

24.201: Topics in History of Philosophy: Justice & Political Economy  
Spring 2016  
First Paper Prompts

*Please select one of the following to respond to in 1800-2100 words. For more guidelines see "Guidelines for Papers".*

1. Marshall Sahlins provides two alternative "routes to prosperity." What are these two alternatives? What are the pros and cons of each? Are there conditions under which one would be preferable to the other? What are they?
2. Thomas Hobbes seems to suggest that the only way a social contract can be binding is in virtue of its enforcement: that is, in virtue of being backed up by the threat of sanctions by a sovereign power. Does might make right? Why or why not?
3. John Locke claims that private property in land "begins in" labor. What reasons does he have for thinking this is the case? What sorts of labor does he have in mind? What advantages might such a regime have over an "original acquisition," habitation, or occupation regime? What disadvantages?
4. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau sketch very different versions of the social contract. What are their similarities and differences and how do these similarities and differences affect their arguments for the justification and form of the state? Do you think one or the other provides a stronger argument? Why? (You can choose to pick two of the three to compare, or compare all three.)
5. Both Rubin and Rousseau offer accounts of the origins of the gendered division of labor. Critically evaluate one of them or compare the two.

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