



Morals and Politics

1.1. *Political Philosophy*

While there is certainly real and substantial disagreement about the nature and proper scope of political philosophy, we must, to begin, attempt to define our subject matter at least at the most general level. *Political philosophy* is the evaluative study of political societies. Vague as this definition may be, it allows us to immediately identify some basic ways in which political *philosophy* both overlaps with and is distinct from the discipline of political *science*. Political science in its purest form is an essentially descriptive discipline; its primary task is to *describe* and analyze the nature of political societies—to describe their structure and organization, the principles that guide them, the (actual or likely) behavior of their subjects and leaders, and so on. The core subject matter of political science is *de facto* (existing) political societies (though political science also describes past and possible societies). When political scientists begin to evaluate real or possible societies—as good or bad, just or unjust, legitimate or illegitimate—their work shades into the domain of political philosophy (or what political scientists like to call “normative political theory”).

Political philosophy must, of course, share with political science its concern for accurately describing the realities of political life, for one can hardly defend a form of political life as good or ideal without first taking account of the facts of (e.g.) psychology and economics, without seeing clearly how various kinds of people can be expected to act and interact and how various kinds of institutional structures can be expected to function. Similarly, political philosophy shares with political science

a purely analytic, conceptual side, where its job is to sort out and clarify the essential concepts of politics.

What is distinctive about political philosophy, however, is its *prescriptive* or evaluative concern with justifications, values, virtues, ideals, rights, obligations—in short, its concern with how political societies *should* be, how political policies and institutions can be justified, how we and our political officeholders ought to behave in our public lives. The principal subject matter of political philosophy can accordingly be said to be *de jure* (legitimate, justified, just) political societies. Political philosophy can thus be aptly characterized as a branch or an application of *moral* philosophy. Not all evaluations are moral, of course (as my judgment that I'm writing these lines with "a good pen" plainly shows); but the evaluations made in political philosophy are in fact distinctly moral. Where moral philosophy examines the more general questions of how we should act and be, political philosophy examines the more specific questions of how we should act and be in our political lives and (consequently) of what kinds of political societies we should (and should not) create or oppose. A familiar way in which political philosophers of all ages (from Plato in *Republic* to John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*) have pursued these questions is by describing an ideal or model political society, against which past, present, and possible political societies can be compared, analyzed, and criticized. The ideals in question are moral ideals for our political lives, and in defending such ideals, political philosophy secures for itself a special and immediate practical relevance that much other philosophical theory at least appears to lack.

Exactly *how* political philosophy is related to moral philosophy (i.e., exactly what the former's being a "branch" or an "application" of the latter amounts to) is a subject of some controversy among political philosophers. In the simplest and most traditional model, the principles of political philosophy are thought to just follow directly from perfectly general moral principles, conjoined with the facts of political life, in a roughly syllogistic way.¹ Thus, certain general moral principles, taken to apply to all people in all contexts (and serving as major premises)—principles such as "All persons should be treated as equals" or "All persons' rights should be respected"—might be taken to imply (when the facts of political life, serving as minor premises, are taken into account) principles (conclusions) more specifically political—such as "All basic goods and liberties should be distributed equally by governments," "All political authority should be created and employed democratically," or "No person should be subjected by government or law to unmerited harm." Much of traditional natural law theory, from Aquinas to Locke, viewed the relationship of moral to political philosophy in this way, with the (universally applicable, always binding) rules of natural law (i.e., the moral rules laid down for humankind by

God/reason) directly determining the moral rules for the structure of and limits on political societies and their inhabitants. The same general view of the relation of moral to political philosophy was in fact shared by many of natural law theory's most ardent opponents (e.g., utilitarian moralists), and this view continues to be well represented among today's moral and political philosophers.

According to a second, more contemporary model, the principles of political philosophy are viewed instead as an autonomous region of moral philosophy, neither derived from more general moral principles nor applicable to the nonpolitical aspects of our lives.² Political philosophy, in this view, is a body of separately justified moral principles that are special for political contexts, governing how political institutions should be arranged and how persons in their public lives should act and be, but irrelevant to our private lives or to our conduct in non-political settings (e.g., where the rule of law has completely dissolved). Thus, it might be a principle of political philosophy that governments must treat all their subjects (and citizens must treat their fellows in public life) impartially and as equals; but it might still be perfectly permissible (or even obligatory) for people in their private lives (or in "the state of nature") to show special favoritism to their friends and family, there being no generally applicable moral principle requiring impartiality in our dealings with others.

There is still a third model of the relationship of moral to political philosophy that seems in many ways more satisfactory than either of the first two we've considered. In this model, the principles of political philosophy are a mix of those advocated by the first two models, with some directly derived from more general moral principles and others separately justified for specifically political contexts.³ It seems plausible, for instance, to argue that, on the one hand, governments and citizens must scrupulously respect the moral rights that all persons possess simply as persons—just as these rights must be respected in nonpublic, nonpolitical contexts—while, on the other hand, the principles specifying the best form for political institutions to take (within the constraints imposed by this respect for rights) are not simply derivable from more general moral principles but are justified in a special way for political contexts.

1.2. Moral Philosophy

I have been referring to "moral philosophy" and "moral principles." But aside from offering a very general characterization of the former and a few examples of the latter, I have not said anything about the substance of morality (but have only mentioned a couple of substantive moral theories without

explaining them). Nor will I try to do a great deal more on that topic now. Moral philosophy is, of course, a very large subject, a subject for another book (or for two or three other books). But a few very general observations here may help to make a bit clearer the idea of political philosophy as a "branch" or an "application" of moral philosophy. I will mention here just two basic divisions in moral philosophy,⁴ both of which are features of the most general kind of map of moral philosophy's terrain and both of which are important to understanding prominent disagreements in political philosophy.

Moral philosophy, I have said, is the study of how we should act and be—or, more generally, how we should live. Perhaps the most basic division among moral philosophers concerns whether moral philosophy should focus first or primarily on the kinds of acts we should perform or on the kinds of persons we should be. Those who opt for the former orientation defend what we can call *conduct-based* (or *deontic*) moral theories, whose central moral concepts are right action, rights, or obligations/duties. After telling us how we should act, such theories typically conclude, secondarily and derivatively, that we should be the kind of person who reliably performs right actions, respects rights, and discharges obligations. Those who opt for the latter orientation defend *virtue* (or *aretaic*) theories, whose central moral concepts are virtue, excellence, and moral character. After telling us what kinds of persons we should be, virtue theories typically conclude, secondarily and derivatively, that we should act in the ways that a good or virtuous person would act (in the circumstances). While moral philosophers have, of course, attempted to defend comprehensive (or genuinely mixed) moral theories, which give priority to neither conduct-based nor virtue-based concerns, these attempts have almost invariably allowed one category or the other to dominate in the end.

Modern and contemporary political philosophers have mostly regarded political philosophy as a branch or an application of some conduct-based moral philosophy. Influenced by conduct-based natural law, utilitarian, or Kantian moral theories, they have derived principles of political philosophy that primarily concern how states/governments and subjects should act, what their respective rights and obligations in political society amount to. Worries about natural and human rights, political obligation and authority, property and the just division of social goods, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of political participation, and so on all naturally take center stage in a political philosophy oriented by conduct-based moral theory. Government's proper role is to try to control how its subjects act (within reasonable limits) and to secure their freedom to choose for themselves, not to try to determine who those subjects shall be (or how they shall become that way). By contrast, representatives of

ancient and republican traditions in political philosophy, more directly influenced by virtue theories (such as those of Plato and Aristotle), have often taken government's primary function to be precisely that of promoting the process of virtuous character formation in its subjects in order to insure that those subjects will be suitable participants in civic life. With virtuous citizens, it may seem, the details of political life can largely be safely left to sort themselves out.

A second basic division in moral philosophy—primarily, but not exclusively, at issue in debates within conduct-based moral theory—is the division between *consequentialist* and *deontological* moral theories. Here, the division concerns more directly the ways in which we can defend or justify claims that a particular kind of action is right (or that a particular character trait is good or virtuous). And it is a division in moral philosophy that has been, as we shall see, at the very center of prominent debates in contemporary political philosophy. According to consequentialist moral theories, the rightness (or wrongness) of actions (or the excellence of character traits) depends solely on the goodness (or badness) of their consequences.⁵ Deontological moral theories, by contrast, maintain that at least some actions are right or wrong (or character traits are virtuous or vicious) "intrinsically," or at least for reasons other than (or in addition to) the goodness or badness of their consequences.

The most widely discussed and defended consequentialist theories have been varieties of ethical egoism and utilitarianism, both of which view rightness in action (or virtue in character) as a function of the promotion of "utility." According to egoistic theories (e.g., that defended by Hobbes), actions are right by virtue of promoting the good of the agent's "personal utility"—that is, the actor's own pleasure, happiness, or desire satisfaction. According to utilitarian theories (e.g., those defended by Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick), actions are right by virtue of promoting "overall utility" (i.e., pleasure, happiness, or desire satisfaction summed over all persons or all sentient creatures). There are also non-utility-oriented consequentialist theories, such as perfectionism—which (as in Nietzsche) makes rightness a function of the promotion of the good of human excellence—and mixed consequentialist theories (e.g., Aristotle's).⁶ The great strength of all of the many varieties of consequentialist moral theory is their identification of plausible candidates (e.g., happiness) for the good and their adoption of the seemingly quite natural view that rightness or virtue is simply a matter of producing goodness in the world. The great weakness of these theories is a simple function of this "natural" view: if rightness or virtue is simply about producing goodness, then in some sense "the ends justify the means" and right or virtue could in principle turn out to involve (seemingly) quite awful acts or traits.

Deontological moral theories, by denying that rightness turns exclusively on the production of goodness, can avoid this apparent weakness and can square more easily with the central intuitive, pretheoretical moral commitments of many (to, e.g., the sanctity of individuals, the absolute wrongness of certain kinds of acts, etc.). But in thus divorcing rightness or virtue from the simple production of goodness, deontological theories have been forced to identify alternative ways to justify judgments of rightness or virtue. And these ways have seemed to many to involve weaknesses as great as those ascribed to consequentialism—in particular, the weaknesses of dubious metaphysics or undue reliance on moral intuition (which, after all, these critics point out, is a mere cultural artifact, not the proper basis for a rational moral theory). Of the best-known deontological moral theories, the first charge (dubious metaphysics) has often been leveled against both “divine command theories” (which identify right actions with those commanded or willed by God) and Kantian theories (which, following Kant, identify rightness in action with a certain kind of nonconsequentialist practical consistency or rationality). Other deontological theories have been attacked using the second charge (undue reliance on moral intuition)—theories such as intuitionism (which identifies right actions with those so identified by mature moral agents), ideal observer theories (which identify right actions with those so identified by a hypothetical ideal observer), or some contemporary theories inspired by Kant that jettison Kant’s metaphysics (e.g., those defended by Rawls and Nozick, which we discuss in Chapter 4).

Given our account of political philosophy as a branch or an application of moral philosophy, it should be unsurprising that many of the deepest disagreements in political philosophy simply reflect deep underlying disagreements in moral philosophy. In what follows, we will repeatedly see evidence of this fact. And we will see that keeping in mind the simple distinctions in moral philosophy noted above, even without pursuing any fuller account of the nature of moral philosophy, will enable us to understand much about the structure of many basic debates in political philosophy.

1.3. *Political Society*

Suppose we understand moral and political philosophy as they have been characterized above. This will help us to understand what I meant by emphasizing political philosophy’s evaluative character. But even so, at least two obvious and immediate questions will remain concerning our initial definition of political philosophy as “the evaluative study of political societies.” First, what is a “political society”? Second, precisely what is it about political

societies that gets evaluated by political philosophy, and how are the various evaluations related to one another? Let us deal with these questions in turn.

We all, of course, have some more or less sophisticated intuitive response to the question “What is a political society?” Even if we cannot provide a precise definition of *political society*, we mostly have the sense that we would “know one if we saw one.” After all, anyone at all likely to be reading this *lives* in a political society. But any reasonably precise answer to our question is bound to be controversial, for neither *political* nor *society* has a sufficiently precise meaning on its own to permit real precision in a definition of their conjunction. Indeed, once we give the matter some thought, there are a variety of ways in which the answer to this first question is not as plain as it may initially seem. There are many social groupings that clearly do not qualify as “societies,” and there are many societies that clearly do not qualify as “political.” While we are all familiar with many of the chief characteristics of the kinds of political societies in which we currently live, there are some societies about which most of us would be uncertain if asked to classify them as “political” or “nonpolitical”: consider the variety of migratory, tribal, and religious societies, for example. Must a “political society” be a *state* (of the sort with which we moderns are all familiar)? Must it have a government, a fixed territory, law with coercive law enforcement (etc.)? Notice that this vagueness in the term *political* leaves equally vague the boundaries between “political philosophy” and the disciplines commonly called “social philosophy” and “legal philosophy” (a vagueness that most practitioners of these disciplines cheerfully acknowledge).

We can attempt now, though, at least a rough-and-ready answer to our question so that we can begin productively discussing the problems of political philosophy. Let us say, as adequate for our purposes here, that a “society” is a stable (e.g., multigenerational)⁷ group of persons characterized by generally peaceful, cooperative (even if economically competitive), rule-governed conduct within a reasonably wide range of important interpersonal activities. Further, members of a society, properly so called, typically accept a certain view of themselves and their relations⁸: most of them (at least implicitly) accept that the social rules that mandate peaceful, cooperative conduct are binding on all of them.⁹

In this account (and in any other plausible account), many social groupings fail to count as societies principally because of the limited range or limited importance of the activities over which the grouping operates. So, for example, most clubs, teams, neighborhoods, churches, unions, and even groups that refer to themselves in their names as “societies” (e.g., “The Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology” or “The National Debating Society”) do not constitute societies in the relevant sense. Indeed, it is often (though by no means necessarily) the case that the political organization of a social

grouping is what gives it its character as a society, for political organization generally involves the coercive imposition (on some group of persons) of requirements of peaceful, cooperative conduct within a wide range of important activities.

A political society, we can say, is a society that is governed, a society that has a functioning government. And a government (again in our rough-and-ready, intuitive sense) is a set of institutions that empowers people to make (or to authoritatively interpret) and coercively enforce (with significant sanctions) laws for all of that government's subjects, laws that require at least peaceful, cooperative conduct within a wide range of important activities.¹⁰ Further, a real government's control must be at least broadly effective so that it can largely deter (if necessary) domestic lawbreaking, rival domestic lawmaking or law enforcement, and external control or aggression.¹¹ Finally, a government must claim to (or be generally understood to) exercise this control legitimately or rightfully.

We can, by extension, call something a "government" that does not effectively perform but that only has or claims the right to perform these functions (as in the case of a legitimate "government in exile"); but a society that has only a government in this extended sense is not governed, nor is it a "political society" in our sense. We could also, I suppose, call something a government "by analogy" that imposed only insignificant sanctions for lawbreaking (say, a maximum penalty of \$1) or that required peaceful conduct only in small or unimportant areas of life (say, when inside a large building or when buying or selling vegetables) or that deliberately enforced the law only against some of those it took to be its subjects (say, redheads or lispers); but, again, a society with such a "government" would be governed little more than one with a government in exile. Most important for our purposes here, if we count such deviant and bizarre possibilities as instances of "political society," it will be very difficult to see how to argue for or against political life, by virtue of the difficulty in distinguishing political from nonpolitical life.¹² Let us, then, accept our definition of *political society* as at least reasonably intuitive and as sufficiently clear to allow us to focus on what has been chiefly at issue when political philosophers have performed their evaluative study of political societies.

1.4. *The Problems of Political Philosophy*

As for our second question ("What is it about political societies that gets evaluated by political philosophy?"), we can make a start toward an answer by observing that political philosophy has during its history focused principally on two main "evaluative" problems (or, better, two main families

of problems): that of the proper distribution by political societies of basic social goods (e.g., wealth, privileges, and liberties) and that of the conditions for the rightful possession of political power or authority. Political philosophy, in short, evaluates both political distributions of goods and the distribution of the authority to control those distributions of goods. Which of these two problems is given priority largely determines the approach to (or style of) political philosophy that is practiced. Contemporary political philosophy has tended to give priority to the first problem (distributive justice), with the second problem (political authority) falling mostly into the background. The authority to govern is often taken, in this contemporary view, to follow simply from a government's justly distributing basic goods. After all, if a particular distribution of goods is morally ideal (say, being such that any reasonable person would favor it over all others), then it seems clear that we should all pursue and support such a distribution and that those who "impose" on us such a just distribution do so rightfully.

Early modern (i.e., sixteenth- to eighteenth-century) political philosophy, by contrast, focused more centrally on the problem of political authority, with the problem of distributive justice being either largely ignored or solved in a derivative fashion. For instance, those who were taken to rightfully wield political authority (or "the right to rule") were often taken to have as well (as a part of their authority) either the right to choose how to distribute social goods within their political societies or the right to control such distributions within the moral and contractual terms under which their political authority was held. The principal concern was with which specific governments were—and with which kinds of governments could be—legitimately instituted and maintained.

It is possible, then, to approach the two central problem areas of political philosophy in ways that make the solutions to one or the other primary, with solutions to the other being secondary or derivative. It is also possible, however, to regard the two problems as distinct and equally important aspects of political philosophy, the solution to each being largely independent of the solution to the other. Thus, it might be that a government that justly distributes basic social goods nonetheless acts without rightful political authority or that a government possessing such authority nonetheless acts unjustly in its distributive capacity.

It is this last approach to political philosophy, according to which neither of its two basic problem areas is primary, that I will defend and exemplify in this book, with the early chapters devoted mostly to the problem of political authority and the later chapters concentrating on the problem of distributive justice. More accurately, I should say that the later chapters deal with what some will take to be a more general problem than that of distributive justice: namely, what is the best form or structure for a political society to have

(which includes, of course, the traditional problem of “the best regime”)? Here, we mean, of course, “the best form” of political society for beings like ourselves in a world like ours. (The best societies for beings with no needs or impenetrable exoskeletons, say, or for beings living in a world of fantastic abundance are the province of the science-fiction department of political philosophy.) There are legitimate questions about just how utopian serious political philosophy can be, but there is also general agreement that political ideals feasible only on the assumption of dramatic changes either in human nature or motivation or in the material condition of the world are not the ones over which political philosophy should exert itself.¹³ (Marxist political philosophy, e.g., has been widely condemned on precisely these grounds.)

This conception of the fundamental problems of political philosophy leaves some obvious possible topics untouched. Perhaps most important, this book will not try to address the various forms of what we can call “meta-political philosophy”—that part of political philosophy which offers a further interpretation, a social-scientific account, or a deep analysis of the long-standing orientation of political philosophy, typically suggesting that its arguments and positions are disingenuous, self-deceptive, or otherwise not to be taken at face value. Many take this project of “unmasking” politics (and unmasking philosophical arguments about politics) to be the only political philosophy worth doing.

The classical source of this approach to political philosophy is the stance of the character Thrasymachus in Plato’s *Republic*. According to Thrasymachus (in Book I of that dialogue), the much revered “justice” being discussed by Socrates is really nothing but “the advantage of the stronger”; the strong make rules to enhance and preserve their own power, call obedience to these rules “justice,” and (ideally) “con” the less strong into thinking that these rules are mandated by objective morality, required by the gods, or for the good of all. This style of argument is more familiar to modern readers from the writings of Karl Marx, who regarded the state (including the liberal-democratic state) as a mere tool of class domination and political philosophy (like all philosophy) as a form of ideological manipulation designed to support this domination. The kinds of arguments and positions we will consider centrally in this book are characterized by Marx as no more than devices by which the bourgeoisie (who control, and want to keep controlling, the principal means of production in society) maintain their power over the proletariat. Even if this project of control and manipulation is not fully deliberate or conscious (i.e., even if those in power sincerely believe in the force of the arguments they advance), this is in fact all that politics and political philosophy amount to. Both will disappear when economic class distinctions (and the private property relations that define them) disappear.

This Marxist project in political philosophy is still very much alive, both in its classical form and through its various contemporary offspring in political and legal theory. But it is also interesting that powerful, but non-Marxist, analogues of this approach have been developed by contemporary political philosophers. Much recent feminist political philosophy, for instance (though by no means all of it, as we will see in Chapter 4), has a similar meta-philosophical form: politics, along with the political philosophy that accepts its terms, is alleged to be really about gender domination, about the maintenance (and camouflaging) of the power that men exercise over women in society, in order to allow men to preserve their traditional social privileges (including especially that of free sexual access). Politics is really just sexual politics. The analogy to Marxist theory is perhaps clearest in the influential work of Catherine Mackinnon, where *gender* essentially replaces *class* in otherwise familiar Marxist arguments.¹⁴

None of these “meta-arguments,” or any of the other possible skeptical meta-approaches to political philosophy,¹⁵ is centrally discussed here. They are obviously important, for we can hardly claim to fully understand our subject (political philosophy) unless we appreciate the reasons for accepting, modifying, or rejecting the force of such arguments. Why, then, not consider these arguments here? Unhappily but inevitably, not everything can be considered in a book of this limited size; and we cannot, in my view, fairly analyze or interpret (in, e.g., the Marxist or feminist “meta-” fashions) the positions of political philosophers until we first know and fully understand those positions. It is toward that first step—the step of understanding the structure and force of the long-standing projects in political philosophy—that this book is intended as a contribution. The second “meta” step I must leave to others.

1.5. *Ideal and Non-ideal*

As we have seen, much political philosophy proceeds by trying to describe a political ideal—a form of political life that is best (morally and/or prudentially) for beings like ourselves in a world like ours. The ideal typically includes both an account of the best political institutions (or government) and an account of how governors and subjects ought to behave within the ideal political society.¹⁶ It seems clear, though, that none of us actually lives in a political society that could be reasonably described as “ideal” in all respects (unless our “ideals” are ridiculously modest). What, then, is the relevance of some abstract philosophical ideal of political life to our actual lives in quite non-ideal circumstances?

One popular answer to that question follows the lead of John Rawls, who distinguished between (what he called) "ideal theory" and "non-ideal theory" in political philosophy. Rawls wanted to carefully separate philosophical reasoning about the best form for political society to take from philosophical reasoning about the rules we should follow in the very imperfect political societies in which we find ourselves. Roughly, the principles of ideal theory should collectively define a political ideal—a model of the best possible political society that is consistent with realistic assumptions about persons and societies (what Rawls eventually came to call "a realistic utopia"¹⁷)—that could serve as the "target" for non-ideal theory. The principles of non-ideal theory would then specify the best path from here to there, the rules for accomplishing a fair, efficient, politically possible transition from our current state to one closely approximating the ideal target.

Rawls' ideal theory assumes "strict compliance" with the institutions of the basic structure of society (i.e., that people act justly and help to uphold just institutions, so far as it is possible for them to do so) and then asks which principles could "well order" a political society under those conditions. What, in short, would be an ideal political arrangement that could realistically hope to motivate such compliance, to (in Rawls' phrase) "generate its own support"? What is the best political life that we could bring into existence by our own choices, given the limits set by our moral and psychological natures and by facts about social institutions and how humans can live under them? Our answer will set the goal for non-ideal theory, which will then proceed to specify the rules for advancing toward that goal by dealing with two kinds of obstacles to its attainment: deliberate noncompliance with ideal principles by institutions and persons (to be addressed according to non-ideal rules specifying how to deal with unjust governments and persons) and unfavorable historical, social, or economic conditions, which make achieving ideal arrangements very difficult or impossible.¹⁸

Rawls himself concentrated throughout his career on ideal theory, for obvious reasons. While philosophical judgments about the fairness of transitional rules will be a necessary component of non-ideal theory (as will judgments about the acceptability of the moral costs of transition¹⁹), much of the rest of the work in non-ideal theory will either be better suited to social scientists (making judgments about what policies will "work" best in our actual political lives) or be highly relativized to the particular societal circumstances under consideration (i.e., how we should get from here to there depends very much on where "here" is).

The current book, like Rawls' books, will discuss principally questions of ideal theory in political philosophy. To those who insist that the more urgent work in political philosophy is work in non-ideal theory—after all,

we want our practical philosophy to help us understand what we should do here and now—the only possible reply is the one that Rawls would no doubt make. We can properly understand what we should do here and now only after we have understood where we are trying to go from here. To those who suggest that the ideal target set by ideal theory should be not only feasible but "accessible"²⁰—thus bringing the ideal closer to our immediate practical aims—the response should be that weakening the ideal in this way leaves it unclear why even further weakenings are not equally defensible, resulting in a morally anemic "ideal" (say, of the best political society that is "easily achievable"). But to thus lower our sights is to effectively abandon the conception of an ideal as our ultimate target in political philosophy. It is, in my view, the first job of political philosophy to specify a robust political ideal toward which our efforts in our non-ideal world should be aimed.

1.6. *The Book*

The remainder of this book will proceed in the following fashion. In Chapter 2, we will examine the traditional project of justifying the state, though in a rather different way from what is usual. Where most political philosophers have asked (following the great social contract theorists) "How is the state justified; that is, how can the state be shown to be prudentially and morally superior to the state of nature (i.e., to a condition of anarchy)?" we will ask instead the more general and open question "What is the best form of social organization (for beings like ourselves in a world like ours)?" For there are, as we shall see, more choices to consider than merely anarchy or the modern territorial state, and there is no reason to begin by assuming that the state *must* be justifiable. There are both more cooperative nonpolitical options to weigh as well as quite different political options (including, e.g., less territorial and world-state possibilities). In Chapter 3, the discussion turns more directly to the nature of the moral relationship between states (of the sort in which we currently live) and political subjects (such as ourselves). How can a state achieve legitimacy with respect to us, and what are the nature of and limits on the moral obligations we owe to our states? Modern states typically claim rights to obedience from their subjects, rights to independence from the control of those external to the state, and rights to sovereignty over a particular geographical territory. Chapter 3 focuses principally on the first of these claims, while later chapters (especially Chapter 6) will address the others.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the book thus deal (broadly) with questions about the nature and basis of political authority. With Chapter 4, the book turns to the second basic problem area of political philosophy: the proper organization

or structure of political life. Assuming that political society can be justified and legitimated, how should it be ordered? The first requirement and principal virtue of a state is justice, and Chapter 4 explores the meaning and substance of political justice. Contemporary political philosophy has been so thoroughly dominated by discussions of justice that it will seem to some futile and misguided to devote to the subject (as I do here) only a single chapter. And it would be irresponsible of me not to note accordingly that my perspective on the terrain of political philosophy is a minority view (or, at least, an unfashionable one). As we will see, my approach to political philosophy comes closer to exemplifying the "Lockean" approach to the subject than it does the "Kantian" approach. I concede that my approach here will be forced to treat quite briefly much that merits more extended discussion. But I do hope that the first three chapters of the book will persuade readers of the propriety of my emphases.

We continue in Chapter 5 by examining the purported justifications of democratic government, exploring both the possible varieties of democratic order and the various values in light of which democratic government is said to be superior to its rivals. Many have argued, of course, that both state legitimacy and distributive justice require the operation of democratic political institutions, so the discussion in Chapter 5 will constitute a natural extension of those in Chapters 3 and 4. Finally, Chapter 6 considers the importance to political philosophy of relationships other than the simple citizen-state relationship: for instance, the moral relationships between states, between a state and those outside the state's boundaries, and between a state and distinct (e.g., tribal, national) groups within its boundaries. We conclude, then, by addressing both international and intranational dimensions of political philosophy, returning at the same time to themes touched on only quickly in prior chapters; our discussion here will center on questions about international distributive justice, state claims to territorial sovereignty, the rights of minority and national groups, and the justification of secession. Thus, this last chapter deals with issues central to a proper understanding of both political authority and distributive justice.

Suggested Reading

- David Copp, *Morality, Normativity, and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
 Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
 Jean Hampton, *Political Philosophy* (Boulder: Westview, 1997).
 Gerald MacCallum, *Political Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987).
 Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).



States?

2.1. *Why Have Political Societies?*

If political philosophy is the evaluative study of political societies, its most fundamental question must be "Why have (create, support) political societies of any sort?"¹ Are political societies better (for us, here and now) than their alternatives and, if so, better in what way(s)? Why should we not live completely nonpolitical lives—not in the sense that many of us do now (i.e., by ignoring political matters, despising politicians, declining to vote, etc.) but in the sense of living with others without any political organization whatsoever to structure and control our interactions? None of us should have much trouble thinking of at least some respects in which we might be better off without political societies, but the positive case for political societies has always seemed to most so obviously strong that anarchist arguments to the contrary have earned their authors reputations ranging from wildly eccentric to dangerously subversive. Political life seems to most of us to plainly be at least permissible and prudent (if not morally obligatory) for us, with anything that threatens its continuation constituting an attack on our most basic interests.

As these quick remarks may have already suggested to the careful reader, however, it is easy on this topic to run together a variety of related but importantly distinct questions. To start, we can distinguish three such questions. First, what is the best form of social life (for us here and now)? Second, what forms of social life are acceptable? It could, of course, turn out that there is a range of permissible, advantageous forms of social life, all of which are acceptable, with all but one being less than ideal. Provided that it is morally permissible for us to create and sustain a form of life and