

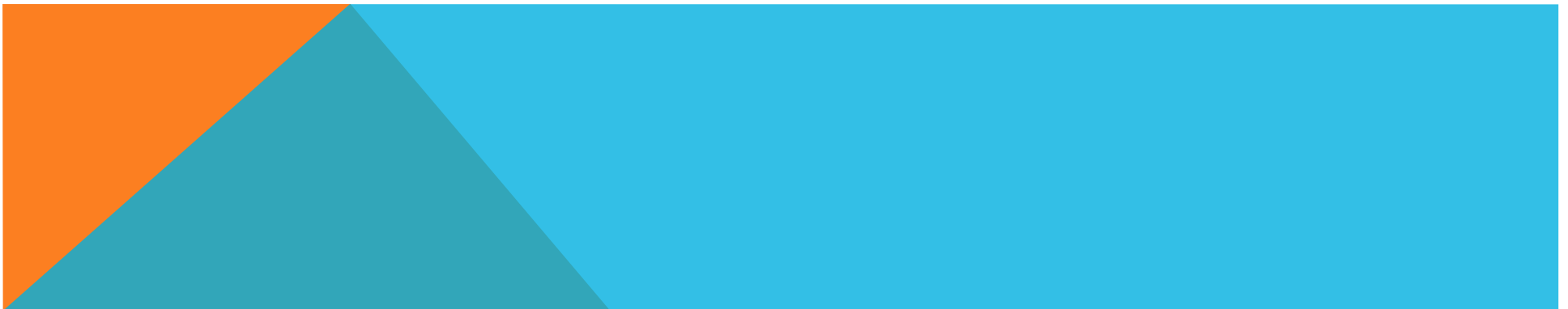
**INTRODUCTION TO
PHILOSOPHY**

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TOPIC 3

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- ❑ Political philosophy focusses on fundamental questions about the nature of the state and government, and the relationships between individuals within these settings.
- ❑ In this segment we are going to be focussing on three aspects of political philosophy: *freedom*, *justice*, and *global justice*.



DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF FREEDOM

- ❑ The 'freedom of the ancients' (Benjamin Constant, 1767-1830): freedom is not understood individually, but rather in terms of groups (e.g., the freedom of the city).
- ❑ This is contrast to the 'freedom of the moderns', which is specifically understood along individualist lines.
- ❑ Positive freedom: the (individual) freedom to achieve our goals.
- ❑ Negative freedom: (individual) freedom from coercion and interference from others.
- ❑ Kant on freedom: although we cannot demonstrate through reason alone that we are free, it is only on the assumption that we are free that the world is intelligible to us.



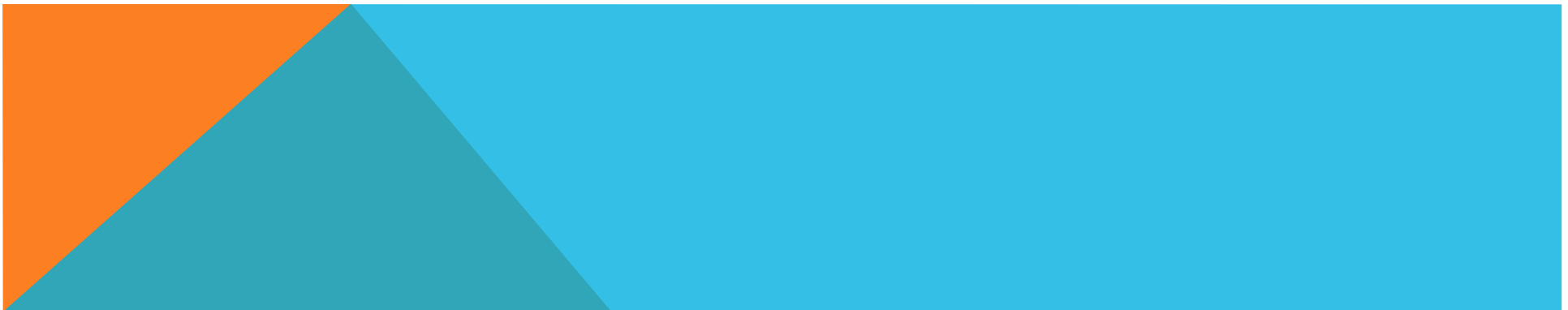
FREEDOM AND REAL CHOICE

- ❑ Freedom implies choice. But how genuine should those choices be?
- ❑ Are we free to act otherwise if we have a gun at our head?
- ❑ The natural answer is 'no', but Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) famously argued otherwise. His point is that one could choose to disregard the gunman, even though this is obviously an unpalatable choice.
- ❑ This conception of freedom is controversial because it breaks the link between freedom and *responsibility*. (We do not hold people responsible for doing things when they have a gun at their head).



FREEDOM AND REAL CHOICE

- ❑ A related issue here is whether more choice means more freedom.
- ❑ One might think so. But what if the options available, while numerous, are all very similar (e.g., lots of different newspapers, but they all carry essentially the same news)?
- ❑ Or what if the options available, while numerous, are all bad for you (e.g., lots of different brands of cigarettes)?

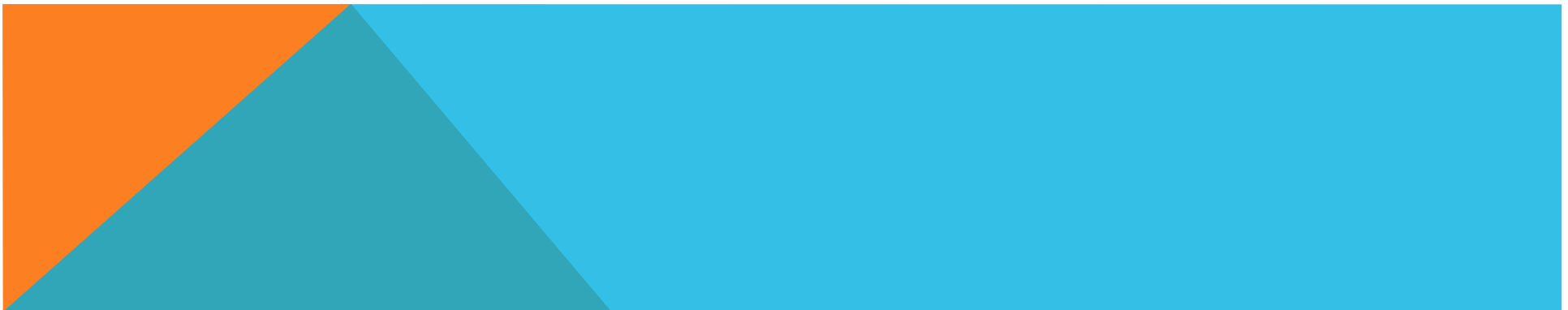


FREEDOM AND THE ABILITY TO DO OTHERWISE

- ❑ Freedom implies choice. But does it imply the ability to do otherwise than one in fact does? One might think that it must mean this, in that if one couldn't have acted otherwise, then how could one be free?
- ❑ But this claim has been called into question by Harry Frankfurt (1929-). He imagines cases where one selects a particular option, but where one would have been prevented from doing otherwise. His point is that in such a case, one is freely choosing to do what one will be required to do anyway.
- ❑ It is akin to an addict who enjoys her addiction, as opposed to one who doesn't.

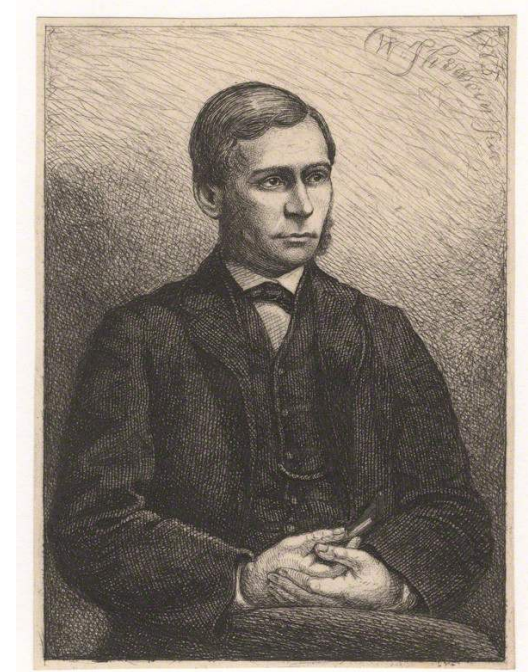


Harry Frankfurt (1929-)



POSITIVE FREEDOM

- ❑ Unlike negative freedom, which is freedom from restraint or coercion, positive freedom is the freedom to achieve our goals and fulfil our potential.
- ❑ For example, having an excellent health service enhances our positive freedom, by enabling us to live better lives.
- ❑ But does it matter to positive freedom which goals are being fulfilled (and in particular whether they are worthwhile goals)?

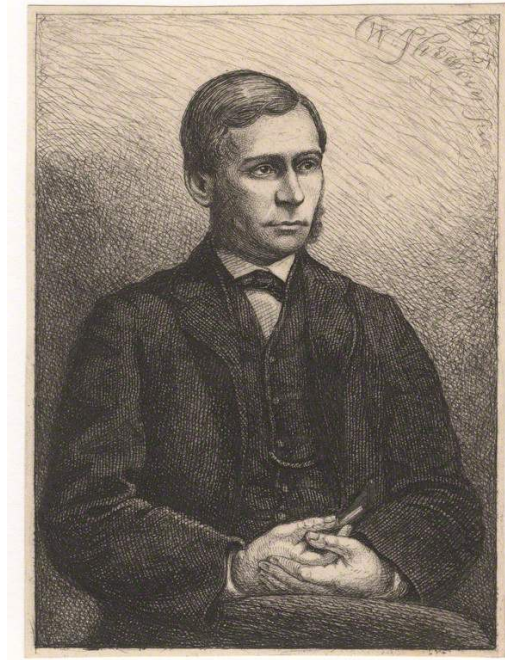


T. H. Green (1836-1882)



POSITIVE FREEDOM

- ❑ One person who thought that the value of the goals was important was T H. Green (1836-1882). For example, he campaigned for a ban on the sale of alcohol as he claimed it would promote our positive freedom.
- ❑ This exposes how a conception of positive freedom can lead to the restriction of choice. But is this so counterintuitive? After all, a good education system might be crucial for our positive freedom, and yet in order to be paid for it requires taxation, which effectively limits our options in other areas. (More generally, having a government and being subject to the rule of law can enhance our positive freedom).



T. H. Green (1836-1882)



NEGATIVE FREEDOM

- ❑ As the name suggests, negative freedom is defined in terms of what it isn't. It means being free from coercion or interference from other people.
- ❑ One of the most influential defenders of negative freedom—and critics of positive freedom—was Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-97). He argued that positive freedom confused freedom with other values, such as equality or justice. For example, free education may make society more just or equal, but that doesn't entail that it makes it any more free.



Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-97)

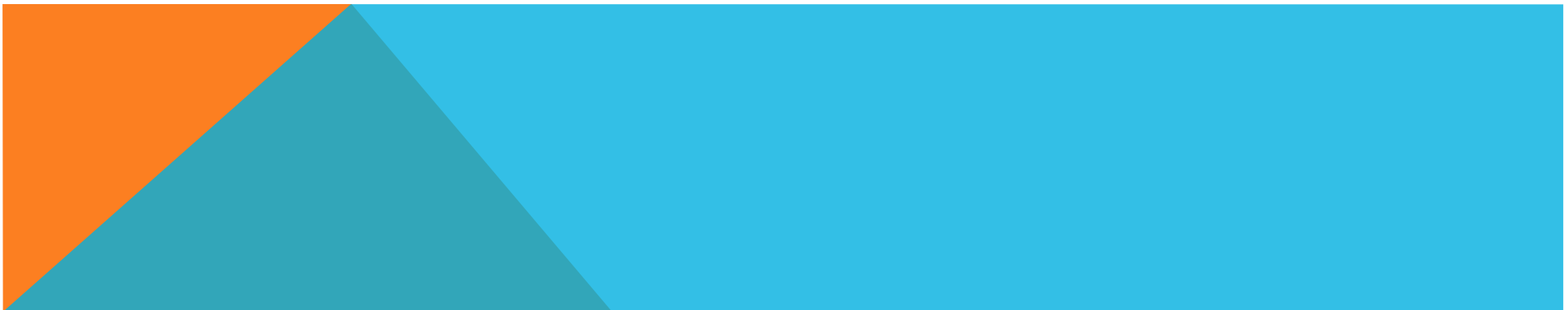


NEGATIVE FREEDOM

- ❑ One of the problems that faces defences of negative freedom is that it seems to favour the privileged.
- ❑ It might work very well for the wealthy to be free from coercion and interference, but in practice the less well off are not so fortunate, as they need to submit to the authority of others in order to enjoy the goods that the wealthy have direct access to.
- ❑ Of course, strictly speaking, they are not being coerced, as they voluntarily enter in these relationships. But is there a genuine choice here?



Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-97)



REPUBLICAN FREEDOM

- ❑ Republican freedom is a conception of freedom rooted in ideas found in ancient Rome, and in particular the Roman republic.
- ❑ It revolves around the idea that freedom essentially consists in living on one's own terms, rather than being subject to the will of another.
- ❑ Defenders of republican freedom reject the idea that all coercion or interference renders us unfree. For if this were so, then laws (e.g., against murder) would be contrary to our freedom.



Philip Pettit (1945-)



REPUBLICAN FREEDOM

- ❑ Defenders of republican freedom, such as Philip Pettit (1945-), argue that through public deliberation (e.g., via democratic processes) we are able to form a reasoned, shared view about the limits to our activities.
- ❑ This is held not to be a limitation of our freedom, but rather to set the boundaries regarding what we are free to do.
- ❑ In order to understand why this isn't a limitation of our freedom, it would be worth remembering Frankfurt's point about freedom being choosing what one wants (even if one couldn't have chosen otherwise). Similarly, according to defenders of republican freedom, the laws that constrain us are in a sense *our* laws.



THE HARM PRINCIPLE

- ❑ One person who has tried to formulate a general principle about when it is legitimate to interfere with another's free action is J. S. Mill (1806-1873), in his famous work *On Liberty* (1859).
- ❑ He argued that it was only legitimate to interfere with another's free action if this would prevent harm to others. Accordingly, this is known as the *harm principle*.
- ❑ In particular, notice that on this view it is not legitimate to interfere with another's free action because it is that person's best interests (e.g., as when one prevents a suicide). Mill is thus arguing against a form of *political paternalism*.



J. S. Mill (1806-1873)

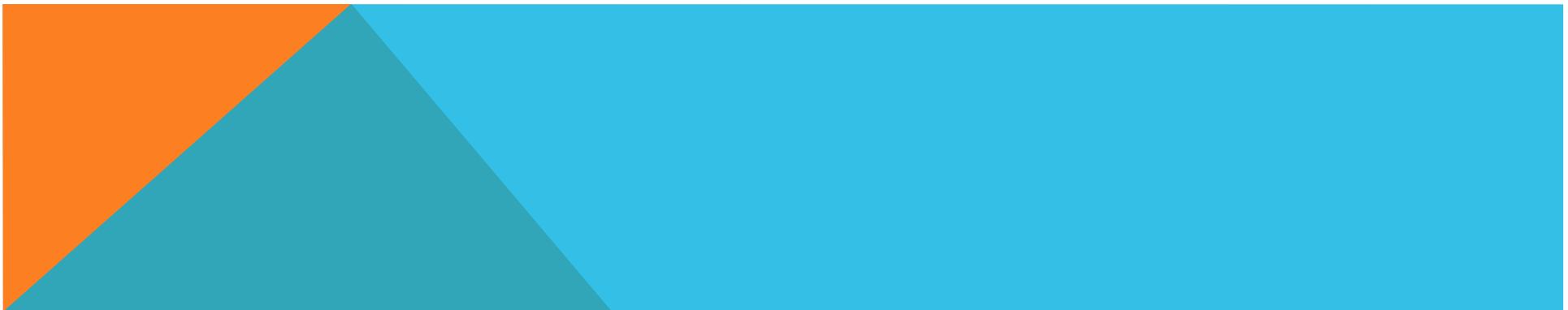


THE HARM PRINCIPLE

- ❑ So, for example, if I want to spend my days doing activities which others think are anti-social (such as getting drunk), then no-one has a legitimate basis to interfere, *so long as I don't harm anyone else in the process.*
- ❑ The problem for this proposal arises once we start to consider what constitutes a harm to others. My anti-social behaviour might well offend you, for example. Is that not a harm, and if so, can it be used to infringe my behaviour?
- ❑ And what about clearly harmful activities that are consensual, such as boxing? This raises the question of whether the harm in question should be specifically understood in terms of *autonomy*.



J. S. Mill (1806-1873)



FREEDOM AND ALIENATION

- ❑ For G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), *alienation* occurs when a strata of people become disconnected from the wider society.
- ❑ Note that although poverty is one way in which alienation can occur, for Hegel it is not the only way. In particular, this alienated strata of people might be materially well-off and yet still feel disconnected from wider society.
- ❑ Note that this problem is orthogonal to the problem of freedom by negative or republican lights, as it could be that no-one is preventing the alienated from participating in the wider society. And yet the alienated will lack the positive freedom of achieving their goals and fulfilling their aspirations.



G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831)



THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

- ❑ How are we supposed to peacefully co-exist? If each person simply asserts their own self-interest, then will this inevitably lead to anarchy and the rule of the powerful over the weak?
- ❑ One answer to this perennial problem of political philosophy is the *social contract*, as defended by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).
- ❑ The general idea is that rather than resolving disputes by appeal to one's own interests, one instead appeals to a general will embodied in the social contract.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(1712-1778)



THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

- ❑ Note that the general will is not the same as the common will, which is just the majority viewpoint.
- ❑ So, for example, in a representative democracy it might both be true that most people, if asked, would vote for capital punishment, but that the elected representatives never pass this kind of legislation.
- ❑ The common will is thus in favour of capital punishment, but we might say that the general will—which considers the right political settlement overall—is not in favour of capital punishment.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(1712-1778)



THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

- ❑ One challenge to the social contract idea has been that of consent. Clearly we do not explicitly assent to this contract individually, which is what is normally required to make a contract valid. In fact, the only explicit consent might have been a long time ago (e.g., when the country is founded). And in some cases there is no obvious explicit consent, whether contemporary or historical. So why is it binding?
- ❑ But could such consent be implicit, incurred in virtue of being willing to participate in society and benefit from the goods that it offers? (But then, do we have much choice about this?)



Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(1712-1778)



A THEORY OF JUSTICE

- ❑ One of the giants of twentieth century political philosophy was the American philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002), in particular via his seminal book *A Theory of Justice* (1971).
- ❑ Rawls made use of an interesting thought experiment. Imagine we have to choose a society from behind a *veil of ignorance*, where we do not know what position we will occupy in that society (e.g., whether we will be rich or poor, talented, beautiful, male or female, etc). What kind of society would you favour?
- ❑ Rawls argued that with the problem so posed, we would all agree that society ought to be structured in certain fundamental ways.



John Rawls (1921-2002)



A THEORY OF JUSTICE

- ❑ In particular, Rawls argued that we would want every person to have the same set of basic liberties and rights (a 'social minimum', as he called it, sufficient for a decent life of self-respect).
- ❑ In addition, he argued that we would only allow there to be social and economic inequalities where there is genuine equality of opportunity and where this is to the most benefit to the least advantaged in society.



John Rawls (1921-2002)



A THEORY OF JUSTICE

- ❑ One challenge that Rawls' proposal faces is whether it is psychologically plausible that someone could adopt a veil of ignorance, and so disregard their actual societal condition.
- ❑ Another challenge is whether it is so obvious that we would all agree about the nature of a just society from behind this perspective. Wouldn't some people be risk-takers ('maximisers'), and so opt for a society with more inequality (i.e., great wealth for some, great poverty for others)? Wouldn't some people do the opposite and opt for lower levels of inequality ('minimisers')?



John Rawls (1921-2002)



THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH

- ❑ An influential alternative to Rawls' account is the *capabilities approach*, as defended by Martha Nussbaum (1947-) and Amartya Sen (1933-).
- ❑ They argue that Rawls was wrong to focus questions of political justice around the distribution of resources. Rather, we should focus on the more general notion of well-being, where they argue that this in turn is closely related to our capabilities. Having a large share of resources is little use to us if our children have no access to good education, we are subject to a corrupt legal system, etc.



Martha Nussbaum (1947-)



FEMINISM

- ❑ A common thread in most versions of feminism is a critique of patriarchal assumptions inherent in traditional accounts of political justice.
- ❑ For example, traditional accounts of political justice focus on the public realm and tend to ignore the private realm entirely. And yet what happens here can have a huge bearing on the political realities that women face (e.g., if they are expected to take on the lion's share of the childcare).



Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005)



RADICAL VS. LIBERAL FEMINISM

- ❑ One contrast to be drawn here is between radical and liberal forms of feminism. Proponents of the former, such as Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005), argue that the inherent nature of gender inequality entails that certain practices, such as pornography or prostitution, should be banned altogether.
- ❑ In contrast, liberal feminists, such as Susan Moller Okin (1946-2004), argue for a less restrictive approach which advocates regulating the problematic practices rather than banning them altogether.



Susan Moller Okin (1946-2004)



MULTICULTURALISM

- ❑ Multiculturalism poses specific challenges for political theory. In particular, one needs to be able to balance respect for other cultures, and hence different ways of organising society, with putatively universal (and hence not culture-specific) political values.
- ❑ For example, certain cultures have norms which might be thought to be prejudicial to woman (e.g., regarding what women can wear, what public roles they can perform, and so on).
- ❑ One of the most influential defenders of multiculturalism is Bhiku Parekh (1935-), who has tried to emphasise the advantages of embracing our cultural differences.



Bhiku Parekh (1935-)

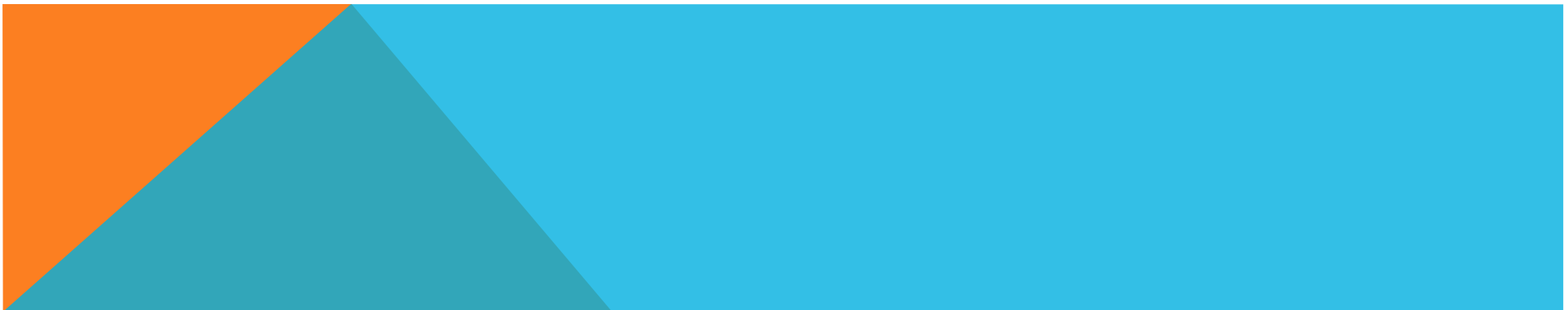


GLOBAL JUSTICE: NATIONALISM

- ❑ Do we have special political obligations to members of our state, as opposed to members of foreign states?
Defenders of *nationalism*, such as David Miller (b. 1946), think so.
- ❑ The idea is that such special political obligations can be underwritten by a common history, common political institutions, and so on.
- ❑ Note that nationalism in public discourse is often associated with racist views, but contemporary political theorists who endorse nationalism do not understand the view along ethnic lines.



David Miller (b. 1946)



GLOBAL JUSTICE: COSMOPOLITANISM

- ❑ In contrast, proponents of *cosmopolitanism* argue that we are in fact all “citizens of the world” (as the Stoic philosopher and dramatist Seneca put it), such that our political obligations to each other are determined by the fact that we are all people, as opposed to which particularly nationality we belong to.
- ❑ Notice that this debate between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is not a purely abstract contrast, as it has a practical bearing on, for example, what our political obligations are to alleviate poverty in far-off lands (as opposed to right on our doorstep).

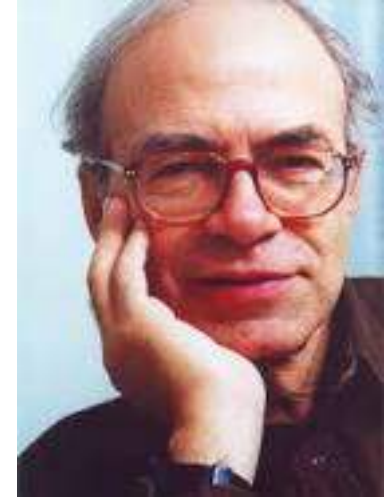


Seneca (4-65 AD)

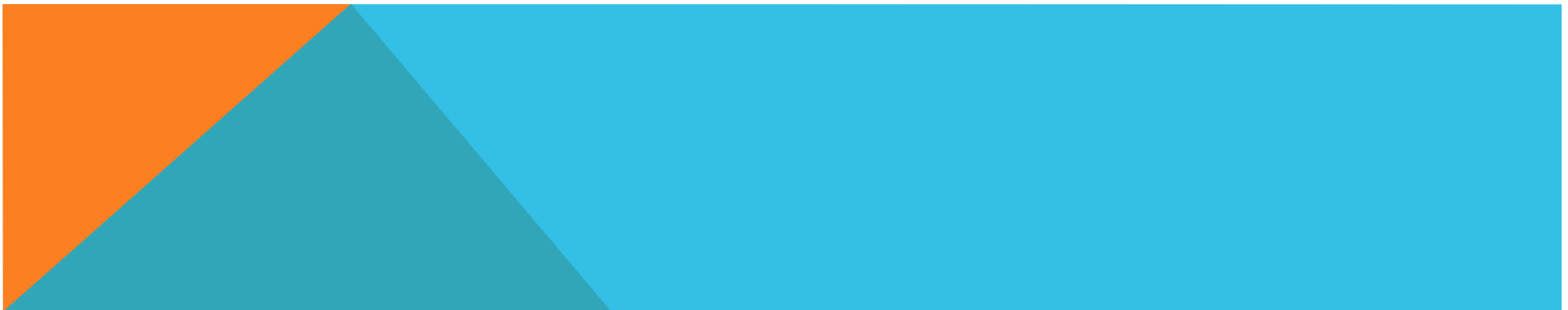


GLOBAL JUSTICE: COSMOPOLITANISM

- ❑ Peter Singer (b. 1946) offers a radical version of cosmopolitanism. Singer is a *utilitarian*, and hence believes that morally and politically we should seek to maximise everyone's happiness and minimise their suffering.
- ❑ Note that this is *everyone's* happiness and *everyone's* suffering. There is no mention of nationality here.
- ❑ Indeed, Singer argues that our moral obligations to help those less well off on the other side of the world are usually identical to the moral obligations we have to the less well off right in front of us.



Peter Singer (b. 1946)

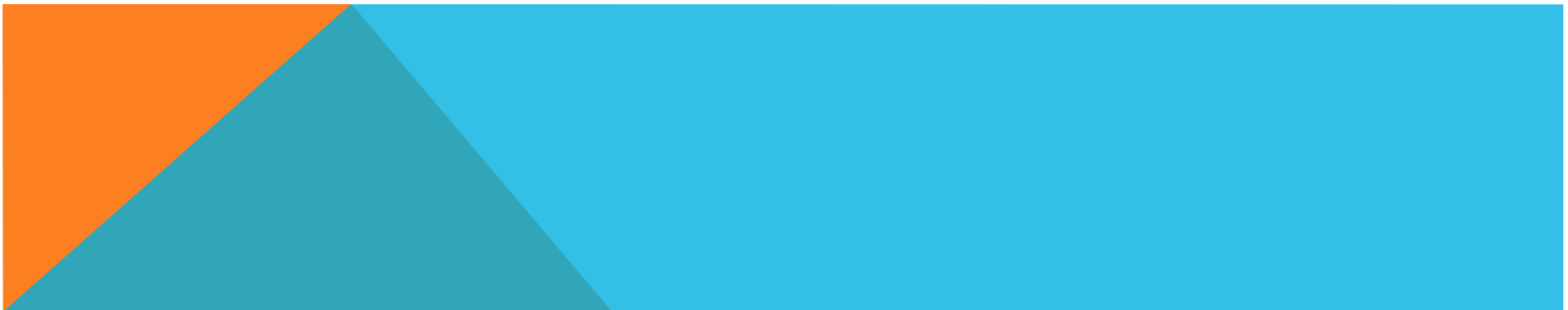


GLOBAL JUSTICE: COSMOPOLITANISM

- ❑ Thomas Pogge (b. 1953) goes even further than Singer. Singer isn't arguing that our duty to help others in far-flung countries is because we are in some way responsible for their circumstances. We should act because we can, as a charitable act. This is known as a *positive duty*.
- ❑ In contrast, Pogge thinks that those of us in wealthy western countries do bear some responsibility for this poverty, as we effectively consent to a global political settlement that generates such severe poverty.
- ❑ Since we are partly responsible for the harm in question, our moral duty to help is thus a *negative duty*.



Thomas Pogge (b. 1953)



GLOBAL JUSTICE: COSMOPOLITANISM

- ❑ A problem for both Pogge and Singer's view is that they both assume that charity and aid are part of the solution to the problem of global poverty, but this has been contested.
- ❑ Indeed, some have claimed that such charity and aid rather makes matters worse, by making groups of people reliant on external help rather than develop their own resilience, or by ensuring that the structural features that created the poverty in the first place remains in place (e.g., unfair trade deals, lack of democratic institutions, corruption etc).
- ❑ This last point is important since those who criticise the reliance on charity and aid in resolving world poverty do so because they think the real solution is through political means (e.g., fairer trade arrangements etc).

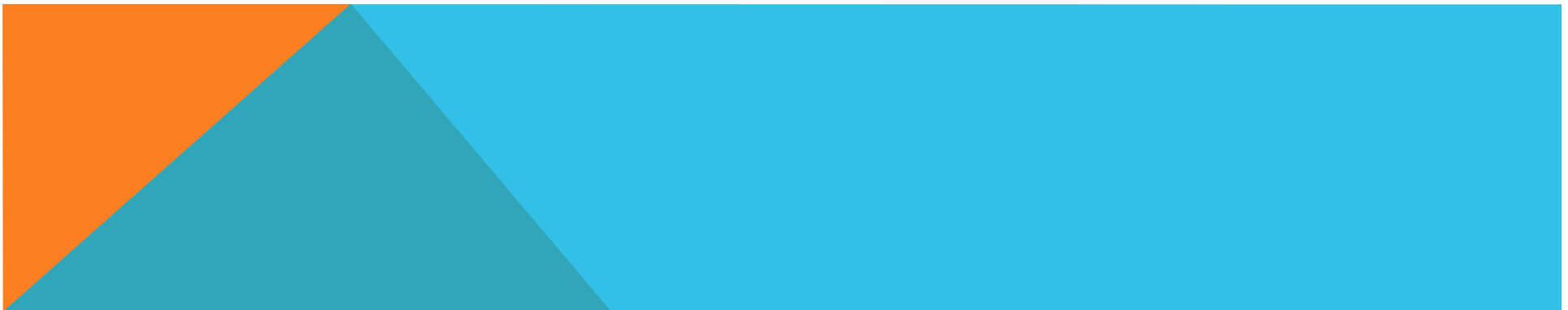


GLOBAL JUSTICE: COSMOPOLITANISM

- ❑ A problem that is specific for Pogge's view is that it is not clear that the negative duties in question could plausibly be directed at the general public.
- ❑ How can an ordinary member of the public be complicit in a system of global injustice, particularly since many are unaware of how (according to Pogge) political systems generate this injustice?
- ❑ If anyone, wouldn't it be the *politicians* who incur the negative duties?



Thomas Pogge (b. 1953)



CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL JUSTICE

- ❑ One key issue in discussions of global justice is *climate change*. This is because the effects of climate change have the potential to affect everyone. Moreover, the persons being affected may not be the persons who are doing the polluting, or who are gaining from the pollution being created.
- ❑ Normally we would expect the polluter to be subject to the social costs created by the pollution, with this enforced at a national level. But the issue becomes global once we have a kind of pollution which crosses national boundaries. How is such a control on pollution to then be enforced?



CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL JUSTICE

- ❑ Moreover, there is an issue of global fairness. The countries that benefit most from the industry that generate the pollution might also be best-placed to avoid the problematic consequences of this pollution, unlike less wealthy countries.
- ❑ Poor countries effectively face a 'double-whammy': not only do they suffer most from the pollution generated, but they also do not gain from the industry that caused the pollution.

