

IV. EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF VALUES: AssignmentsOctober 11:

- Hume, David. An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding. Chapters 2-4, 7, and 12 (only Part III). (On Reserve)
- Frohock, Normative Political Theory, 1-43  
 Chapter 1, "Methodological Neutrality"  
 Chapter 2, "The New Naturalism"

Comments: Although Hume can be counted as a political philosopher, this most famous work of his is really epistemological rather than political. Indeed, Hume's position on causality is often taken as a starting point in many contemporary discussions of causation. Frohock, as you will see, refers to Hume for his observations concerning the "is-ought" distinction, which--while not discussed specifically in An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding--follows from its argument. Be prepared to explain why.

October 16:

- Wiser, James E. "Political Theory, Personal Knowledge, and Public Truth," Journal of Politics 36 (August 1974): 661-674. (On Reserve).
- Wright, Bruce E. "A Cognitivist Program for Normative Political Theory," Journal of Politics 36 (August 1974): 675-686. (On Reserve)
- Frohock, Normative Political Theory, 44-111.  
 Chapter 3, "Evaluation in Law"  
 Chapter 4, "Moral Evaluation"  
 Chapter 5, "Morality and Society"

Comments: Wiser and Wright propose different answers to the question of the logical status of value claims. Be prepared to identify and explain their positions. Frohock examines the status of value claims in a variety of contexts. Which of his contentions do you find the most convincing; which the least; and why?

October 18:

- Rawls, John. "A Theory of Justice," in Donald M. Levine and Mary Jo Bane (eds.), The "Inequality" Controversy: Schooling and Distributive Justice. New York: Basic Books, 1975. Pp. 228-251. (on Reserve)
- Harsanyi, John C. "Can the Maximin Principle Serve as a Basis for Morality? A Critique of John Rawls's Theory," American Political Science Review, 69 (June, 1975), 594-606. (On Reserve)
- Barry, Brian and Douglas W. Rae, "Political Evaluation," in Greenstein and Polsby, Handbook of Political Science, Volume 1, 337-401.

Comments: John Rawls' A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) has been acknowledged as a truly creative, significant work in normative theory. The brief selection from that book assigned for reading should convey enough of the substance of the theory for our purposes. Harsanyi's article should help to understand Rawls further through Harsanyi's criticism. Indeed, Rawls' theory seems to be criticized even more vigorously than it is praised. Harsanyi's article is only one of seven which critique Rawls' theory in a single issue of the APSR. (Some of the others are noted in the "other readings" section.) The Barry and Rae article approach the whole issue of political evaluation more generally. After reading all this, would you rate yourself as a utilitarian or an egalitarian? What would be your favored formulation of "justice"?

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I think that Frohock does a commendable job of investigating the issue of value neutrality in social science, contrasting the Weberian position of value-free inquiry (once the problem was selected) with the Straussian position on both the impossibility and undesirability of neutrality in social science. He also treats at some length John Searle's response to Hume's contention that one cannot derive an ought statement from one or more is statements. Whether Searle's counter-example is convincing depends on one's readiness to accept his argument, I suspect. Frohock, in any event, is sufficiently convinced to reject Hume's logical separation of is from ought.

Of course, the logical status of "is" and "ought" statements is crucial to both the ontological (what one can know) and the epistemological (how one can know) bases of the social sciences. The first several items below deal with the logical status of normative claims and various claims to knowledge, which is a topic that we will return to later when we examine "Issues in Normative Analysis in Political Science." The remaining items are additional critiques of Rawls' theory of justice,

Hudson, W.D. (ed.) The Is-Ought Question. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969.

Here is a whole book, actually a collection of essays, on the topic of the fact-value distinction. You should already be familiar with a number of its selections, for Frohock draws heavily from some in his discussion.

Graham, George J. Jr. "Empirical Theory and Classical Evaluation: The Fact-Value Bridge," The Helderberg Review, 11 (Fall, 1971), 19-36. (On Reserve).

Graham is a political scientist familiar with both normative and empirical studies. He attempts to bridge the "fact-value" gap by arguing that classical philosophy and modern empirical theory both seek to understand order in the world and that both try to account for that order through generalizations.

MacRae, Duncan, Jr. The Social Function of Social Science. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

MacRae's objective is to encourage valuative discussion among the social science disciplines and to join science and evaluational activities in the service of human welfare. His third chapter, "Positivism and the Devaluation of Ethics," is a good summary of the rejection of systematic valuative discourse by contemporary social science.

Polanyi, Michael. Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964.

The article by Wiser ("Political Theory, Personal Knowledge, and Public Truth") argued in effect that we must judge the validity of a theory by our judgments of the validity of the theorist's personal knowledge. Wright's article ("A Cognitivist Program for Normative Political Theory") sought instead to establish the validity of a theory through the public, rather than private, nature of knowledge. Polanyi discusses in depth the relationship between public and private knowledge.

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Barry, Brian. The Liberal Theory of Justice: A Critical Examination of the Principal Doctrines in a Theory of Justice by John Rawls. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

This work is often cited as the most sweeping critique of Rawls's theory. You will note that Barry is a co-author of the article on "Political Evaluation," which finds Rawls' "minimax" criterion wanting as a single criterion of justice. But note also that Rawls' theory does not offer "minimax" as the sole criterion of justice. Barry's critique in the book is far more sensitive, however.

Van Dyke, Vernon. "Justice as Fairness: For Groups?" American Political Science Review, 69 (June, 1975), 607-614.

Van Dyke's wonders how one can formulate a theory of justice which does not attend specifically to groups distinguished by race, language, religion, or ethnicity. He contends that Rawls assumes "that societies are homogeneous" (p. 607) and that he "treats the problem of justice as a problem relating to individuals. Thus he tends to conceive individuals in their personal capacities rather than in their capacity as members of ethnic and national groups." (p. 609)

Barber, Benjamin. "Justifying Justice: Problems of Psychology, Measurement, and Politics in Rawls," American Political Science Review, 69 (June, 1975), 663-674.

Barber has several concerns about Rawls' theory. He contends that maximin is the "rational" solution to the problem of choice under uncertainty in the "original position" only if one posits a psychology which reveals "a primary concern with security and the achievement of minimal conditions for individual welfare." (p. 666) Humans with more spirited psychologies might be willing to risk more to gain more, thus not choosing the maximin principle. Barber also raises Van Dyke's issue of groups in the context of Rawls' heavy reliance on wealth and income as criteria for measuring the distribution of justice. He asks, "Who then is to be regarded as least advantaged: the prosperous black or the poor white? The unemployed, self-deprecating suburban housewife or the self-respecting, overburdened welfare mother?" (pp. 667-668) Finally, he is troubled by Rawls' application of the maximin principle in a "timeless vacuum," for if social forces (such as a revolution) were allowed to play themselves out, the "least advantaged" in a society might ultimately gain more than provided by a premature invocation of maximin in the name of justice.

Bloom, Allan. "Justice: John Rawls Vs. The Tradition of Political Philosophy," American Political Science Review, 69 (June, 1975), 648-662.

You will recall my separation of "classical political theory" from "normative analysis" more generally. Clearly, Rawls' seminal book lies within the category of normative theory, but Allan Bloom criticizes Rawls for its misuse and non-use of classical theory. Bloom states: "Rawls's 'original position' is based on a misunderstanding of the 'state of nature,' teachings of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. His 'Kantian interpretation' is based on a misunderstanding of Kant's moral teaching. His 'Aristotelian principle' is based on a misunderstanding of Aristotle's teaching about happiness. . . . An authentic understanding of these thinkers would have given him an awareness of the problems he faced and of the nature of philosophic greatness.

. . . This is not to assert that the last word has been said, but that any serious new word must be based on a profound confrontation with the old ones." (p. 662) So the question arises, just how much attention must be given to the classics before we can move ahead? Rawls, according to Bloom, certainly did not give them enough.

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Hayek, Friedrich August von. Law, Legislation and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy, Volume 2: The Mirage of Social Justice. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

This is the second in a projected three volume work. Hayek, a conservative economist and Nobel laureate, is a defender of classical liberalism, which emphasizes liberty as a value over equality. In this volume, Hayek critiques the concept of distributive or social justice, as expounded by Rawls for example. Hayek argues that the concept of justice is most applicable to the procedures, rules, or institutions of a society rather than to the distribution of goods or services that result from the operation of society.

Oppenheim, Felix E. Moral Principles in Political Philosophy. New York: Random House, 1968.

Oppenheimer is concerned with meta-ethical claims, which are not moral judgments (e.g., "democracy is good") but claims about value judgments or about the meaning of ethical terms. Thus Oppenheim does not advocate any moral principles but speaks about political value judgments. Oppenheim contends that moral principles cannot be shown to be true or false: "Basic ethical principles have no cognitive status; they cannot be known to be either true or false because they are not true or false; and they are neither true nor false because they do not affirm or deny that something is the case" (p. 24). In denying the "cognitivist" position on the truth value of moral principles, Oppenheim takes the "noncognitivist" view. What function of communication do such statements perform? According to Oppenheim, they express attitudes or feelings (pp. 27, 179). This position on the status of moral principles is usually identified as "emotivism"--moral principles are expressions of emotions.

VanDeVeer, Donald. "Oppenheim's Defense of Noncognitivism," American Political Science Review, 65 (December, 1971), 1105-1114.

VanDeVeer criticizes Oppenheim's defense of noncognitivism. He contends that Oppenheim provides no explicit criterion for distinguishing sentences which either affirm or deny that something is the case from those which do not; hence, there is no way to distinguish a factual claim from any other claim, including a value claim. He also is puzzled about Oppenheim's position that the choice of ultimate moral principles is not rationally justifiable when Oppenheim himself pronounces his own normative preference for democracy over tyranny. "It is thus in the end unclear why Oppenheim, given his meta-ethical convictions, maintains the normative position he does." (p. 1113)

Oppenheim, Felix E. "Comment: Defense of Noncognitivism Defended," American Political Science Review, 65 (December, 1971), 1115-1116.

Oppenheim replies to VanDeVeer's first criticism with the standard positivist position that sentences are cognitively significant only if they (1) are analytic--i.e., have logical significance, or (2) are synthetic--i.e., can potentially be tested by experiential evidence. Because moral principles are neither analytic nor synthetic (empirical), they are not cognitively true or false. "Finally, my denial that my own moral principles of politics are true (or false) does not prevent me from propounding them and from trying to persuade others to adopt them." (p. 1116) Moreover, Oppenheim would argue that noncognitivism--by not holding that certain values are "true"--tends to promote moral scepticism and thus pluralism rather than moral absolutism.

IV. EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF VALUES: Other Readings (continued)

Kalleberg, Arthur L. and Larry M. Preston. "Normative Political Analysis and the Problem of Justification: The Cognitive Status of Basic Political Norms." Journal of Politics 37 (August 1975): 650-684.

Statements, whether empirical or normative, are cognitive to the extent that they result from a process of inquiry that has accepted certain validating-investigatory criteria as relevant. If empirical theory relies upon subjective criteria for the determination of "knowledge," why not normative theory? What would constitute a test of validity for normative judgments? A valid normative judgment must be (1) impartial in the sense of attempting to consider and respect the interests and values of all parties affected by the decision, and (2) universal or consistent in that one must be willing to apply a given ethical judgment in the same way in all similar situations, and (3) based on full understanding of the facts of the situation. It is unlikely that these conditions can be met in evaluating public policy or even the process of policy making, but perhaps they can be met in evaluating constitutional arrangements--patterns of political access, operating rules, and basic goals.

Kassiola, Joel. "Does Normative Political Theory Rest on a Mistake? Karl Popper's Epistemology and Its Significance to the Study of Political Values." Paper delivered at the 1976 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois.

Arguing the same epistemological point as Kalleberg and Preston above, Kassiola contends that it has been a mistake to try to "prove" normative theory in any deductive, absolutist sense, for this standard has been rejected within science. Instead, we should ask, "Can normative political claims be rejected as empirical claims can? The key phrase is 'as empirical claims can.'" (p.15) The task is to determine what constitutes "error" in normative theory to have some basis of rejection.

Moon, J. Donald. "Values and Political Theory: A Modest Defense of a Qualified Cognitivism." Journal of Politics 39 (November 1977) 877-903.

Mead, Walter J. "A Call for Conceptual Clarification in Value Theory: A Response to Professor Mead." Ibid. 904-912.

Moon, J. Donald. "Rejoinder to Professor Mead." Ibid. 913-915.

Moon's argument is along the same lines as Kalleberg/Preston's and Kassiola's; he contends that empirical theory makes all sorts of assumptions about the phenomena it describes. "The real question is when are we to abandon one theory in favor of another--not when are we to reject a theory because it is false." (p.899) Moon distinguishes between evaluative and obligational normative statements and says that one can establish a cognitive basis for evaluative statements of what is "good" for man by showing that the state of affairs is conducive to human well-being, given a particular conception of man. If this be "relativistic" proof, so then is "proof" in science. Hobbes is cited to illustrate the rational structure of evaluative discourse.

Mead approves of Moon's desire to de-closet normative statements, but he chides Moon for his unwitting "modernist-positivistic" perspective. To Mead, one must distinguish between ontological value cognitivism (which maintains "that value judgments can be assumed or known to be either true or false") and epistemological cognitivism (which asserts "that value judgments can be demonstrated or proved to be true or false"). By insisting on "proving" evaluative statements, Moon is an epistemological cognitivist, while Mead holds that choosing our basic premises is a "noncognitive process." (p.911)

Moon replies that his purpose was to criticize "ontological noncognitivists," and Mead's distinction "neither adds to, nor detracts from, my argument." (p.913)