

Classics in Moral & Political Philosophy: An Open Collection

Edited by
Rafael Martins



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Rafael Martins
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Introduction

This is a collection of classics in moral and political philosophy containing public domain and fair-use material. It unites in chronological order the most indispensable historical texts for an introduction to moral and political philosophy. The primary role of this collection is to provide instructors and students with a jazzy set of free materials. Inescapably, my editorial choices have followed some methodological and substantial views that deserve a more careful exposition.

Given its ancient origins, philosophy is extravagantly prodigal of texts in the public domain. Unlike in any other scholarship, my first challenge was not to dig out rare specimen, but to filter out of such abundant material only that what would best serve a sensible and internally coherent set of historical texts in value theory, broadly construed. As such, the collection includes foundational works on intrinsic and extrinsic value, subjective and objective value, practical reason, normative ethics, metaethics, political theory, and political economy.

I first established a backbone of selections from which one could depart to any direction if necessary. For this purpose, I sought to streamline all those most-popular-ever theories, concepts, and arguments, vis-à-vis an orthodox view of the history of Western thought. This initial inclination is not, however, supposed to constrain the picks that have made it to the actual selection, nor any future inclusions that depart from established

orthodoxies. On the contrary, those inclusions are encouraged, since they are necessary to make every scholarly tradition pop up in crisp and clean outlines.

The Nature of Political Philosophy

Given the scope, depth, and influence of these classic texts, it is natural to find them integrating introductory bibliographies in a number of scholarships, such as economics, neuroscience, and constitutional law, just to name a few. I begin thus by mitigating some concerns about the nature of *political philosophy*, as distinguished from political science, in regards to how these subjects are purely aprioristic and conceptual versus their empirical dependence. It is very likely that political philosophy is not entirely aprioristic¹ whatsoever. For instance, Bernard Williams understands political philosophy as “both normative and impure”, given that political questions usually arise from the urgency of actual social circumstances, thus necessarily involving the subject with history and other social sciences.² For the purpose of this material, it is not necessary nevertheless to establish a sharp and rigid taxonomy. It suffices to

¹ Geuss calls it “empirical abstemiousness” of political philosophy and morality. Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*. Princeton University Press, 2008. p. 7

² Bernard Williams, *Political Philosophy and the Analytical Tradition* in A. W. Moore (ed.) *Philosophy as Humanistic Discipline*. Princeton University Press, 2006. p. 155

have in mind that approaches whose conclusions depend more heavily on empirical data tend to be understood as political *science*, while political *philosophy* is more largely made of *aprioristic* reasoning.

More recently, this division of theoretical labor has also been understood in terms of *ideal* and *nonideal* political theory.³ Ideal theory is the investigation, through different versions/mixes⁴ of empirical independence, of the values and principles that would guide actual political agents, actions, and institutions. Nonideal theory, on the other hand, emerges from the intuition that political theory must first address the most urgent injustices of the actual world⁵, as well as from critics on the limitations of ideal theorizing. Notwithstanding, these theoretical dimensions should be seen as playing different roles, while complementary and mutually informative. From that agreement, large part of debates hinges on the empirical feasibility (social engineering⁶) of those political ideals we believe to be part of the perfect society. However, empirical feasibility

³ Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory" In Estlund, David (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁴ Rawls's strict compliance is an example

⁵ For instance, "iniquities of hunger, illiteracy, torture, arbitrary incarceration, or medical exclusion". Amartya Sen, "What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?" *Journal of Philosophy* 103: 215-38 2006, p. 218.

⁶ Creating public (state) and nonpublic (private) structures that would realize political ideals.

should not be considered an ultimate criterion for assessing the utility of ideal or aprioristic political theorizing. Apart from the possible relations between a priori and a posteriori political theorizing, the autonomy of each shall be taken seriously.

Political Philosophy as Public Morality

My second concern is not about political philosophy's independence from the empirical, but from morality. Method and object are among the main criteria for defining schools of thought. Political philosophy is rich in methods and objects. In this collection, the reader will find different approaches to what political philosophy is, what are its objects, and how it can be made. There will be plenty of opportunity for the reader to evaluate the level of autonomy of the political, as a fundamental science, in contrast to a merely derivative scholarship based on more fundamental sciences.⁷ Now, within classic normative theory, the *political* point of view and the *moral* point of view have always been deeply entangled. Traditionally, the difference between moral and political philosophy is that the first is usually understood as *individual* morality and the second as

⁷ Rawls favors a highly autonomous view of political philosophy; while Williams says Political philosophy is applied ethics: "I shall call views that make the moral prior to the political, versions of "political moralism". Bernard Williams, "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory" in Geoffrey Hawthorn (ed.) *In the Beginning Was the Deed*. Princeton University Press, 2005, pg. 2

public morality. Hence, the received view is that morality is strictly about individual characters, individual actions, and individual life projects, while the political has always been a moral enquiry about legislations and governments⁸, or, more fundamentally, the morality of collective agents, collective actions, and societal goals. Intuitive as it sounds, such understanding of political philosophy should not come without some degree of skepticism.

More controversial than the epistemological qualities of political enquiry is its autonomy from morality. Here we will find two extremes. One is to understand political philosophy strictly as applied ethics and the other is to advocate different versions of the irreducibility of the political to the moral.⁹ According to the former, political agents and institutions are justified by their leading to or being in accordance with a conception of the good and have their actions assessed in terms of deontic categories of traditional morality such as permissible, impermissible, omissible, supererogatory, and so forth. The familiar procedure is to first establish empirically independent, universal, and undeniable claims about human nature (theories of human nature). Second task is to elaborate on what is good and bad for individual humans according to their nature (theories of

⁸ Aristotle, NE and POL. Sidgwick. *Methods of Ethics*, p. 2

⁹ Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*. Princeton University Press, 2008. Bernard Williams. *In the Beginning Was the Deed*. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*.

intrinsic value). From these two premises, we then derive the deontic categories that we use to evaluate actions (normative theories). These three theoretical endeavors synthesize traditional moral theorizing. Now, from the completion of the second task, it has been classically recognized that it is impossible to live well, and even merely survive, without some kind of division of labor and mutual cooperation.¹⁰ Political theorizing thus emerges from the need to coordinate collective action. But the criteria we use for such coordination remains naturally the application of what has been established within moral theory developed for individuals.

The alternatives to this dominant methodological view take that political theory is autonomous in relation to moral theory. But if the dominant view skates on thin ice, it remains obscure what exactly is *distinctively* political, and absolutely independent, of moral theory. It would be odd, notwithstanding, if public morality was completely independent of private morality, but at the same time public morality has a certain kind of autonomy. However, the dispute may well boil down to the significance of internal and external factors that play a role in determining the feasibility of projects. The individual project of quit smoking needs not overcome certain hindrances that certainly the project of abolishing smoking in a whole society will require, quite equally in the case of quit eating beef, or start practicing

¹⁰ Plato, Aristotle, and many others. Plato: "...” Aristotle “no one can be fully virtuous away from the city-state”

the oboe, or individually overcome pernicious racist views about human nature. Disputes aside, this collection seeks to include the most perennial topics in public morality, such as political legitimacy, political obligation, civil disobedience, the social significance of individual liberty, theories of private and common property, the point of equality, classical political economy, distributive justice, gender, and race. I insist, however, that the autonomy of distinctive political thought does not require burning bridges, since a sensitive reflection on the classics will show that the differences between the moral and the political largely lie within metaphysics and epistemology, rather than on insurmountable chasms in value theory.

The Five Cardinal Moral Theories

In spite of the debate over the degree of autonomy of the political from the moral, all classical texts necessarily involve a rich blend of theories of human nature, theories of intrinsic value or wellbeing, and normative principles. Theories of human nature are, as much as possible, merely descriptive views about the subject of our moral considerations, in this case, the human being.¹¹ Traditionally, philosophers then derive a

¹¹ Instead of the classical and orthodox use of the concept of human nature, the idea of *personhood* has been steadily growing more influential along the 20th century and has probably reached its scholarly peak with Rawls and his critics. Notwithstanding, genetic advancements in the last ten years have overhauled this debate, and

theory of intrinsic value or wellbeing from their endorsed conception of human nature. The theories of intrinsic value here contained range over perfectionism, hedonism, libertarianism, and egalitarianism. From the accomplishment of those two theoretical tasks, they then close their comprehensive moral theory with one of more criteria or principle for the assessment of the rightness and wrongness of actions. Accordingly, this collection includes what I call the five cardinal¹² moral theories: Virtue Ethics, Natural Law, Egoism, Utilitarianism, and Kantianism. Each of these views constitute blends of more fundamental theories of human nature and intrinsic value that culminate in encompassing principles or criteria for the determination of above mentioned deontic categories.

Comprehensive political theories therefore emerge from, but are not completely reducible to, these five moral theories or to other possible combinations of those fundamental theories that compound a standalone moral theory. For the mitigation of any doubts, it shall be remarked that the essence of normative theories is to offer criteria or principles for the eval-

today the concept of human nature has recovered large part of the theoretical influence that it so lastingly maintained over twenty centuries.

¹² The idea of cardinality comes from C. D. Broad's *Five Types of Ethics Theory* Broad's used of the term "ethical theory" actually refers to larger comprehensive systems of moral philosophy, among which, in his view, five are quite distinct: those of Spinoza, Butler, Hume, Kant, and Sidgwick.

uation human action. But they will follow quite different lines depending on the various characteristics of the things that are object of normative theorizing, such as individual persons, a neighborhood association, business groups, lawyers, soldiers, politicians, and so forth. That individualization of the subjects of moral evaluation then determines the outlines between public and individual morality. My aim here is thus to offer a clear-cut display of the most influential and traditional moral theories, even if for the sake of any theoretical departures from orthodox moral and political philosophy.