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PHIL 422E.01: Contemporary Moral and Political Theory

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PHILOSOPHY 422

CONTEMPORARY MORAL AND POLITICAL THEORY

SPRING 2003

Administrative Information

Professor: Irene Appelbaum
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Class: M, W 3:10-4:30, LA 201
Office Hrs: T 1:30- 3:00 & by appt.

Course Description and Objectives

There are three central ways philosophers study ethics: as a project in meta-ethics, as general normative ethics, and as applied ethics. Meta-ethics is concerned primarily with the meaning, justification and status of ethical concepts and theories. General normative ethics develops theories that purport to be action guiding, that is, theories which make claims about what one ought to do or how one ought to live. Such theories are concerned with the fundamental principles of ethics and their relation to one another. Applied ethics deals with the application of these principles to concrete problems in real-life.

This course is a contemporary overview of major texts and issues in each of these projects. In the first part of the course, "Meta-Ethics" students are expected to achieve a clear understanding of attempts to grapple with the meaning of ethical concepts such as 'good' and 'right' and the implications for ethical theory; attempts to defend moral relativism, and of the debate between internalism and externalism about moral reasons. In the second part of the course, "General Normative Ethics" students will be expected to understand characteristic features and problems of the three major types of ethical theory -- consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics -- as presented by a major contemporary representative of each tradition. Finally, in the third part of the course, "Applied Ethics", students are expected to understand how the above general theories get applied to the particular issues of abortion, euthanasia, and hunger.

Requirements

Readings: Students are expected read each assignment *at least twice* before the class in which it is discussed, and at least once afterward.

Papers: Students are expected to write two 5-page papers and a final 10-page paper. Paper topics will be assigned for the 5-page papers. For the final paper, topics will be suggested, but with the instructor's approval, students may write on a topic of their own choosing. The final paper is due **Friday, May 9 by 4 pm.** Final papers should be turned in to the instructor's mailbox in LA 101. *Late papers will not be accepted.*

Grades will be calculated as follows: 5-Page Papers: 50% (25% each), Final Paper: 50%.

Texts

• Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition, 1971, 1999. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
• Williams, Bernard. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.
• All other readings will be on 2-Hour Reserve in the Philosophy Department Library in LA101.

Reading Assignments

Introduction

Mon	1/27	No reading

I. Meta-Ethics

Wed	1/29	Moore, from *Principia Ethica*
Mon	2/3	Stevenson, The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms
Wed	2/5	Mackie, from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*
Mon	2/10	Harman, Moral Relativism Defended
Wed	2/12	Nagel, from *The Possibility of Altruism*
Mon	**2/17**	**Presidents' Day – No class**
Wed	2/19	Williams, Internal and External Reasons

II. General Normative Ethics

Mon	2/24	Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Ch. I, sec. 1-4.
Wed	2/26	Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Ch. 2, sec. 11-14.
Mon	3/3	Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Ch. 2. sec 15-17
Wed	3/5	Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Ch. 3, sec. 23-26, 29
Mon	3/10	Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Ch. 7, sec, 60-65, 68
Wed	3/12	Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Ch. 9, sec. 86, 87.
Mon	3/17	Kagan, from *The Limits of Morality*
Wed	3/19	Kagan, from *The Limits of Morality*
Mon	**3/24**	**Spring Break - no class**
Wed	**3/26**	**Spring Break - no class**
Mon	3/31	Kagan, from *The Limits of Morality*
Wed	4/2	Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Ch. 1
Mon	4/7	Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Ch. 8
Wed	4/9	Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Ch. 9
Mon	4/14	Williams *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Ch. 10

III. Applied Ethics

Wed	4/16	Warren, On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion.
Mon	4/21	Marquis, An Argument that Abortion is Wrong.
Wed	4/23	Hursthouse, Virtue Theory and Abortion.
Mon	4/28	Rachels, Active and Passive Euthanasia.
Wed	4/30	Sullivan, The Immorality of Euthanasia.
Mon	5/5	Singer, Famine, Affluence, and Morality.
Wed	5/7	O'Neill, Kantianism and World Hunger.