

Ethics And . . .

Spring 2011

Wednesdays, 1:30-4:20pm
(except one Thursday meeting)
Marx 201

Professors: Elizabeth Harman
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Marx 207
office hours: Thur. 10:30-11:30am

Sarah McGrath
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Marx 209
office hours: Wed. 9-10am

Course Description:

We pretend that philosophical problems divide into the various subfields of philosophy, but to take this pretense too seriously is a mistake. Philosophical problems often raise issues within more than one subfield, and require knowledge of and insights from several subfields. To pretend that ethical questions can be pursued in isolation from the rest of philosophy would be to miss out on a great deal. This course will highlight some recent, cutting-edge work on problems at the overlap of ethics and three other subfields of philosophy. The course has three sections: Ethics and Metaphysics, Ethics and Language, and Ethics and Epistemology. We will examine questions such as the following:

- Is there moral luck? Is there a morally significant making/allowing distinction? Can work in the metaphysics of causation help us to answer these two questions?
- Does a careful reflection on modality, and the recognition that each of us could have lived different lives, ultimately show that consequentialism is true?
- Can recent work in the philosophy of language on generics help us to understand moral generalizations better?
- Can it help us to settle whether particularism is true?
- Can recent work on semantic relativism solve problems for Expressivism?
- What can advances in the study of vagueness tell us about slippery-slope arguments and other Sorites-like arguments in ethics?
- Should we expect reasonable, fully-informed people to converge on the same moral beliefs over time? What is the epistemic significance of our predictions regarding convergence?
- What is the epistemic significance of widespread moral disagreement?
- Is it reasonable to rely on first-order moral beliefs in answering such meta-ethical questions as *do we have moral knowledge?* and *is moral realism true?*
- Are there moral experts?

Throughout the course, we will discuss these questions:

- Can particular insights and advances in other subfields help us to make progress in ethics?
- Do the answers to ethical questions hang on the answers to non-ethics questions?
- Can insights and advances in ethics help us to make progress in other subfields?

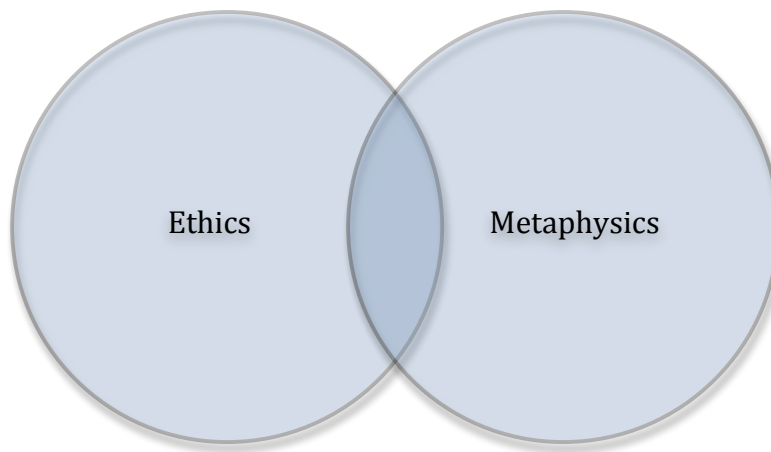
We will have at least five guest professors: Carolina Sartorio (Arizona), Caspar Hare (MIT), Jamie Dreier (Brown), Sarah-Jane Leslie, and Adam Elga.

The course syllabus will be posted on Blackboard. Check there for revisions.

Course Schedule:

This schedule is tentative. Readings may be removed, and readings may be added. All readings will be posted on Blackboard, or linked from Blackboard.

Part One:



February 2 – Making and Allowing

- Shelly Kagan, “Doing Harm” in his The Limits of Morality
- Carolina Sartorio, “Moral Inertia”

February 9 – **Guest Professor: Carolina Sartorio (Arizona)**

- Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck” in his Mortal Questions
- Carolina Sartorio, “Resultant Moral Luck”

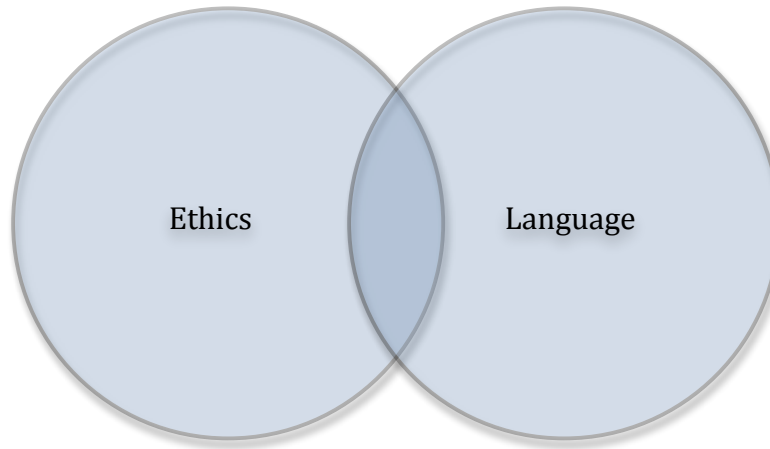
February 16 – Modality and Identity

- selections from Caspar Hare, The Limits of Kindness, book manuscript
- possibly further background reading

February 23 – **Guest Professor: Caspar Hare (MIT)**

- selections from Caspar Hare, The Limits of Kindness, book manuscript

Part Two:



March 2 – Semantic Relativism and Expressivism

- Mark Schroeder, “How Expressivists Can and Should Solve Their Problem with Negation,” *Nous* 2008
- John MacFarlane, “Relativism and Disagreement,” *Philosophical Studies* 2007
- pp. 79-90 of Jamie Dreier, “Relativism (and Expressivism) and the Problem of Disagreement,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 2009

This meeting is on a THURSDAY:

Thursday, March 10, 3:30-6:20pm – Guest Professor: Jamie Dreier (Brown)

- Jamie Dreier, “Relativism (and Expressivism) and the Problem of Disagreement,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 2009

Spring Break is March 12-20

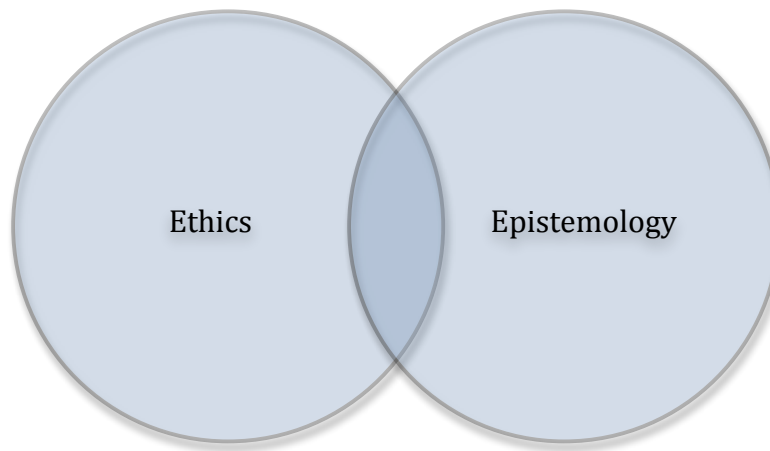
March 23 – Generics and Moral Particularism – **Guest Professor: Sarah-Jane Leslie**

- Sarah-Jane Leslie, “Generics: Cognition and Acquisition,” *Philosophical Review* 2008
- Jonathan Dancy, “Moral Particularism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- Elizabeth Harman, “Does the study of generics undermine moral particularism?” manuscript

March 30 – Vagueness

- Roy Sorenson, “Vagueness,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- Ted Sider, “Hell and Vagueness,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2002
- Warren Quinn, “The Puzzle of the Self-Torturer,” *Philosophical Studies* 1990
- Elizabeth Harman, “Vagueness and Moral Status,” manuscript

Part Three:



April 6 – Convergence

- Bernard Williams, “Knowledge, Science, Convergence” in his Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy
- Sarah McGrath, “Realism Without Convergence” manuscript

No class meeting on April 13.

April 20 – Disagreement – **Guest Professor: Adam Elga**

- Adam Elga, “Reflection and Disagreement” *Nous* 2007
- Sarah McGrath, “Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise” Oxford Studies in Metaethics Volume 3, 2008

April 27 – Using Ethical Claims to Undermine Moral Skepticism

- Ronald Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Believe It” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1996
- Sharon Street, “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Rethink It” manuscript

Moral Expertise Conference: April 29-30

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.

All undergraduates, and graduate students in departments other than philosophy and politics, need the permission of the instructors to audit the class or to take the class for credit.