
BEATRICE MAGNI
University of Milan
beatrice.magni@unimi.it

NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES: THE KIND OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY WE NEED

abstract

There isn't an overall consensus on the aim, meaning and role(s) of contemporary political philosophy. The relationship between philosophy and politics has been addressed and sharpened – not just today but in different ways and from various, separate and sometimes conflicting perspectives (Leopold & Stears, 2008). Regardless, the main aims, meaning and role of a field of study are key issues, and the quality and credibility of the research will most likely depend on our capacity to draw a path through this conflicting background. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to drafting elements of a new road map that could lead contemporary political philosophy out of this crippling impasse. It builds on a specific version of political theory – Walzer's interpretation path reviewed (Walzer, 1985) – and addresses a kind of political practice able to reconcile political philosophy's normative commitments – as is the case with the Rawls' four roles of political philosophy (Rawls, 2007) – with its actual ambitions and conditions of achievability (Hall, 2015; Galston, 2010).

keywords

political philosophy, normativity, interpretation, judgement, injustice

Introductory Remarks

In her work on the differences between political science, political theory, and politics, R. Grant (2002) identifies – starting from Berlin’s seemingly critical estimation of the scientific project of political philosophy¹ – what she calls the “practical and theoretical problem” (p. 578) inherent in the humanities: political theory would never become a science because of the character of the concerns it addresses: normative concerns, which indicate how political agents and political institutions *should* act in the domain of politics. When one makes a normative claim, one expresses an evaluation of something; when one evaluates something, it is assessed relative to some standards, ideals or possible alternatives. In other words, something is, in some respect, better, worse or on a par with some standard, ideal, or alternative. Normative questions and concerns contain an element of evaluation and ultimately remain – in political theory in general – obstinately philosophical, and consequently, their claims cannot be either validated or falsified definitively through any scientific method. Grant sees three possible answers to this sort of characterisation: the first is simply to accept it because the main aim in the humanities should be not so much about acquiring scientific knowledge but to provide a type of educational experience that can be inspirational, revelatory, and transformative of our common world. The second response posits that some elements of uncertainty are inevitable, even in the most formal sciences; therefore, the distance between the so-called “hard” sciences and the “social” sciences is smaller than its followers (on both sides) are willing to admit. Both lines of argument, Grant continues, have some merit, but they are not sufficient to define the character of political theory and its importance for the study of politics. The third possibility, then, is to acknowledge that humanities research requires a special defence, a defence on its own terms:

1 “Nevertheless, attempts made by the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century to turn philosophy, and particularly moral and political philosophy, into an empirical science, into individual and social psychology did not succeed. They failed over politics because our political notions are part of our conception of what is to be human, and this is not solely a question of fact, as facts are conceived by the natural sciences; nor the product of conscious reflection upon the specific discoveries of anthropology or sociology or psychology, although all these are relevant and indeed indispensable to an adequate notion of the nature of man in general, or of particular groups of men in particular circumstances. Our conscious idea of man – of how men differ from other entities, of what is human and what is not human or inhuman – involves the use of some among the basic categories in terms of which we perceive and order and interpret data. To analyze the concept of man is to recognize these categories for what they are. To do this is to realize that they are categories, that is, that they are not themselves subjects for scientific hypothesis about the data which they order” (Berlin, 1999, pp. 162-163).

the distinctiveness of humanities research, to which political philosophy belongs, has its own particular characteristics and should be defended as integrally related to the aims and the limits of humanistic inquiry, i.e., the means of interpretation and judgement (or, following Grant's vocabulary, the historical understanding):

There is nothing arbitrary about the methodological approach [of political theory, e.d.]. You cannot discover either what something means or why it matters without both interpretation and historical understanding. The characteristic uncertainty, disagreement, and lack of closure found in the discourse of humanities are not arbitrary either. These characteristics reflect both historical and epistemological realities [...]. I would suggest that, whereas the sciences are primarily concerned with knowledge of cause and effect, the humanities are primarily concerned with understanding of meaning and judgment of significance (Grant, 2002, pp. 581-582).

Along the lines of this argument on the political theory's stance, my aim in this essay is to clarify the extent to which reflecting on the relationship between philosophy and politics enables us to highlight the unique character of political philosophy. In the first part, I will attempt to isolate two main concerns surrounding political philosophy and its issues – descriptive and normative concerns – that are covered by three different and sometimes conflicting levels of analysis: epistemic, moral, and political. In the second part, I will consider the main lines of one of the most compelling efforts to gather concerns and analytical levels: Walzer's attempt to find a *connected* criticism and to identify what (political philosophers as) social critics do and how they go about doing it. Linked to that attempt, my provisional conclusion attempts to suggest that the reasons and arguments one can use to blame political philosophy are the same that make its unfinished work so necessary today.

To depict the directions in which political philosophy is heading, the first concern may even appear to be merely a matter of definition: what is political philosophy, and why does it matter?

It is difficult to answer even this question univocally. In one sense, one could say that political philosophy is simply a branch, or what we call a subfield, of the field of political science. It exists alongside of other areas of political inquiry such as policy studies, comparative politics, and international relations. In another sense, political philosophy is something much more different than simply a subfield; it appears to be the oldest and most fundamental element of political theory. Its purpose is to address, as it were, the fundamental problems, concepts and categories that frame and identify the study of politics. In terms of content, political philosophy is primarily concerned with questions of freedom, equality, justice and political authority. Matters of political authority concern why and to what extent political authority has legitimate power over individuals and groups. Do governments derive their authority from the consent of the governed? If so, what does that consent look like? Can the state do anything it wants to the governed, or are there limits? If there are limits, where do those limits come from? In this general sense, we can state that political philosophy investigates whether, on what grounds, and to what extent politics and power, or political authority, can be justified. Political philosophy, in this regard, will focus on the examination of a series of basic and central questions:

- What is the nature of justice, freedom, and equality?
- What is the justification for the authority of a state?
- How should we envision the relationship between ethics and politics?
- What is a just society?

**The Old Questions
(and Socrates'
Cold Case)**

- What constitutes a good citizen?
- What is the relationship between order, authority and freedom?

These are a few such questions. Political philosophy can explore these questions, for example, through the careful study of classic and contemporary texts in the field and will take the form of a broad inquiry of some of these most fundamental topics. Classic philosophical works accordingly provide us with the most basic questions that continue to guide the field. We keep asking the same questions that were asked by Plato, Machiavelli, John Locke, and others. It can be argued that we do not accept their answers, and it is likely that we ultimately do not, but their questions are often posed with a type of unrivalled clarity and insight, and their doctrines have not simply been refuted, replaced, or historically superseded; they remain, in many ways, constitutive of our most basic perspectives and attitudes about the world. However, when these old and classic questions – as Rawls specifies in his *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Rawls, 2007) – are raised in different historical contexts, they can be taken in different ways and have been approached by different scholars from different points of view according to their political and social worlds, their circumstances and problems as they saw them. It is the *fact* of pluralism that implies that, regardless how impartial and altruistic people are, they still disagree in their factual judgements and in religious, philosophical and moral doctrines (Freeman, 2014). To understand their works, then, we must identify these points of view and how they shape the way the writer's questions are *interpreted* and *discussed*. If we go one step further, engaging in political philosophy will therefore mean answering questions to which we often do not have safe and sure answers, and we can say that political philosophy works as a critical approach in terms of being:

- a commitment to make distinctions between states of the world;
- a commitment to identify criteria for evaluating states of the world;
- a commitment to order the possible states of the world according to some preferred principles.

This critical effort drives political philosophy from a first descriptive level to another one: political philosophy becomes foremost, then, a normative discipline² – that is, one concerned less with questions about how political life is or was and more with how it should be. The primary aim of political philosophy becomes helping those who address it to think more deeply about important theoretical concepts and crucial political problems.

All this is in accordance with the Socratic method. In the *Apology*, for example, Plato has Socrates explaining and justifying himself, his way of life and thinking before a jury of his peers: Socrates speaks in a public forum when defending the utility of philosophy for political life. At the same time, the *Apology* demonstrates the vulnerability of political philosophy in relation to the city and political power. From its beginnings, philosophy and the city, as well as philosophy and political life, have existed in a sort of tension with one another. Socrates is charged, as we know, by the city for corrupting the youth and for impiety towards the gods (in short, treason), and the *Apology* puts not merely an individual but, we might say, the idea of political philosophy on trial. For the philosopher – as in the case of Socrates and Delphi – it is not enough simply to hold a belief on faith but to be able to give a rational and reasoned account for one's belief: its goal, again, is to replace civic faith with rational knowledge.

² Even if boundaries are not always clear between descriptive and normative, i.e., between description and prediction. See Sen (1980).

Therefore, philosophy is necessarily at odds with belief and this kind of civic faith. The citizen may accept certain beliefs about faith because he or she is attached to a particular kind of political order, regime or ideology. However, for the philosopher, this is never enough. The philosopher seeks to judge these beliefs by true standards, i.e., what is always and everywhere true as a quest for knowledge.

Thus, there is a necessary and inevitable tension between philosophy and belief, or to put it another way, between philosophy and the civic compromises that hold the city together. However, even though one might say that Socrates appears to be engaged in a sort of highly personal quest for self-perfection (he maintains throughout the entire trial that the unexamined life is not worth living), there is also something deeply *political* about the *Apology* and his teachings that one cannot avoid. At the heart of the dialogue and this speech is a dispute with his accusers over the question, which is never stated directly, of who has the right to guide the future citizens and statesmen of the city of Athens. Socrates' defense speech, like every Platonic dialogue, is ultimately a dialogue about education: who has the right to teach and who has the right to educate the city? This is in many ways the fundamental political and philosophical question of all time for Socrates. This is essentially a question of who governs or, said otherwise, who should manage, i.e., who should manage disagreements that represent the main feature of political life. Socrates intends to put the democracy of Athens itself on trial: not only does the *Apology* force Socrates to defend himself before the city of Athens, but Socrates, with his strong critique of democratic practices, puts the city of Athens on trial and makes it defend itself before the high court of (his political) philosophy.

Thus, if we decide to enter the debate on some of the most basic and fundamental merits and limits of the study of today's political philosophy through the *Apology*, the shifty Plato's reference to Achilles (Plato, 1991, 28c)³ could probably be significantly more revealing than the most famous *gadfly* (Colaiaco, 2001). The latter case is the reference by which the philosopher explains his benefaction to the *polis* as analogous to the good done by a gadfly to "a large and well-bred horse, a horse grown sluggish because of its size and in need of being roused" (Plato, *Ap.* 30e-31a). With the Achilles example, Socrates maintains, as he states near the end of the defense speech, that the examined life is alone worth living and only those engaged in the continual struggle to clarify their thinking and remove sources of contradiction and incoherence can be said to live worthwhile lives. The Socratic paradigm of political philosophy may reveal some features in common with the older Homeric warrior: Socrates and Achilles are paradigms of the tradition – philosophical and heroic in the order – and are two connected critical voices within the tradition. In a significant and scarcely examined passage, Plato re-reads Homer when Socrates invokes Achilles as an exemplar of the courage he himself must display in pursuing his mission: ultimately, he wants to replace military combat with a new type of epistemic fight, in which the person with the best argument – the best justified argument – is declared victorious. The principle is for the best argument to prevail while maintaining one's position – as Achilles did to protect his friends and comrades – to show who one was (at descriptive level), who one is (at descriptive level), and who one should be (at normative level). Here, Achilles's *aretè* – specifically, the *soldier's* virtue and courage – becomes the most peculiar character of the Socratic methodology and philosophy. The *Apology* then shows Socrates offering a new model of citizenship and a new kind of citizen. As was the case

**Keep Your
Position**

³ "This is the way it is, men of Athens, in truth. Wherever someone stations himself, holding that it is best, or wherever he is stationed by a ruler, there he must stay and run the risk, as it seems to me, and not take into account death or anything else compared to what is shameful" (Plato, *Ap.* 28c).

with Achilles, so is with Socrates: fear of death, or any other punishment, will never induce a philosopher to abandon her stance.

Now and Around Here: Political Philosophy and the Present

My position concerning where political philosophy must begin and what it ought to take into account when so doing therefore considers two distinct and equally much-needed commitments underlying the meaning and the aims of political philosophy: as we know from the Socratic cold case and the constitutive ambiguity of political philosophy – the Socratic rational inquiry that even calls the Oracle into question – the analytical ambition must always come to terms with the contingency constraint. We saw that we can engage in political philosophy in a descriptive and normative way. Political philosophy should therefore descriptively remain at a certain distance from political events and contingencies to normatively develop appropriate criteria and categories that can make some specific difference in politics. The problem, though, is that by placing itself at a certain distance from its object in relation to politics, political philosophy may, of course, respond adequately to its philosophical commitments and meet the demands of theoretical rigor but appears to be less able to honor another commitment, which is also indispensable. Political philosophy appears to be less committed to putting categories and criteria into place that make a difference and can be useful in politics.

What I pose here is, therefore, not only a problem of distance, the recurrent trouble of the correct distance at which the philosophy must be placed to fruitfully examine politics and its contingencies. The problem I am raising concerns *how* political philosophy, once the gap has been exploited with respect to policy and contingency, can claim its usefulness, how it can make categories and criteria that it processes relevant while staying away from contingencies relevant to politics. Thus, the problem I raise appears to be an epistemic problem and concerns how political theory matters today, i.e., the way in which political philosophy should justify itself by conceiving or reconstructing the link between its principles that are theoretically elaborated, on the one hand, and the politics and its contingencies on the other. The tension between philosophy and politics is reformulated in a question of guidance: where must one go to engage in political philosophy? I suggest it is at this point where the political philosopher is faced with a choice.

From Rawls’ Epistemic Account to Walzer’s Connected Criticism

In the Socratic turn, philosophy is a kind of “public service” that constantly demands dialogue, which is never a mere theoretical exercise but always a mutual crossing in the context of the political exchange that compels the interlocutor to become involved and to be a moral agent who has to always give (good) reasons for her positions. In the epistemological account of Rawls (Rawls, 2007), political philosophy is tasked – perhaps more modestly – with explaining how we know and apply political philosophy’s principles and categories.

According to Rawls, we can distinguish four roles of political philosophy as part of the public culture of every society: practical, guiding, reconciling, and realistically utopian. The practical one – the first – aims to find a common and rational ground for political dealings in political conflict and disagreement. It focuses on some controversial issues, and – against all odds – considers whether it is possible to find some basis for a philosophical and moral agreement or at least whether it is possible to limit the existing political divisions to save social cooperation based on mutual respect. The idea behind the second role is that reason and thinking (both theoretical and practical) should orient individuals and institutions in the conceptual space of every possible end. Political philosophy can further help us to reconcile with our comprehensive views (see also Rawls, 2005, pp. 10, 40, 144), showing us the reason of the fact of pluralism, its benefits, and some political advantages; finally, political philosophy can be realistically utopian, i.e., it can attempt to create a decent political order and a reasonably just democratic regime.

To perform such tasks, political philosophy needs statements of value because of its prescriptive or normative attitude. The premise is that political life and institutions are not regarded as unchanging and part of the natural order but as potentially open to change and therefore as recurrent stances in need of philosophical justification. However, political philosophy for Rawls is relevant, especially in times of crisis, where it becomes imperative to find and implement some new shared criteria of judgement. It then calls for critical clarification of and reflection on the most fundamental terms of our political life and suggests new possibilities for the future. Political philosophy exists and only exists in that “zone of indeterminacy” between the “is” and the “ought”, between the actual and the ideal,⁴ which is why political philosophy is always and necessarily a potentially disturbing endeavour. What is distinctive is its prescriptive or evaluative concern – in short, its concern with how political societies should be, how policies and institutions can be justified, and how we and our political leaders ought to behave in our public lives. This tension between the best and the actual is the only way in which a Rawlsian perspective makes political philosophy possible: in an ideal situation, political philosophy would be unnecessary or redundant; it would wither away. At the same time, however, the actual cannot prevent philosophy from assessing truths, answering questions, and settling disagreements.

In the wake of Rawls and his four roles of political philosophy, one could be led to believe that the difficulty political philosophy faces in expressing its object – politics – comes from its tendency to represent it through categories that hide or remove its prevalent content, i.e., conflict (of interest, power, and values). To be clear, such a difficulty is not only connected to the choice of certain authors; it is rather inherently connected to the functioning and status of the Platonic model of political philosophy, where political philosophy is structurally unable to consider conflict because it is originally oriented towards the question of order. However, if we consider that conflict is not a slag to be eliminated but is rather the irreducible core, basis and substance of politics, we should admit that no attempt at giving shape or order to politics can dismiss it unless it is possible to completely revamp the political itself. To help frame this issue, it is useful to reconsider Michael Walzer’s proposal of a *connected criticism* in political theory. Walzer, like Rawls, sees no way in which the pluralism in politics might be avoided and no definitive way to ending the disagreement. However, his reflection on the possible positioning of political philosophy starts with this question: where do we have to start criticizing? He explicitly refers to the Platonic allegory: the philosophy has to dwell in a cave. However, he cannot maintain or claim an external or superior position: “We have to start from where we are: I do not mean to deny the reality of the experience of stepping back, though I doubt that we can ever step back all the way to nowhere; even when we look at the world from *somewhere else*, we are still looking at the world. We are looking, in fact, at a particular world; we may see it with special clarity, but we will not discover anything that is not already there” (Walzer, 1987, p. 16).⁵ This approach suggests that people critically examine their own practices, or better, it wants to chronicle and extend patterns of critical arguments that already exist. Walzer’s social criticism, in this respect, requires critical distance, but this new kind of criticism “does not require us to step back from society as a whole but only to step away from certain sorts of power relationships within society. It is not connection but authority and domination from which we must distance ourselves” (Walzer, 1987, p. 52).

⁴ I owe Salvatore Veca this idea of *actuality*.

⁵ On that point, see also Galston (2010, p. 396): “we must begin from where a given political community is” and Hall (2015, p. 6): “The basic thought, then, is that we cannot clarify the nature of various political values in any meaningful manner before we consider the historical and political question of what their elaboration requires ‘now and around here’ [...]. I will refer to this idea as the ‘realism constraint’”.

Walzer conceptualizes the activity of social criticism in a way that puts special emphasis on the connection of the critic with the society in which she operates. In *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987), Walzer distinguishes between three paths in moral philosophy: discovery, invention and interpretation. The first path, discovery, is one where the moral philosopher receives her ideas from the outside the communities at which these ideas are directed. The classical example of this path is the revelation of the commandments to Moses. The second path, invention, starts from the assumption that the rules of human interaction cannot simply be discovered – they need to be constructed to guide collectives. The difference in the path of discovery is that the moral philosopher makes use of some hypothetical device or thought experiment so as to generate principles of justice. Here, Walzer is clearly referencing Rawls: the underlying intuition is that no external creator is needed in order to produce rules of human interaction; instead, the application of the appropriate method alone will lead to the right kind of results. However – and this is a crucial facet of many such hypothetical devices and thought experiments – the individuality of those who contribute to the constructive process becomes effaced. Individual standpoints disappear in the course of inventing principles of justice. Such is the purpose of impartial procedures. The path of invention thus accentuates human agency but only to the extent to which it can help generate principles of justice that abstract from the individuality of those involved. In the second path, the end is given with the morality we hope to invent. Walzer identifies a third path of moral philosophy that breaks with both discovery and invention: if discovery and invention are efforts at escape in the hope of finding some external and universal standards with which to judge moral and political existence, the effort may well be commendable but unnecessary; this is the path of interpretation. Moral philosophy as an interpretation conceives of the activity of social criticism as embedded in and dependent on society. In the third path, we do not have to discover the moral world because we have always lived there. We do not have to invent it because it has already been invented. A moral argument in such a setting is interpretive in character, closely resembling the work of a lawyer or judge who struggles to find meaning in a combination of conflicting laws and precedents. This emphasis on the connectedness of social criticism naturally invites doubt about distance: how far should the critic be from society if absolute detachment is, in fact, detrimental to her activity? If shared understanding of what is valuable in a society is a precondition for effective social criticism, how much commitment to these communal values is necessary? Social criticism is an immanent activity and is typically considered to be the practice of one who can be detached enough to examine a particular society from a vantage point that is “no place in particular” (pp. 5, 16).

Walzer is correct when he posits that a moral and political world already exists, as a historical product, that gives structure to our lives but whose ordinances are always uncertain and in need of scrutiny, argument, and commentary. This perspective turns out to be particularly useful to proposing a theoretical proposal to fitting “hard and dark times” in politics, to thinking about and evaluating answers, solutions, and to finding a way out.

The New Questions (Political Philosophy and the Problem of Injustice)

The most important issues of political philosophy so far address the controversial question of what justice requires. If now we attempt to take a step in the direction suggested by Walzer, at a more normative and political level, we will probably find a new philosophical black list, where the stakes are as follows:

- What is injustice?
- What are the goals of a decent society?
- What constitutes the basis of human dignity?
- What does this imply for our obligations as human beings and citizens?

- What relationships should we establish among our passions, our subjectivities, our main interests, and the rules of public life?
- How much inequality can we live with?

If one looks at our many injustices, what becomes clear is how ordinary and pervasive they are. They do not involve only acts of obvious misconduct but also failures of both governments and citizens to act when they could. The political philosopher as a connected critic is not separate from or outside the society that he or she interrogates and challenges but is rather “connected” to it, engaged in its central concerns and passionately, if complicatedly, involved in the struggles of the common people. What does this mean for the meaning and the role(s) of political philosophy? Can political theory meet the challenges of the present? We now know that we need a political philosophy that engages political science without attempting to become a science. The best contribution that political philosophy can make to the study of its main issues – i.e., political issues, as injustice – depends on its loyalty and commitment to philosophical questions as they arise in our political and everyday life. Political philosophy as it stands is an imminently practical discipline and field, where the purpose is not simply contemplation or reflection alone: it is advice giving. The fact is that the work of political philosophy is irreducibly plural and multidimensional, and although we are most familiar with the character of a modern democratic regime such as ours, a consistent and distinctive conception of political philosophy is, in many ways, a type of immersion into what we might today call comparative politics. Regarding this attempt to find a road map to political philosophy, it is not justice that brings us to politics but injustice – the avoidance of evil rather than the pursuit of good. Heading off evil, not the attempt to realize that an ideal condition of justice and fairness, should be the central focus of political thought and action. It is also important to realize that philosophy is not without a history; philosophy is a historical movement that tackles social and political questions as well as more technical problems of logic and epistemology.

In this brief essay, I did not want so much to propose a theory as to explore and expose difficulties in the ways we characteristically think and act when we currently discuss political theory in general and political philosophy in particular. I believe that Isaiah Berlin was right: political theory will never be a science due to the presence of pluralism and disagreement. However, its main weakness could coincide with its primary constructive power, and if we refer to Grant’s argument, we might perhaps agree that the fact of disagreement does not imply that nothing can be known, only that everything cannot be “between ignorance and knowledge, in the realm of judgment, [is] where the humanities reside” (Grant, 2002, p. 585).⁶ Therefore, thinking realistically about the audience, the authority, and the position of political philosophy could mean attempting to present it as a viable and fruitful method for interpreting the political events of our time without removing its philosophical commitments. If Nagel is right (Nagel, 2005), the path of justice is a consequence of correctly finding

**The Vulnerability
and the Usefulness
of Political
Philosophy.
Conclusive
Remarks**

⁶ See also Grant (2002, pp. 589-590): “Every good causal explanation of political phenomena cannot exclude the questions of interpretation and judgment that drive political philosophy. Political theory as an enterprise assumes that interpretations, conceptual regimes, judgments of significance, and ideas of all kinds are themselves both causes and effects. Ideas have significant consequences [...]. In other words, the study of politics needs both to seek general laws to explain the causes of political behavior and to develop interpretations of the meaning and significance of political events and conceptual regimes to inform evaluative judgments of them. Political studies have both scientific and humanistic aims. These are distinct but complementary enterprises; the ‘permeability’ does not efface the distinction”.

injustices. The normative constraint of political philosophy involves questions of value, what we should do, or what we ought to do when we face a political dilemma. To be concerned with finding reasons and justifications to eliminate or reduce injustice are still normative concerns. If Walzer is right, we need distinguish the epistemic problem of knowledge and how we come to know moral distinctions from the problem of motivation and what moves us to act based on moral distinctions. In this sense, political philosophy should take on the responsibility over the long term to understand politics and meet the contingencies, ask the right questions, find possible and reasonable answers, and contribute to reducing injustices. The “possible-accessible” is what we call for in political philosophy today: the priority of the *actual* over the *possible*. The priority of actuality is the only path to any form of possibility in political theory. Rooms can be rearranged, as Walzer suggested, and old bottles can be refreshed with new wine. Between desirability and feasibility, the purpose could only be to provide some elements for a political philosophy that is *achievable*, i.e., an accessible normative theory starting from our actual world. This is not a definition, as Rawls would have said, but just an indication.

REFERENCES

- Berlin, I. (1999). *Concepts and Categories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cath, Y. (2016). Reflective Equilibrium. In H. Cappelen, T. Gendler, & J. Hawthorne (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 213-230.
- Cohen, G.A. (2008). *Rescuing Justice and Equality*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Colaiaco, J. (2001). *Socrates against Athens. Philosophy on Trial*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Dunn, J. (1980). *Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Estlund, D. (2014). Utopophobia. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 42(2), 113-134.
- Freeman, S. (2014). Original Position, in E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/original-position/>.
- Galston, W.E. (2010). Realism in Political Theory. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 9(4), 385-411.
- Grant, R. (2002). Political Theory, Political Science, and Politics. *Political Theory*, 30(4), 577-595.
- Hall, E. (2015). How to do realistic political theory (and why you might want to). *European Journal of Political Theory*, 1-21.
- Leopold, D., Stears, M. (2008). *Political Theory. Methods and Approaches*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, D. (2013). *Justice for earthlings: Essays in Political Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagel, T. (2005). The Problem of Global Justice. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 33(2), 113-147.
- Pettit, P. (2007). Analytical Philosophy, in R. Goodin, P. Pettit, T. Pogge (Eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwells, 7-38.
- Plato (1991). *The Apology of Socrates*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- O’Shea, J. (2000). Sources of Pluralism in William James, in M. Baghramian, I. Attracta (Eds.), *Pluralism: The Philosophy and Politics of Diversity*. London: Routledge, 17-43.
- Rawls, J. (2005). *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rawls, J. (2007). *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Sen, A. (1980). Description as Choice, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 32(3), 353-369.
- Walzer, M. (1987). *Interpretation and Social Criticism*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press.