PHIL / POL S / VALUES 207
Issues of Global Justice

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(WITH THANKS TO MICHAEL BLAKE FOR SHARING HIS POWERPOINT SLIDES)
Topics

1. Course mechanics
2. Moral and Political philosophy
3. Global justice
A few facts

- Roughly one third of all human deaths, some 18 million annually, are due to poverty-related causes, easily preventable through better nutrition, safe drinking water, mosquito nets, re-hydration packs, vaccines and other medicines.

- In a 2005 report, UNICEF reported that the total was over 300 million deaths in just the 15 years since the end of the Cold War — many more than were caused by all the wars, civil wars, and government repression of the entire 20th century. Children under five account for nearly 60% or 10.6 million of the annual death toll from poverty-related causes (UNICEF 2005).
What is moral and political philosophy?

- Moral and political philosophy address normative questions: How *ought* we to treat other people? What does justice *require*?
- Normative questions cannot be settled by purely descriptive facts. Such facts are relevant, but they are not decisive.
Normative Judgment

To take this course, you must be able to make normative judgments about how we ought to treat others and about what is required by justice and support them with reasons, not with appeals to authority. In this course, there are no normative authorities (including me). Also, there are no proofs. There will be good reasons for more than one position. Each of us must make a good faith effort to address the various reasons and figure out what it makes the most sense to believe.
The history of political philosophy

• Throughout most of history, political philosophy has worried about the state and the citizens.

• The task of political philosophy was to justify state authority and power to the citizens who face it – by specifying what just political institutions ought to look like.
From Domestic to Global Justice

- Globalization has made encounters across countries more frequent and more important
- Media and travel have made it possible for us to see the poverty of those who are not part of our community
- The result: we ask questions about justice that are not questions about one country and its citizens
Topics: Global Poverty

- Wealth and poverty across nations.
- If global inequality is wrong, why is it wrong? Can we use the tools we have developed in domestic political philosophy to analyze global poverty?
Wealth and poverty across nations.
Is global poverty wrong because poverty is a bad thing, and we should avoid bad things?
Is global poverty wrong because inequality is a bad thing, both at home and abroad?
Is global poverty wrong because the global rich are responsible for creating global poverty?
Topics: Global Poverty

- **Global poverty: what is to be done?**
- If global poverty is something we ought to eliminate – what, exactly, should we do?
- Is it enough to move money, or is something more radical required?
- What is likely to actually work?
Topics: Immigration

- What would a just system of immigration look like?
- Would people have a right to move anywhere they want?
- What does justice mean for those who live in a place without the legal right to be there?
What sorts of ethical challenges does climate change represent?
Do we have an obligation to future generations to ensure their standard of living?
Do developing countries have the right to burn coal and other sources of CO$_2$ to continue development?
Topic: Global governance

- Should we develop new forms of political institution?
- Is international criminal adjudication a good idea?
- Should we be working toward a single world government?
Topic: human rights

- Are there some things that are unjust no matter where they happen?
- Do human rights exist – or are they simply things that Western countries are imposing on the rest?
The tools

- **Readings.** Expect to read these things a few times.
- **Sections.** Exploration of the arguments.
- **Assignments.** Papers in which you EXPLAIN an issue and the various positions on and TAKE A POSITION and ARGUE for it in a way that takes seriously and treats fairly opposing views.
- **Participation.** Please, please participate in the conversation, in lecture and in section.
• Please set your Turning Technology Clicker to channel 41

—Press “Ch”, then “41”, then “Ch”
Have You Used Clickers Before?

A. Yes
B. No
Norms for This Class

- **Mutual respect.** Treat opposing positions fairly. Make the strongest case that you can for them.
- **Academic integrity.** Avoid plagiarism and cheating.
- **Participate.** Ask questions, consider reasons on both sides . . . participate!
Three Kinds of Moral Judgment

- Moral Principles (e.g., Golden Rule = Do unto others as you would have them do unto you)
- Moral Norms (e.g., Lying is wrong)
- Particular Moral Judgments (e.g., Hitler’s attempt to exterminate the Jews was wrong)

Principles and norms are generalizations that apply to many potential acts. Particular moral judgments are singular judgments about a particular case.
Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning

- **Top-Down**: Begin from principles or norms, end with a particular moral judgment.

- **Bottom-Up**: Rely on particular moral judgments either to: (a) *undermine* a norm or principle that they conflict with; or (b) to *support* a norm or principle that they fit with or are compatible with.
Peter Singer’s Use of Bottom-Up Reasoning

Peter Singer is Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, and a Laureate Professor at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne.
An Example of Top-Down Moral Reasoning

PREMISES: (1) My moral obligations of assistance are obligations that I have to family and friends, not to strangers.

(2) People starving in distant lands are strangers, not family and friends.

CONCLUSION: (3) I have no moral obligation of assistance to people starving in distant lands.
An Example of Bottom-Up Moral Reasoning

PREMISES: (1) I have moral obligations of assistance to family and friends, not to strangers.

(2) In this case, there is a child who is a stranger to me drowning in a pool.

(3) In this case, I could save the child’s life at the cost of getting some of my clothes wet and muddy.

(4) In this case, if I don’t save the child, she will drown.

CONCLUSION: (5) In this case, I have no obligation to save the drowning child.
Singer expects me to reject the conclusion that I have no obligation to save the drowning child.

This *undermines* the premise that I have moral obligations of assistance to family and friends, not to strangers.
Am I morally obligated to save the drowning child?

A. Yes.
B. No.

97% Yes.
3% No.
Singer expects that when I reject the conclusion that I have no obligation to save the drowning child, I will need to find another principle or norm that fits with the particular moral judgment that I do have an obligation to save the drowning child.

Any suggestions?
Singer’s Proposals

(1A) If it is in my power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of moral significance, I have a moral obligation to do it.

Singer’s favored alternative:

(1B) If it is in my power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, I have a moral obligation to do it.
The Results of Two Steps of Bottom-Up Reasoning

PREMISES: (1A) If it is in my power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of moral significance, I have a moral obligation to do it.

(2) In this case, there is a child who is a stranger to me drowning in a pool.

(3) In this case, I could save the child’s life at the cost of getting some of my clothes wet and muddy.

(4) In this case, if I don’t save the child, she will drown, which would be very bad.

(5) In this case, getting some of my clothes wet and muddy is not a morally significant sacrifice by me.

CONCLUSION: (5) In this case, I have an obligation to save the drowning child.
Singer’s Less Demanding Principle

(1A) If it is in my power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of moral significance, I have a moral obligation to do it.

How demanding is this principle?
(1B) If it is in my power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, I have a moral obligation to do it.

How demanding is this principle?
Which View Is Closest to Your Own?

A. No moral obligations to people outside our borders.

B. Singer’s Weak Principle

C. Singer’s Strong Principle

D. Other

- No moral obligations to: 50%
- Singer’s Weak Principle: 30%
- Singer’s Strong Principle: 15%
- Other: 5%
How Much Should Fred Send?

A. Nothing
B. $100 or less
C. $101 - $1,000
D. $1,001 - $10,000
E. Over $10,000
Is There a General Duty to Prevent Bad Things from Happening?

Singer thinks that there is no difference between our duty to the drowning child and our duty to those who are starving in distant lands, because they are equally bad.

The idea that we should minimize the number and severity of bad things that happen is the fundamental idea of negative utilitarianism. Singer thinks that negative utilitarianism captures only half of the requirements of morality.
Utilitarianism is a moral theory with one fundamental principle: That we should maximize overall happiness (utility).

This is not the hedonistic principle that each of us should maximize our own happiness. Utilitarianism requires us to maximize overall (total or average) happiness.

Peter Singer is a utilitarian.

What is the difference between a utilitarian (unqualified) and a negative utilitarian?
Are You Some Kind of Utilitarian?

In section tomorrow, come prepared to consider reasons for and against utilitarianism and negative utilitarianism.
John Rawls (1921-2002)
Author of *Theory of Justice*, *Political Liberalism*, *The Law of Peoples*, and *Justice as Fairness* (with Erin Kelly)
Reflective Equilibrium

Singer’s example of the drowning child illustrates bottom-up moral reasoning. Moral reasoning can also be top-down. Ultimately, in any case in which a moral norm or principle conflicts with a particular moral judgment, we must decide what it makes the most sense to believe. All moral beliefs are subject to revision. This balancing of norms and principles against particular moral judgments is equilibrium reasoning.
Full Reflective Equilibrium

- **Wide reflective equilibrium** is intra-subjective, based on considering the variety of moral views in society.

- **General reflective equilibrium** is inter-subjective, when a society as a whole reaches a moral consensus.

- Full reflective equilibrium is general and wide.
In this course, the authors will present you with examples intended to challenge some of your moral beliefs. Pay attention to the examples they use. Whenever an author presents an example, ask yourself what the author intends the example to do: Is it intended to undermine a widely shared belief? [If so, what is the proposition that it is intended to undermine?] Is it intended to support a proposition that the author is arguing for? [If so, what is the proposition that it is intended to support?] [Note that it may play both roles, as Singer’s example of the drowning child illustrates.]
Whenever an author proposes a moral principle or norm, you should ask yourself: Are there other examples that the author has overlooked that undermine the author’s proposal?

In this course, you will have to be able to reason both top-down and bottom-up. Ultimately, you will have to exercise your moral judgment to decide what it makes the most sense to believe.

Thomas Nagel
University Professor of Philosophy and Law at NYU
Nagel is interested in moral reasons and why they seem to apply to everyone, even those who don’t care about other people and don’t care about morality.

“How would you like it if someone did that to you?” According to Nagel, this is not a question aimed at making you care about others. It is a question aimed at making your realize that you think others should recognize that you have a moral claim on them.

But moral reasons are general: If you have a moral claim on them, they have one on you.
Moral Reasons and Impartiality

- Morality seems to require some kind of impartiality, a recognition that other people matter morally.
- One way of stating this idea: Other people’s good is morally significant.
- If impartiality is understood in this way, how much impartiality is required? Should we regard the good of others as equal in importance to our own good? (This is what utilitarianism requires.) John Rawls gave a different way of understanding moral impartiality that we will consider next week.
“The deeper kind of relativity, which some people believe in, would mean that the most basic standards of right and wrong—like when it is and is not all right to kill, or what sacrifices you're required to make for others—depend entirely on what standards are generally accepted in the society in which you live. This I find very hard to believe, mainly because it always seems possible to criticize the accepted standards of your own society and say that they are morally mistaken”(Nagel, 72-73).
Conclusion

All of these questions, and many more that we will take up in this course, require you to think about what it makes the most sense to believe.