

## Social Philosophy

(PHI 316/CHV 318/HUM 316/SOC 318)

Jonny Thakkar, Fall 2015

jthakkar@princeton.edu

### Course Description

Social Philosophy is the systematic study of philosophical questions pertaining to social phenomena. Since politics is a social phenomenon, social philosophy might plausibly be thought to shed light on political philosophy—that, at any rate, is the hunch that will guide this course.

We will begin with some questions from the classics of social theory such as:

- In what sense, if any, does society precede the individual?
- Is there a difference between community and society?
- Can a theory of society be built up out from a theory of individual action?
- What are social structures and how do they come about?

We will then turn to contemporary philosophical inquiry into social ontology, such as:

- In virtue of what can we say that a set of individuals constitutes a society, or that a society has beliefs and desires?
- Are there such things as social facts or social kinds, and if so what are they and what is their ontological status?
- Is it possible for social science to be value-neutral?

We will then raise important normative questions connected to social ontology, such as:

- Do corporations have moral responsibilities?
- Do we have a prima facie obligation to obey the law?
- Are we right to restrict immigration?
- Ought we to respect traditions as such?
- What is it to criticize social constructions regarding race and gender?
- Does socialism depend upon a distinct understanding of what society is?

The course will therefore provide an alternative way into contemporary political philosophy relative to the usual approach via the work of John Rawls and his critics. It will also serve as an introduction to some of the great social theorists, like Weber, Durkheim and Simmel, assessing their ideas in the context of recent currents in both philosophy and sociology.

## Course Requirements

Lectures are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30 to 4:20 pm, in McCosh Hall 2.\* Precepts are on Wednesdays, 12-1:20 in Joseph Henry House 15, and Thursdays 10-10:50 in 1879 Hall, room 119. You are required to attend lectures and precepts, both of which will often take up issues not in the readings, and 10% of the grade will reflect precept participation. There will be two short papers of no more than 1,500 words (15% each), a final paper of 2,000-2,500 words (40%) and a final exam (20% of grade). All papers are to be emailed to your preceptor. The first short paper is due by the beginning of class on October 13th. The second paper is due by the beginning of class on December 1st. The third paper is due on Dean's Date.

## Readings

Readings should be done *before* the lecture indicated. There are three books to purchase:

Margaret Gilbert, *Political Obligation*  
Christian List and Philip Pettit, *Group Agency*  
John Searle, *Making the Social World*

These books have been pre-ordered at Labyrinth Books on Nassau Street and are ready for pick-up. All other readings will be posted to the course website, except for those marked with an asterisk—since these are books, they cannot be placed online, but will be on reserve in the library. In addition, you are strongly encouraged to consult the following online resources to learn how to read philosophical texts and to write philosophy papers:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

## Office Hours

I will be available for office hours on Monday afternoons, 1:00-3:00, in Joseph Henry House 20. Please sign up for an appointment through [wass.princeton.edu](http://wass.princeton.edu)

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\* There is one exception, marked by an asterisk, where we will have to rearrange the session for another time.

## Introduction

### 9/17 Why Social Philosophy?

G. A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (30)

*Further Reading:* Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation"  
Philip Pettit, "Rawls's Political Ontology"  
Philip Pettit, "Rawls's Peoples"

## Part One: Social Theory

### 9/22 Holism and Atomism

F. H. Bradley, "My Station and Its Duties" (50)

*Further Reading:* G. H. Mead, "The Self"  
Charles Taylor, "Atomism"  
Robert Pippin, "Recognition and Reconciliation"

### 9/24 Community and Society

Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, Book One (70)

*Further Reading:* Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*  
Max Scheler, *On Feeling, Knowing and Valuing*, ch. 11

### 9/29 Action

Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ch. 1 (59)

*Further Reading:* Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, ch. 3  
Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, ch. 2

### 10/1 Representations

Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, ch.1 (10)  
Emile Durkheim, "Individual and Collective Representations" (34)  
Emile Durkheim, "Value Judgments and Judgments of Reality" (17)

*Further Reading:* Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, ch. 5

**10/6 Structures**

Georg Simmel, "The Problem of Sociology" (12)  
John Levi Martin, *Social Structures*, Preface, ch. 1 (28)

*Further Reading:* Georg Simmel, "How is Society Possible?"  
John Levi Martin, *Social Structures*, ch. 7

**10/8 Structuration**

Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, ch. 1 (40)

*Further Reading:* Sally Haslanger, "What is a (Social) Structural Explanation?"

**10/13 Tradition**

Edward Shils, *Tradition*, Introduction and ch. 3 (65)

*Further Reading:* Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, ch. 2

**\*\*First Paper Due\*\***

**Part Two: Social Ontology**

**10/15 Joint Commitment**

Margaret Gilbert, *A Theory of Political Obligation*, Part Two (90)

*Further Reading:* Michael Bratman, *Shared Agency*, chs. 5-6\*

**10/20 We-Intentions**

John Searle, *Making The Social World*, chs. 2 and 3 (35)  
Hans-Bernard Schmid, "Plural Self-Awareness" (17)

*Further Reading:* Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*, ch. 5  
Raimi Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Sociality*, chs. 1 and 2

**10/22\* Speech Acts**

John Searle, *Making the Social World*, ch. 5 (33)



## Part Three: Normative Consequences

### 12/1 Responsibility

Christian List and Philip Pettit, *Group Agency*, chapters 7 & 8 (32)

*Further Reading:* Joel Feinberg, “Collective Responsibility”  
Peter French, “How Corporations Qualify for Membership in the Moral Community”

***\*\*Second Paper Due\*\****

### 12/3 Obligation

Margaret Gilbert, *Political Obligation*, ch.11 (50)

*Further Reading:* Alasdair MacIntyre, “Is Patriotism a Virtue?”  
John Simmons, “Associative Political Obligations”  
M. B. E. Smith, “Is There A Prima Facie Obligation to Obey the Law?”

### 12/8 Immigration

Joseph Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration*, ch. 11 (30)

*Further Reading:* Christian Wellman, “Immigration and Freedom of Association”  
Michael Blake, “Immigration, Association, and Anti-Discrimination”  
Joseph Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration*, ch. 12

### 12/10 Conservatism

Michael Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative” (30)  
Samuel Scheffler, “The Normativity of Tradition” (25)

*Further Reading:* G. A. Cohen, “Rescuing Conservatism: A Defense of Existing Value”

**12/15 Ideology**

Sally Haslanger, "But Mom, Crop-Tops Are Cute!" (23)

*Further Reading:* Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, ch.1  
Sally Haslanger, "Race and Gender: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?"

**12/17 Socialism**

Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, ch. 3 (50)

*Further Reading:* Cornelius Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, chs. 4 and 5  
Cornelius Castoriadis, "On the Content of Socialism, II"

**\*\*Final Paper Due on Dean's Date\*\***

**\*\*Final Exam TBA\*\***