

PHI 380

Explaining Values

Syllabus

Fall Term 2003-04

Instructors

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Description and Objectives

Why do many people even today condemn promiscuity in women more than similar promiscuity in men? What explains seemingly altruistic motivation? Where do moral rules come from and why are they followed? What accounts for how people think about abortion? Do people act morally as a result of moral reasoning, or is moral reasoning simply a rationalization of emotions? Do people suppose that a person's moral worth can be a matter of "moral luck"? How does a child develop a conscience? Do some people have better characters than others? How do the moralities of different cultures vary? Are there moral universals?

Various explanations might be offered of ordinary moral values: that they are based in reason, that they are based in emotion, that they are the result of social pressures, that they are the result of biological evolution, that they are the result of more or less arbitrary historical facts. In this course we consider a variety of things about morality that might be explained and a variety of explanations of them. Our goal is to try to assess these explanations, to decide how plausible they are, when they compete and when they are complementary, what evidence is relevant to them, and what normative implications they would have if true.

Course Requirements

Lectures are Monday and Wednesday at 1:30-2:20 p.m. in Jones 113, plus one precept to be assigned.

There will be about fifty pages of reading per week, a short one-page written assignment each week, a 12 page term paper, a midterm in class on Wednesday, October 22, and a one hour final exam.

The final course grade will be based on the following components: Midterm Exam: 20%; Final Exam: 25%; Term Paper: 30%; Class Participation: 5%; Written Assignments: 20%.

Schedule and Reading Assignments

All reading is on electronic reserve through Firestone Library web site. To access this material, use the login name *phi380* and the password *explain*

Monday, September 15. Introduction

Wednesday, September 17. Sociopsychological account

- David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part II, Section XII, "Of Chastity and Modesty."
- David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning The Principles of Morals*, Section IV, "Of Political Society." [In the electronic reserves this is combined with the following section, "Why Utility Pleases," which we read later.]

Monday, September 22. Sociobiology

- Robert Wright, Male and female. *The Moral Animal*, pages 35-89.

Wednesday, September 24. More sociobiology

- Robert Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism"
- Robert Axelrod, "Tit for Tat"

Monday, September 29. Hume on sympathy

- David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part I, Section XI, "Of the Law of Fame," and Part II, Section VII, "Of Compassion."
- David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section V, "Why Utility Pleases."

Wednesday, October 1. Adam Smith on sympathy

- Adam Smith, *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, Part I, Section I, “Of the Sense of Propriety.”

Monday, October 6. Blair on sympathy

- R. Blair, “A Cognitive Development Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath.” *Cognition*, 57, 1-29.

Wednesday, October 8. Hume on rules

- David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part II, Section II, “Of the origin of justice and property.”

Monday, October 13. Rawls on Rules

- John Rawls, “Justice as fairness,” *Philosophical Review* **67** (1958), pp. 164-194.

Wednesday, October 15. Abortion Issues

- Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Abortion,” *Boston Review*, Summer 1995, pp. 11-15.

Monday, October 20. Explaining Abortion Issues

- Ronald Dworkin, “What is sacred,” *Life’s Dominion*, chapter 3.

Wednesday, October 22. MIDTERM EXAM

During regular class meeting.

MIDTERM BREAK: October 25-November 2

Enjoy!

Monday, November 3. Kant

Reason as the Source of Morality.

- Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated, with an introduction by Lewis White Beck. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, c1990. From the second section, pp. 39-49.

Wednesday, November 5. Sartre and Hare

Individual Decision as the Source of Morality.

- Jean Paul Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism,” as reprinted in Walter Kaufmann, editor, *Existentialism from Doestoevsky to Sartre*, Meridian, NY, 1956, pp. 287-311.
- R. M. Hare, “Decisions of Principle,” chapter 4 of *The Language of Morals*, Oxford U. P. 1952, pp. 56-78.

Monday, November 10. Smith on Moral Luck

- Adam Smith, *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, Part II, Section III, “Of the Influence of Fortune upon the Sentiments of Mankind, with regard to the Merit or Demerit of Actions.”

Wednesday, November 12. Psychology of rule systems.

- Stephen Stich, “Moral Philosophy and Mental Representation,” in Hechter, Nadel, and Michod, *The Origin of Values*, chapter 10, pp. 215-228.

Monday, November 17. Reason versus Emotion

- Jonathan Haidt, “The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment.” *Psychological Review* (2001) 108, 814-834.

Wednesday, November 19. Morality and Superego

- A. Smith, Self-approbation, *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, Part III, Chapter I.

Monday, November 24. Character.

- Martha Nussbaum, “Character,” in Becker, C. B., and Becker, C. B., *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2nd edition, volume I, pp. 200-203.
- Alasdair MacIntyre, “Virtue Ethics,” in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2nd edition, volume III, pp. 1757-1763.
- Edmund L. Pincoffs, “Virtues,” in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2nd edition, volume III, pp. 1763-1768.

Wednesday, November 26. Fundamental Attribution Error

- Ross and Nisbett, Attribution, *The Person and the Situation*, chapter 5.

Monday, December 1. History

- Hume, “Government and Allegiance,” *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part II, Sections 7-10.
- Rawls, John, Liberty and Toleration, *Theory of Justice* sections 33-35, pp. 205-234.

Wednesday, December 3. Anthropology

- R. Shweder, N. Much, and L. Park, “The ‘Big Three’ of Morality (Autonomy, Community, and Divinity) and the ‘Big Three’ Explanations of Suffering,” in A. Brandt and P. Rozin, eds.), *Morality and Health*, pp. 119-169.

Monday, December 8. Ethics and Language

- Susan Dwyer, “Moral Competence,” in Kumiko Murasugi and Robert Stainton, eds., *Philosophy and Linguistics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 169-90.

Wednesday, December 10. Final thoughts.