental property. If it seems obvious that we own our bodies and no one else can lay claim to them, it follows that ownership of our bodies is extended to whatever is produced by the labor of our bodies. If we invest our energy in creating or improving something, we have a right to it. According to Locke, this implies that we have a right to claim anything as our own under two conditions. We cannot claim for ourselves that which is rightfully owned by another, and we can claim no more for ourselves than what we can use without waste or spoilage. Property rights are closely connected to the other natural rights he enumerates. By eating, I make food my property, and I cannot have life and health without this property. Moreover, procuring property requires that I exercise the right of freedom since I must choose whether to direct my efforts toward growing apples or building houses as a means of preserving my life and health. In short, the rights to life, health, freedom, and property are a package deal.

So far, the state of nature sounds like a pretty nice place. Everyone has rights and perfect freedom, and natural law makes everyone aware that they should respect the rights of others. However, Locke is not so naïve as to believe that everyone will act rationally (and thus morally). When others do harm to us, the law of nature gives us the

right to punish those who violate our natural rights. The problem is that we may not have sufficient power to execute judgment on a violator. The lack of power to punish wrongdoers means that the state of nature threatens to become a state of war. When immoral people know that others cannot bring them to punishment, they will persist in their evil. Or if punishment is exacted on evildoers, they may kill in revenge.

For Locke, the inability of the individual to execute punishment in the state of nature explains why we move to civil society. Government has what we do not: sufficient power to punish lawbreakers. However, when we transition to civil society, we don't move away from the law of nature. We bring it with us into the social contract. We don't forfeit our right to life, health, freedom, and property; we constitute government for the purpose of protecting these rights. Thus government is limited by God's will as expressed through natural law. It cannot justifiably enact laws that limit those rights without our consent.

That last phrase, "without our consent," is an important qualifier, because it recognizes that government places some limitations on our rights. For example, the mechanisms by which government preserves our peace and safety include law enforcement, military capability, and court systems. We have to pay for all of this, so government imposes taxes. But taxation is just a nice way of saying that government overrides our right to property. Locke says that governments can claim some of our property, but only when we give consent through elected lawmakers who express the will of the majority. If legislators fail to properly express the will of the people, periodic elections allow us to replace one lawmaker with another who more adequately represents our collective will. Locke's political thought includes an additional feature that was revolutionary, in a double sense. Almost every earlier political philosopher believed that a revolt of the citizenry against its government was prohibited. However, Locke argues that if government is deaf to the peoples' will or arbitrarily interferes with citizens' God-given rights, they have the right to rise up against government.

We try to be evenhanded in our evaluations of the philosophers in this text, but we have reason to hope that you resonate with Locke's

social philosophy. In so many ways, he is the chief intellectual architect of the ideas behind United States government, so you have to live with his philosophy. A look at the first few lines of the Declaration of Independence illustrates the parallels with Locke:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it.

Locke's philosophy jumps out everywhere in these few lines: natural law is "self-evident" to all through reason; rights such as life, freedom, and pursuit of happiness cannot be justly "alienated" (taken) from us because they are granted by God; government exists to secure these rights because individuals lack sufficient power to punish wrongdoers; government's powers are derived from the "consent of the governed"; and citizens are justified in rebelling if government abuses their natural rights. If the founders of the United States had run these lines through Turnitin, it would have come back as a plagiarism of Locke.

RAWLS: JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS

Locke's political philosophy emphasizes individual rights and urges government to take a laissez-faire, or "hands-off," approach by imposing minimal restrictions on the exercise of rights and freedoms. In reality, though, no one lives, acts, or produces as an isolated individual. In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (1921–2002) starts from this observation. Society provides the educational infrastructure, transportation systems, military protection, and legal framework that modern production needs. Because society makes the generation of wealth possible, producers have obligations to society. At the same time, Rawls rejects Marx's assertion that the haves are simply economic bloodsuckers who oppress the poor. Instead, society benefits from the efforts of those who are innovative and efficient, both in terms of desirable products and the gainful employment provided by business

interests. Those who serve society in this way should be allowed to receive financial rewards from these efforts. In other words, producers and society need each other, and each has legitimate rights and social duties. The big question is how we strike the right balance between them that results in justice.

Rawls' basic political prescription is that we should think of *justice as fairness*. This sounds pretty simple, but it doesn't take too long before we encounter an obstacle in determining what is equitable. On questions like government regulation, taxation rates, welfare benefits, and similar issues, what seems fair to a third-grade teacher may be considered grossly unfair to a sales manager; a retiree may have a very different notion of fairness than an eighteen-year-old. The problem is, of course, that no one comes to the discussion of fairness without interests and biases.

To get beyond our biases, Rawls suggests that we place ourselves in the **original position**. This is a state of nature scenario in that we start anew to establish society. The primary goal is that everyone in our new society is to be treated justly, which fits nicely with our interests because we will inhabit this society. What sets the original position apart from most state of nature scenarios is not just that we do not know in advance how society should be structured; we also do not know who we are. Our race, gender, social class, nationality, or anything else that usually causes us to be biased are yet to be determined. Thus the original position is one in which we stand behind what Rawls calls the **veil of ignorance**. I will have a part in the play; but the roles are assigned randomly, and I don't yet know my specific role. Behind the veil of ignorance, all are equal, and Rawls believes that this allows us to see justice in a different light. Since I might be assigned any role, family background, educational level, or socioeconomic status, it is in my rational self-interest to want a system that treats everyone fairly.

Rawls believes that if we contemplate fairness from behind the veil of ignorance, we will certainly not select social practices like slavery or advocate for genocide based on religious preference. This would be irrational, because we might discover that we are among those to be enslaved or killed once we emerge from behind the veil

of ignorance. So what political principles would we adopt if we were ignorant of our identity? Rawls proposes two broad guidelines. The **justice principle** states that everyone should be granted equal access to the greatest degree of liberty that is compatible with equal liberty for others. This recognizes that absolute freedom is impossible when we live in community, so the balance is found in giving people as much freedom as possible so long as those freedoms don't unequally interfere with the liberty of others. The **difference principle** says that economic and social inequalities are justifiable only on two conditions: these differences must work to the advantage of all in society, and everyone has to be given an equal shot at the more profitable situations. The difference principle says that we can justify allowing only a small number of highly qualified individuals to attend medical school because it benefits society to have skilled physicians. However, apart from situations where inequality helps everyone, government must ensure that all have equal educational opportunities. When inequalities of wealth, opportunity, and access exist that disadvantage others, governments should engage in **distributive justice**, the reallocation of resources in a manner that results in fairness to all. Those who have more should shoulder a greater burden in meeting social needs, and those less well-off should share in a society's wealth and opportunity.

Rawls' advocacy of distributive justice appeals to our general sense of fairness. Fair competition assumes that everyone begins at the same starting line. We know, though, that this isn't how things are. Because of a variety of circumstances, some people get a huge head start in the race; others, often through no fault of their own, begin from a long way back. Thus Rawls argues that if we stand behind the veil of ignorance and don't know where we will start the race, reason leads us to conclude that redistribution of wealth through taxation and reallocation is necessary to make the race fair to everyone.

Some, however, note that Rawls' language of fairness hides the fact that distributive justice is nothing less than the involuntary seizure of property by government that takes what is rightfully owned by one and gives it to another. In a sense, it sends the message that even if you run the race well, government can simply take your prize and give it to the person who came in last. As Locke argues, our instincts

tell us that it is unjust when others, individually or collectively, take the fruits of our energies against our will. In fact, this instinct runs so deep that we talk about property as a right. Thus some see Rawls' system as one in which government, through the infringement of our property rights, engages in injustice. Do we then have the ironic situation in which Rawls' notion of justice as fairness actually results in injustice through fairness?

NOZICK: THE MINIMAL STATE

Robert Nozick (1938–2002) says that Rawls' notion of distributive justice is flawed because it treats wealth like "manna from heaven." He writes as if wealth was originally distributed by some central mechanism that somehow malfunctioned and gave too much to some and too little to others. Government's task is to correct the errors of this faulty mechanism by redistributing goods so everyone gets an equal piece of the pie. Nozick finds this problematic because, as he puts it, "wealth has a history." To help us think through the forms wealth's history takes, Nozick outlines his principles of **justice in holdings** to explain the ways goods are justly acquired. The first principle is **justice in acquisition**, which involves claiming for yourself that which is not owned by another. If you found a large rock that was not owned by another, you can claim it. If you chisel the rock into a statue, you have a right to the statue. Because you have invested your effort in creating this work of art, you have gained the right to any assets others might trade to you to take ownership of this statue. Others may gain property rights to the statue you created according to the second principle, which is **justice in transfer**. A statue may come with a list of past holders of this asset. Earlier owners have passed on ownership to others, who exchanged their holdings in order to gain the right to this property. Assuming that all parties voluntarily consented to these transactions, the current owner now has the right to this property. The last principle is **justice in rectification**, which allows someone to receive compensation if another party has defrauded them or stolen from them. If someone steals your statue and knocks the head off the torso, the rightful owner of the statue can demand compensation (rectification) equal to the value of the undamaged statue from the

individual who caused the damage. These three principles of justice in holdings describe Nozick's concept of wealth's history. All property has a story of labor invested, gifts given, risks taken, and choices made about priorities and interests. Those who acquire their goods in a manner that is consistent with these principles have a right to them. This is what Nozick calls the **entitlement theory**.

The problem with political-economic theories that reject an absolute right to property and instead redistribute wealth to achieve fairness, according to Nozick, is that they violate liberty. To illustrate this, he asks us to imagine a situation (D1) in which society's wealth is fairly distributed among citizens according to Rawls' model of distributive justice. If justice is fairness, justice has been achieved because everything is fair in D1. When we fast-forward to a year later, in this intervening time, certain individuals attended a basketball game in which a superstar player, as a result of a contractual agreement, received a twenty-five cent bonus from each ticket sold. This bonus adds up to \$250,000 by the season's end. We now have D2, a new distribution of wealth, an unequal one in which some parties are now twenty-five cents poorer, nonattenders have the same share of wealth, and one superstar is \$250,000 richer. If D1 is the standard of social fairness, then D2 must be unfair. However, Nozick points out that every party over the previous year freely obtained or dispensed their wealth, so it is difficult to see how D2 is unjust to anyone. Moreover, if government taxes the superstar for the entire \$250,000 and returns twenty-five cents to each of the ticket purchasers to restore the fair situation of D1, this invalidates the free choices made by the various parties.

Nozick says that wealth redistribution, which measures fairness by equality of outcomes (what he calls *patterned principles*), is incompatible with freedom. Through redistribution, government overrides free choices made between individuals by extracting wealth from some and reallocating it to others. Since our labor is an extension of our identity, government seizure and redistribution of assets amounts to a form of slavery. By taking portions of my assets, government essentially takes ownership of part of me. Thus, rather than defining justice according to patterned *outcomes* that seek equity for all

members of society, Nozick's notion of justice is concerned with the *process* of uncoerced transactions between consenting adults. He freely acknowledges that this leads to inequality, but that is the price of giving individuals maximal liberty to earn, trade, give, and sell. Thus Nozick advocates a *minimal state* in which government's sole purpose is to provide security so we can continue to create, to freely engage in transactions, and to receive recompense if others are dishonest in their financial dealings.

CONCLUSION

Political philosophy is, like most other subjects in this discipline, complex and messy. However, this area of philosophy has a unique urgency because its effect on daily life is more obvious and direct than with a topic like metaphysics, for example. Because we all exist within political structures, we live within a society constructed upon a political philosophy, even if we are unaware of this foundation. It touches everyday existence by shaping the legal, economic, military, and social forces that surround us. Government plays a large role in the degree of freedom we experience, the educational and economic opportunities available to us, and the security we have against internal and external threats to our life and well-being. Because we care about how we are treated, and should care about justice and the good of others, political philosophy raises basic questions that deserve careful thought. Is government the source of whatever salvation we might hope for, as Marx argues? Is Hobbes correct in identifying government as a monster that is the lesser evil in comparison to a bloody state of nature? Is the answer somewhere in the middle?

Since political philosophy is deeply involved with understanding and shaping the structures and laws that regulate daily life, it puts political theory in conversation with religions, which share concerns about social institutions. In today's Western world, we tend to assume that church and state function separately. However, this hasn't always been the case, nor is it in parts of the world today. **Theocracy** is a form of government in which religious authorities, acting as proxies for God, also govern day-to-day national affairs. Moses' rule over the people of Israel and the pope's authority over Vatican City are two

examples of theocracy. Versions of theocracy are also found today in many Islamic states, in which religious leaders and sharia law hold primacy over secular governors. At the heart of theocracy is the notion that all is ultimately sacred, so dividing society into distinct realms of sacred and secular is viewed as a denial of God's authority over all life. In an attempt to find a balance between theocracy and secularized government, *Abraham Kuyper* (1837–1920) advocated the **sovereign spheres model**. Kuyper argues that God creates various spheres that provide for different human needs. Government and church are two such domains, but family, education, business, and the arts are others. Thus we do not have only a separation of church and state, but the separation of a number of independent and self-regulating domains. Kuyper says that ongoing government (or church) interference in other sovereign spheres is illegitimate, and is permissible only when there is a clear breakdown in one sphere, such as government involvement with a child's well-being in the case of family abuse or abandonment.

To many Christians today, theocratic models seem to entangle the church in matters outside its rightful realm, and Kuyper's sovereign spheres approach appears to fragment society into a series of self-regulated kingdoms. So where does this leave Christians, who have a dual citizenship that includes obligations both to a heavenly kingdom and to an earthly kingdom? We are commanded to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17), but the lines between Caesar and God are sometimes blurry. Both demand loyalty and gratitude, but what do I do when my allegiance to God conflicts with obligations to state? To what extent does my commitment to the kingdom of God require that I subject myself to earthly governors (as in Rom 13:1-7), and when does it demand that I stand in principled disobedience to the state (as in Acts 4:19-20)? How a Christian answers these questions reveals that political philosophy shapes one's life as a citizen of a nation and has important implications for one's life as a citizen of God's kingdom.