PHI 525. The Project of Moral Theory

What questions must a moral theory settle to be a full moral theory? What are the possible forms that a moral theory can take? Is the project of moral theory misguided?

Meeting time: Wednesdays 1:30-4:20pm

Location: Wooten Hall 201

Professors: Elizabeth Harman eharman@princeton.edu

Gideon Rosen grosen@princeton.edu

Part I: The Subject Matter of Moral Theory

September 6

Evidence Relative vs Objective Oughts: Is moral obligation objective or subjective? If subjective, how subjective must it be?


- Michael Zimmerman, *Ignorance and Moral Obligation*, ch. 2

September 13

Actualist vs Possibilist Oughts: Do your obligations now depend how you *would* act later if you did something now, or how you *could* act later?


September 20

Rights and Wrongings: What are moral rights and directed duties, and what role do they play in moral theory?

- Gopal Sreenivasan, “Duties and their Direction”, *Ethics*, 2010
- Daniel Muñoz, “From Rights to Prerogatives,” *Phil. and Phen. Research*, 2020

September 27

Moral Status: Which things have moral status? What is moral status?


October 4

Must and Should: Is anything supererogatory, good to do but not morally required? Is anything suberogatory, bad to do but not morally wrong?

- Elizabeth Harman, “Morality Beyond Requirement,” Chapter One of *When To Be a Hero*, ms.

October 11 – Guest Professor: Richard Yetter Chappell, University of Miami

Doing without deontology: Does morality tell us what we must do and may do, or simply what is morally better to do?

- Richard Yetter Chappell, “Permissibility is Overrated,” ms.

*Dinner with Richard Yetter Chappell*
Fall break is October 16-20.

Part 2: Moral Theories

October 25

Two-stage theories: Is the true moral theory a two-stage theory, like Rule Consequentialism?

- Caleb Perl, “Solving the Ideal Worlds Problem”, \textit{Ethics}, 2021
- Gideon Rosen, “Might Kantian Contractualism be the Supreme Principle of Morality”, \textit{Ratio}, 2009 (optional)

November 1

Contractualism: Is it true? How could we assess it?


November 8

Universalizability and Kantianism: What are the prospects for Kantian moral theory?

- Derek Parfit, \textit{On What Matters} (selections on Kantian Contractualism), 2011

November 15

Normative Powers: What are normative powers (like the powers of promise and consent), and what role do they play in moral theory?

- Ruth Chang, “Do We Have Normative Powers”, \textit{Aristotelian Soc. Supp}, 2020

There are no classes on November 22, the day before Thanksgiving.
November 29

Particularist Skepticism about Moral Theory: Are any moral generalizations true? Is the project of moral theory misguided?

- Mark Lance and Margaret Little, “Particularism and Antitheory,” in The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory, 1979

December 6

Mini-Conference: Students present their work to the seminar for feedback and discussion.

Getting Credit for the Course:

If you are taking the course for credit (Princeton grad program “unit”; otherwise a grade), please do the following things:

- Write one 5-6 page paper, due in week six. (The short paper is optional for a unit, but required for a grade.)
- Present the argument of your seminar paper at the December 6 Mini-Conference.
- Write one 15-20 page seminar paper, due during reading period (the week after classes end).
  (The longer paper can be an expansion of the shorter paper.)

Philosophy graduate student oral units: ask us to schedule an exam in connection with your seminar paper.