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: Instructor’s approval. 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. A term paper (15-20 pages) if you are taking the class for E-credit. Please contact me about your topic no later than 3 weeks before the end of the semester. An draft must be submitted at the last class meeting. The paper is due a week after the last class meeting.

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

3: What is valuing?
Harry Frankfurt, “Taking ourselves seriously.”
Sam Scheffler, “Valuing.”
Joseph Raz, *Value, Respect, and Attachment* (161-164).

4: Pluralism
Joseph Raz, *The Practice of Value*.

5: Relativism
Bernard Williams, “The Truth in Relativism.”

6: Truth
Bernard Williams, “Consistency and Realism.”

7: Expressivism

8: Are value concepts thick concepts?

9: The Guise of the Good: Aristotle versus Aquinas-Anscombe
*Nicomachean Ethics* I and III.

10: Desire and the good
David Velleman, “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).

12. **Intrinsic value: What is intrinsic value, and is there such a thing as intrinsic value?**
Christine Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness.”

13: **Making a list: What kind of things are good for human beings?**
Martha Nussbaum, “Women and Culture.”
* [add something]

14: **The pursuit of happiness**
Kant, *Groundwork* II on prudential imperatives.
Railton, selection on the Paradox of Hedonism.