

Philosophy 525.

How Demanding is Morality?

Wednesdays

1:00-3:50pm

Marx 201

In this course, we will take up some questions that fall within the question, “How demanding is morality?”

Are moral dilemmas possible? A moral dilemma is a case in which a person morally ought to A, morally ought to B, and is unable to both A and B. If moral dilemmas are possible, then morality is very demanding, in one sense.

Relatedly: which moral systems allow moral dilemmas? Which rule them out? Does accepting that “ought” implies “can” rule out moral dilemmas?

Is it true that “ought” implies “can”? If not, then morality is very demanding.

Are some actions supererogatory? If so, how can we understand this category of action? Supererogatory actions are morally good things to do; one is praiseworthy if one does them. But they are not morally required. If there are moral reasons in favor of these actions, and the actions are not impermissible, why are the actions not morally required? If some actions are supererogatory, then morality is not as demanding as it might otherwise be.

Can morality require me to sacrifice my own life? If the only way to save my own life is to kill someone, is this morally wrong? If the only way to save my own life is to kill someone, am I blameworthy for doing so?

1. Are there genuine moral dilemmas? Does ‘ought’ imply ‘can’?

Wednesday, September 21:

- “Ethical Consistency” by Bernard Williams (1965)
- “What Moral Dilemmas Are” by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Chapter 1 of *Moral Dilemmas*) (1988)

Wednesday, September 28:

- “Arguments for Moral Dilemmas” by Sinnott-Armstrong (Chapter 2)
- “Moral Dilemmas and Consistency in Ethics” by Terrance McConnell (1978)
- “Against Moral Dilemmas” by Earl Connee (1982)
- “Some Opponents” by Sinnott-Armstrong (Chapter 3)

Wednesday, October 5:

- “Moral Dilemmas and Consistency” by Ruth Barcan Marcus (1980)
- “The Argument from ‘Ought’ Implies ‘Can’ “ by Sinnott-Armstrong (Chapter 4)

- “The Argument from ‘Ought and Ought Not’ “ by Sinnott-Armstrong (Chapter 5)
- “The Diversity of Moral Dilemma” by Peter Railton (1996)
- “Moral Dilemmas, Gaps, and Residues: A Kantian Perspective” by Thomas Hill (1996)

The seminar will not meet on Wednesday, October 12, but will instead meet:

**** Friday, October 14, 1:15-3:45pm ****

Geoff Sayre-McCord (UNC) will be a guest professor for this session.

- “A Moral Argument Against Moral Dilemmas” by Geoff Sayre-McCord (manuscript)
- “The Fragmentation of Value” by Thomas Nagel (1979)

Wednesday, October 19: Does “Ought” Imply “Can”?

Peter Graham (UMass) will be a guest professor for this session.

- “‘Ought’ and Ability” by Peter Graham (2011)
- “Consistency” by Sinnott-Armstrong (Chapter 6)

2. Are some actions supererogatory? If so, what is the nature of supererogatory action?

Wednesday, October 26:

- “Saints and Heroes” by J. Urmson (1958)
- “Supererogation and Offence: A Conceptual Scheme for Ethics” by R. Chisholm (1963)

Wednesday, November 9:

- “The Supererogatory” by Julia Driver (1992)
- “Promising and Supererogation” by Jason Kawall (2005)
- “Self-regarding Supererogatory Actions” by Jason Kawall (2003)

Wednesday, November 16:

Ruth Chang (Rutgers) will be a guest professor for this session.

- manuscript on voluntarist reasons by Ruth Chang

Wednesday, November 23:

- “Kantian Ethics and Supererogation” by M. Baron (1987)
- “Kant on Imperfect Duty and Supererogation” by T. Hill (1971)
- “Virtue Theory, Ideal Observers, and the Supererogatory” by Jason Kawall (2009)

Wednesday, November 30:

Ben Bradley (Syracuse) will be a guest professor for this session.

- “Against Satisficing Consequentialism” by Ben Bradley (2006)

3. When an agent's life is threatened, what does morality require? How blameworthy can one be if one acts to save one's own life?

Wednesday, December 7:

Gideon Rosen (Princeton) will be a guest professor for this session.

- "Evil and Ordinary Decency" by Gideon Rosen (manuscript)
- "Self-defense and the Problem of the Innocent Attacker" by Jeff McMahan (1994)
- "Self-defense" by Judith Jarvis Thomson (1991)

Wednesday, December 14:

- "Understanding Some Cases of Altruism as Permissible Mistakes" by Elizabeth Harman (manuscript)

Getting Credit for the Course:

Graduate students in the philosophy department can take the course for credit to earn a unit in either of the following ways:

1. Do one class presentation, write one 5-6 page paper due in week six, and write one 15-20 page paper due during reading period (the week after classes end).
2. Do one class presentation and take a written exam on the course material during reading period.

Graduate students in the politics department can take the course for credit and get a grade by taking option 1 above.

Any student auditing the course can give a class presentation.

Any students other than Princeton philosophy or political theory PhD students need the permission of the instructor to attend the course.