

Topics in Moral Philosophy (PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS)

What Are Values?

Course Description

We shall discuss some fundamental questions about values. Some of these questions are: What kind of property is 'good'? How should we understand evaluative judgments? What is the role of evaluative judgments in motivation? Is the good relative (and what would that mean)? Is the good relational? Are goods ends? Is the good that which is desired? Is truth a kind of goodness? In which ways are the good and the true ends or aims (of action and of belief-formation)? What is the difference (if any) between the good and the valuable? What is it to value something? Can we formulate an account of values that takes care of the special case of the value of human beings? Is it misleading to study the notion 'good,' because in ordinary discourse we use thicker evaluative concepts (such as fun, cruel, kind, etc.)? How should we understand such thick concepts?

The class is loosely organized around the research topics of advanced Ph.D. students, but it is open to all graduate students who want to do advanced work in meta-ethics.

Requirements

Prerequisites: For all students who are not Philosophy graduate students: please email me before registering.

Presentation: One short (10 min.) presentation.

In-class participation: It is essential to do the readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. All students are expected to participate in in-class discussion. The class is designed as part of an advanced training, with a view to skills needed when you go on the job market, participate in workshops and conferences, and so on.

Writing: None if you are done with requirements or taking the class for R-credit or are done with course work. For students taking the class for E-credit, there are two options:

1. A term paper (15-20 pages). Please contact me about your topic no later than 3 weeks before the end of the semester. A draft must be submitted at the last class meeting. The paper is due a week after the last class meeting.
2. Three short papers (5-6 pages). Papers should either be response papers to individual readings, or engage with a question that is discussed in 2-3 readings. I'm happy to provide input on possible topics as we go along. Due date for the first paper: February 10th, on a reading/topic from weeks 1-3; due date for second paper: March 24th, on a reading/topic from weeks 4-8; due date for third paper: at the latest April 28th (last class), but preferably earlier, on a topic from weeks 9-14. (If you would like to write two papers on more closely related topics, please contact me for advice.) Students choosing this option might want to try to wrap up all paper writing by mid-April, so that they can turn to term papers for other classes afterwards.

Outline of Readings and Topics

1: Scanlon on reasons and values

Tim Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, Chapter 1 “Reasons.”

Tim Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, Chapter 2 “Values.”

2: Realism

Peter Railton, “Moral Realism,” *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163-207.

Peter Railton, “Red, Bitter, Good,” in *Fact, Values, and Norms* (2003), 131-147.

3: What is valuing?

Harry Frankfurt, “Taking ourselves seriously.”

Sam Scheffler, “Valuing.”

Joseph Raz, *Value, Respect, and Attachment* (161-164).

4: Pluralism and Partiality

Joseph Raz, *The Practice of Value* (selection).

Sam Scheffler, “Morality and Reasonable Partiality.”

5: Relativism

John MacFarlane, “Relativism and Disagreement,” *Philosophical Studies* 132 (2007): 17-31.

Bernard Williams, “The Truth in Relativism.”

6: Truth

Mark Richards, *When Truth Gives Out*, Chapter 1 “Epithets and Attitudes.”

Bernard Williams, “Consistency and Realism.”

7. Expressivism

Mark Richards, *When Truth Gives Out*, Chapter 5 “Matters of Taste.”

Alan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1990, Chapters 4 and 5.

8: Are value concepts thick concepts?

Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), 221-250.

Jonathan Dancy, “In Defense of Thick Concepts.” in eds. P. French, T. Uehling and. H. Wettstein, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XX: Moral Concepts* (1996).

Allan Gibbard and Simon Blackburn (1992), “Morality and Thick Concepts,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 66, 267-283+285-299.

9: The Guise of the Good: Aristotle versus Aquinas-Anscombe

Nicomachean Ethics I and III.

Selections from Anscombe, *Intention* (sections 40 and 41 (pages 76-79) on the good and sections 31-35 (pages 55-67) on the Aristotelian conception of practical reasoning).

10: Desire and the good

David Velleman, "The Guise of the Good"

Joseph Raz, "On the Guise of the Good."

11: Final value: Is it true that, for anything to have value, something (or some things) must have final value?

Mill, *Utilitarianism* Chapter IV (beginning).

Kant (selection from *Groundwork* I and II).

Joseph Raz, *Engaging Reason*, Chapter 12 "The Amoralist" and selection from *Value, Respect and Attachment*.

12. Intrinsic value: What is intrinsic value, and is there such a thing as intrinsic value?

Frankena, William K., 1973, *Ethics*, second edition, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, pp. 87-8 (and more).

Kagan, Shelly, 1998, "Rethinking Intrinsic Value," *Journal of Ethics*, 2: 277-97.

Christine Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions in Goodness."

Ben Bradley, 2006, "Two Concepts of Intrinsic Value," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 9: 111-30.

13: What is good for human beings?

Martha Nussbaum, "Women and Culture."

Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* (2006).

14: The pursuit of happiness

Kant, *Groundwork* II on prudential imperatives.

Korsgaard, C. 1997. "The normativity of instrumental reason." In Cullity, G. and Gaut, B. (eds.) *Ethics and Practical Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press. 215–54.

Railton, selection on the Paradox of Hedonism.