PHIL 537 Political Philosophy

Seminars: Mondays 2pm – 4:20pm
Room: MHP 102

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Overview

This seminar will focus on the morality of defensive harm and just war theory. Here are some of the questions we will consider:

• What, if anything, grounds the moral permission to impose serious defensive harm on others?
• Are there agent-relative prerogatives to impose harm in self-defense?
• What is the basis of moral liability to defensive harm?
• What grounds judgments regarding whether a given level of defensive force is proportionate?
• Do judgments regarding the permissibility of imposing defensive harm depend on the epistemic position of the agent imposing the harm?
• Are the moral principles that govern harming and killing in war essentially the same as the moral principles that apply to ordinary individual morality, or are there special sui generis principles governing war?
• Are combatants equally constrained and protected by the same principles of just conduct in war regardless of which side in the conflict they fight for?
• Is the traditional principle of distinction—one that sharply distinguishes between combatants and noncombatants—defensible?
• Is there a clear and useful distinction to be drawn between the deep morality of war as opposed to the rules of war?

No background in political philosophy is presupposed.
Expectations and Requirements

Each week there will be two or three papers that are listed as required reading. Everyone will be expected to have read this material prior to class, and be prepared to discuss this material.

Those taking the course for credit will be evaluated as follows:

Essay (5,000 words approx.) 70%
Seminar presentation (20 mins.) 20%
Seminar participation 10%

Essay and seminar presentation must be on different topics

Note: In addition to the topics and readings listed below, Gary Watson and I are hosting a one day workshop on self-defense on Friday April 17th. The invited outside participants include: Saba Bazargan, Helen Frowe, Jeff McMahan, Michael Otsuka, and Arthur Ripstein.

Provisional Topics and Readings

Part I The Morality of Defensive Harm

Week 1 Innocent Threats and Aggressors
• Jonathan Quong, 'Killing in Self-Defense,' Ethics (2009)

Week 2 No Class – University Holiday

Week 3 Liability
• Jeff McMahan, 'The Basis of Moral Liability to Defensive Killing,' Philosophical Issues (2005)
• Jonathan Quong, 'Liability to Defensive Harm,' Philosophy & Public Affairs (2012)
Week 4  Proportionality and Partial Excuses
- David Rodin, ‘Justifying Harm,’ Ethics (2011)
- Saba Bazargan, ‘Killing Minimally Responsible Threats,’ Ethics (2014)
- Jonathan Quong, ‘Proportionality in Defensive Harm’

Week 5  Necessity

Week 6  No Class – University Holiday

Week 7  Evidence, Uncertainty, and Insincerity

Week 8  The Means Principle
- Victor Tadros, The Ends of Harm (OUP), chapter 6

Part II  Just War

Week 9  Collectivist Accounts
- Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars (Basic Books), chapter 3

Week 10  The Revisionist Challenge
- Jeff McMahan, Killing in War (OUP), chapters 1 and 2
Week 11  Noncombatant Immunity and Liability
- Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War* (OUP), chapter 5
- Helen Frowe, *Defensive Killing* (OUP), chapter 6

Week 12  Vicarious and Complicitous Liability

Week 13  Proportionality and Just Cause
- F.M. Kamm, ‘Reasons for Starting War: Goals, Conditions, and Proportionality,’ in *Ethics for Enemies* (OUP)

Week 14  National Defense and Reductionism
- Cecile Fabre, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Wars of Self-Defense,’ in *The Morality of Defensive War* (OUP)

Week 15  Deep Morality vs. Laws
- Henry Shue, ‘Do We Need a Morality of War?’ in *Just and Unjust Warriors* (OUP, 2008)
- Michael Otsuka, ‘Licensed to Kill,’ *Analysis* (2011)