

Individual Morality & Social Justice

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to some of the main questions in moral and political philosophy. We will begin by thinking about what general principles should guide us in judgments of rightness and wrongness. Here we'll focus especially on utilitarianism, and various objections that have been raised against it, both at an individual and a social level. We then take a step back to address a more basic question, whether there are objective ethical facts in the first place. Is it all just a matter of individual preference or cultural background? Do objective ethical standards require the existence of a god? How do notions like right and wrong fit into a naturalistic picture of the world? We'll continue by investigating the concept of a person and of personal identity, and use that as a jumping off point for considering some especially hard questions about issues like abortion, eating animals, and climate change.

Instructor

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Requirements

- (i) Final Exam: 26%
- (ii) Two 3–4 page papers: 22% each
- (iii) Midterm Exam: 18%
- (iv) Participation, quizzes, review questions etc.: 12%

Tentative Schedule

Part I: Normative Ethics

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| 8.28 | What is philosophy? What is moral philosophy? | |
| 9.2 | Bentham's utilitarianism. Bentham, <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> , Ch. 1 - 4 | |
| 9.4 | Hedonism. Bentham, <i>The Rationale of Reward</i> (excerpt); Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> (excerpt) | |
| 9.9 | Consequentialism and demandingness. Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality'. | |
| 9.11 | Consequentialism and demandingness. Murphy, 'The Demands of Beneficence' | |
| 9.16 | Consequentialism and integrity. Williams, 'Consequentialism and Integrity' | |
| 9.18 | Consequentialism and integrity Railton, 'Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality' | |
| 9.23 | A classic problem: trolleys. Thompson, 'The Trolley Problem' | |
| 9.25 | Consequentialism, Aggregation, and Justice Bentham, <i>IPML</i> Ch. 13.; Smart, <i>An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics</i> (excerpt) | First paper due |

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| 9.30 | Distributive justice. Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (excerpt) |
| 10.2 | Distributive justice Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (excerpt). |
| 10.7 | Egalitarianism. Frankfurt, 'Equality as a Moral Ideal' |

Part II: Metaethics

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| 10.9 | Ethical objectivity and divine command. Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> ; Antony, 'Good Minus God' |
| 10.14 | Cultural relativism. Herskovits, 'Cultural Relativism and Cultural Values'; Williams, 'Interlude: Relativism' |
| 10.16 | Expressivism. Ayer, <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> Ch. 6 |
| 10.21 | Midterm Exam |
| 10.23 | Expressivism. The subjectivity of values. Mackie, <i>Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong</i> , Ch. 1; Hume, <i>Treatise</i> (excerpt) |
| 10.28 | The subjectivity of values. Mackie, <i>Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong</i> , Ch. 1 |

Part III: Applications

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| 10.30 | Personal identity and moral responsibility. Locke, 'Of Identity and Diversity' | |
| 11.4 | Personal identity: complications. Parfit, 'Personal Identity' (excerpt); McMahan <i>The Ethics of Killing</i> (excerpt); | |
| 11.6 | <i>Academic Holiday</i> | |
| 11.11 | Personal identity and the ethics of abortion. McMahan <i>The Ethics of Killing</i> (excerpt) | |
| 11.13 | The ethics of abortion. Thompson, 'A Defense of Abortion' | |
| 11.18 | The ethics of abortion. Marquis, 'Why Abortion is Immoral' | |
| 11.20 | Eating factory farmed meat. Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs, and People' | |
| 11.25 | Future persons. Parfit, 'The Non-Identity Problem' | Second paper due |
| 12.2 | Climate change. Broome, <i>Climate Matters</i> . | |
| 12.4 | Climate change. Broome, <i>Climate Matters</i> . | |
| 12.17 | Final Exam (8-11am) | |