

ISSU9MP- Issues in Moral Philosophy

Module Description

Many of our moral beliefs are acquired and held quite unthinkingly; they are products of our upbringing and socialization, rather than of our own reflection on the right and the good. But sometimes we are forced, by the circumstances or problems that we face, to think critically about our moral beliefs, and to reflect on what we ought to believe: we might have to ask, for instance, whether it is really right to use animals for food; or what kind of care we ought to take of the natural environment.

Even if such questions are not forced upon us by circumstances, we should anyway engage in some kind of critical reflection on our moral beliefs: if we are to be responsible and rational beings, we must think for ourselves about moral matters (as about other matters), rather than simply being led by conventional opinions or ruling orthodoxies. In this module we will engage in critical, philosophical reflection on morality by examining a number of difficult moral issues, including questions about our treatment of animals, environmental values, punishment, and world hunger.

Learning Outcomes

The module will introduce students to some of the central issues in moral philosophy—both normative issues about how we should live, and more theoretical issues about right and wrong, and about the nature of moral thought and argument.

Module Structure and Assessment

There will be two hours of classes each week, which will take the form of a mixture of lectures and class discussion. Videos appropriate to the subject matter may also be shown. Student attendance and participation at these classes is expected.

Your grade for the module will be based on the following:

- (I) A short (1,000 - 1,500 words) critical report on one of the core readings.
- (II) A longer (2,000 words) essay.

Reading

Hugh LaFollette (ed.), *Ethics in Practice* (4th edition; Blackwell)

Topics

Week 1: Environment

Core reading

E. Hill, 'Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments'

Sandler, 'The Value of Nature'

Gardiner, 'A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics, and the Problem of Moral Corruption'

Schmidtz, 'A Place for Cost-Benefit Analysis'

Supplementary reading

Attfield *Environmental ethics: an overview for the twenty-first century*

R. DesJardins *Environmental ethics: an introduction to environmental philosophy*

Devall and G. Sessions *Deep Ecology*

Dryzek *The Politics of the Earth*

Eckersley *Environmentalism and Political Theory: towards an ecocentric approach*

Rolston *Environmental ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*

B. Caldicott *In Defence of the Land Ethic*

Useful websites

Bjorn Lomborg (climate change sceptic) <http://www.lomborg.com/>

Earth First! (UK) <http://earthfirst.org.uk/actionreports/whatisef> (Links to an external site.)

Greenpeace <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/> (Links to an external site.)

Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (UK) <http://www.seashepherd.org/uk/uk.html> (Links to an external site.)

Week 2: Punishment

Core reading

Pojman, 'In Defense of the Death Penalty'

Reiman, 'Against the Death Penalty'

Rachels, 'Punishment and Desert'

P. Wright et al., 'Does Punishment Work?'

Supplementary reading

A. Bedau 'Capital Punishment' in T. Regan (ed.) *Matters of Life and Death*

A. Duff and D. Garland (eds.) *A Reader on Punishment*

Erzorsky (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives on Punishment*

L. A. Hart *Punishment and Responsibility*

Online sources

Reprive <http://www.reprive.org.uk/> (Links to an external site.)

Week 3: Famine and world hunger

Core reading

Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality'

Arthur, 'Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code'

Pogge, 'Eradicating Systemic Poverty: Brief for a Global Resources Dividend'

Rolston III, 'Feeding People versus Saving Nature'

Supplementary reading

The rest of the 'World Hunger' section in LaFollette

LaFollette and Aiken (eds.) *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*

O'Neill *Faces of Hunger*

Singer *The Life You Can Save*

Useful websites

Giving What We Can: <http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/> (Links to an external site.)

Week 4: Animals

Core reading

Singer, 'All Animals are Equal'

Frey, 'Moral Standing, the Value of Lives, and Speciesism'

Regan, 'The Case for Animal Rights'

Supplementary reading

Machan 'Why "Animal Rights" Don't Exist' at <http://www.strike-the-root.com/4/machan/machan43.html> ([Links to an external site.](#))

([Links to an external site.](#)) Scruton *Animal Rights and Wrongs*

Singer *Animal Liberation*

Singer *In Defence of Animals*

Singer and T. Regan (eds.) *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*

Sunstein and M. Nussbaum (eds.) *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*

Useful websites

Animal Rights: The Abolitionist Approach <http://www.abolitionistapproach.com/> ([Links to an external site.](#))

Pro-Test <http://www.pro-test.org.uk/>