

PHIL 503: Introduction to Contemporary Philosophical Literature on Value

Fall 2023

Mondays 4:30–6:50pm

MHP 103

Instructor

Ralph Wedgwood (wedgwood@usc.edu)

Course Overview

This seminar is an intensive survey of some of the most influential contributions to ethics of the last 50 years. The issues raised in these texts lie at the heart of much of the work in current ethical theory – in both normative theory and metaethics – and many of these texts would be regarded as among those that everyone who researches or teaches in any branch of ethics needs to be familiar with. The goal of the seminar is to develop a thorough understanding of these central issues. The assigned readings will all be made available on the course Blackboard site.

Requirements

- Presentations: Each student should give two class presentations.
- Three short papers (approx. 2500 – 3000 words each): due September 29, November 3, and December 8.

The topics for the three paper assignments will be circulated 2–3 weeks before the assignment is due.

Each student's grade for the course will be based on the class presentations (25%) and the three papers (25% each).

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability should register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP), and provide us with a statement listing the requested accommodations. (DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number is (213) 740-0776.)

Schedule

1. August 21: Arguments for utilitarianism
 - Hare, "Ethical theory and utilitarianism"
 - Harsanyi, "Morality and the theory of rational behaviour"

2. August 28: Criticisms of utilitarianism
 - Williams, "A critique of utilitarianism", in Smart and Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*

3. September 4: Labor Day – No classes

4. September 11: Consequentialists on alienation
 - Jackson, "Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection"
 - Railton, "Consequentialism, Alienation, and the Demands of Morality"

5. September 18: Scanlon
 - Scanlon, "Preference and Urgency"
 - Scanlon, "Contractualism and Utilitarianism"

6. September 25: Trolleys
 - Thomson, "Turning the Trolley"
 - Hare, "Should We Wish Well to All?"

7. October 2: Ethics and personal identity
 - Parfit, "Personal Identity"
 - Johnston, "Human Concern without Superlative Selves"

8. October 9: Reasons and normativity
 - Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"
 - Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason"

9. October 16: Rationality of preferences

- Broome, “Can a Humean be moderate?”
- Broome, “Expected Utility and Rationality” (Weighing Goods, Chap. 5)

10. October 23: Expressivism

- Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*, Chapters 6 and 7

11. October 30: Some analyses of ‘good’

- Finlay, “A Good Word to Start With” (*Confusion of Tongues*, Chapter 2)
- Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, “The Strike of the Demon”

12. November 6: The significance of moral semantics

- Eklund, *Choosing Normative Concepts*, Chapters 1–3

13. November 13: Evolutionary debunking

- Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value”

14. November 20: Free will and responsibility

- Frankfurt, “Alternative possibilities and moral responsibility”
- Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”

15. November 27: Political liberalism and public reason

- Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited”