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Courses Taught at the University of Konstanz

Sommersemester 2022

1. Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (Hauptseminar)
2. Hat unser Leben einen Sinn? (Proseminar)

Wintersemester 2021/2022

1. Death (Hauptseminar)
2. The Moral Limits of the Market (Proseminar)

Sommersemester 2021

1. The Ethics of War (Hauptseminar)
2. An Introduction to Business Ethics (Proseminar)

Course Descriptions

Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (SS 2022, Hauptseminar)

In this postgraduate seminar (“Hauptseminar”), we discuss Aristotle’s virtue ethics as laid out in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Aristotle, having a virtuous character – as well as the virtues of intellect – enables us to be good human beings and, in this way, to flourish. Interestingly, his theory of ethics thus denies that there are situations where we need to choose between our own happiness (properly construed) and what it would be morally appropriate to do.

We will spend a fair number of weeks discussing the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but we will also consider some influential discussions of Aristotle’s ethics. We will, moreover, discuss the modern virtue ethical theory that Rosalind Hursthouse defends. Hursthouse is sympathetic to much of what Aristotle says, but nevertheless disagrees with him in key respects. One of the aims of this course is to establish whether Hursthouse has managed to improve on Aristotle’s position. Does she hang on to key insights? Does she discard what seems, on reflection, deeply misguided or unhelpful?

The course is assessed based on a short presentation (5 to 10 minutes) during term time (25% of final mark) and a take home exam in the final week of term (75% of final mark).

Indicative reading list:

Aristotle (around 350 BCE): *The Nicomachean Ethics*. See e.g. the translation by W.D. Ross, available online at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>.

Hursthouse, Rosalind (2002): *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oksenberg Rorty, Amelie (ed.) (1981): *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*. University of California Press.

Hat unser Leben einen Sinn? (SS2022, Proseminar)

In diesem Proseminar gehen wir der Frage nach, ob das menschliche Leben einen Sinn hat (oder ob es zumindest möglich scheint, dass unser Leben einen Sinn hat). Der französische Existentialist Albert Camus ist bekannt für seine pessimistische Antwort auf diese Frage. Er akzeptiert, dass es Teil der menschlichen Natur ist, nach Sinn zu streben. Gleichzeitig ist er überzeugt davon, dass uns ein solcher Sinn verwehrt bleibt. In dieser Gegenüberstellung sieht er die Absurdität unserer Existenz. Arthur Schopenhauer zeichnet ein ähnlich düsteres Bild unseres Daseins. In der zeitgenössischen analytischen Philosophie finden sich hingegen eine Vielzahl von optimistischeren Stimmen. Susan Wolf argumentiert etwa, dass wir unserem Leben einen Sinn verleihen können, indem wir aktiv und mit Leidenschaft für eine Sache eintreten, die objektiven Wert besitzt. Im Rahmen dieses Proseminars setzen wir uns mit den Argumenten und den Positionen einflussreicher zeitgenössischer analytischer Philosophen und Philosophinnen auseinander und fragen uns, ob diese optimistischeren Stimmen uns guten Grund geben, eine pessimistische Haltung abzulehnen.

Als Prüfungsleistung sind drei kurze Aufsätze (ca. 1.000 Wörter oder zwei Seiten) ab Mitte und bis Ende des Semesters einzureichen.

Beispielliteratur:

Landau, Iddo (2017): *Finding Meaning in an Imperfect World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schopenhauer, Arthur (1844): "Von der Nichtigkeit und dem Leiden des Lebens", Kapitel 46 des 2. Bandes von *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*

Taylor, Richard (2000): "The meaning of Life", in *Good and Evil*, pp. 319-34. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

Wolf, Susan (2010): *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Death (WS 2021/2022, Hauptseminar)

As humans, we are mortal beings. Many of us will continue to live for many more years; others will die much sooner than they thought they had reason to fear. Eventually, we will all be dead. These facts are as simple and well-known as they can be disturbing. Contemplating the inevitability of our own death---or that of our loved ones---can make us feel powerless, perplexed, and scared. It is no wonder, then, that the problem of death has received sustained attention from philosophers over the past millennia, and continues to be studied to this day.

In this course, we discuss the problem of death from an ethical perspective. The main focus will be on studying contemporary philosophical papers, but we will cover a range of historical contributions as well, including Epicurus' highly influential view that "death is nothing to us", as well as Plato's argument, in the *Phaedo*, of the immortality of the soul.

The course will be assessed through a presentation (25% of the final mark) and a take home exam (75% of the final mark; the take home exam will take place in the final week of the term). The course is taught entirely in English. Hausarbeiten are possible.

Indicative reading list:

Epicurus (1994): Letter to Menoecus. *The Epicurus Reader*, edited by Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson, Hackett

Luper, Steven (2013): Exhausting Life. *The Journal of Ethics* 17 (1-2): 99-119

Moller, Dan (2007): Love and death. *Journal of Philosophy* 104 (6): 301-316

Nagel, Thomas (1970): Death. *Noûs* 4 (1): 73-80

Scheffler, Samuel (2013): *Death and the Afterlife*. Oxford University Press

The Moral Limits of the Market (WS 2021/2022, Proseminar)

Many people feel that some things should not be for sale. They will argue, for example, that it is wrong to sell sexual favours, or that there should not be a market for human organs. For some goods, it seems morally defensible that a market should exist, but it is less clear that prices should be determined in the interchange between demand and supply. Suppose that a small town is hit by a snow storm. The local hardware store sells snow shovels, and its owner quickly realizes that she can raise the price for snow shovels tenfold while still selling her entire supply by the end of the day. Here, it is at least not obvious that the store owner does the morally right thing if she raises her prices accordingly.

In this course, we will discuss what considerations – if any! – determine the moral limits of the market. If some things should not be for sale, is this only because there is always a risk of abuse or exploitation? Or is there a deeper reason to resist the commodification of at least some of the goods that might in principle be for sale? The course draws heavily on Debra Satz' book "Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale. The Moral Limits of Markets" (OUP, 2010). Additional sources are introduced as well.

The course will be assessed through a presentation (25% of the final mark) and a take home exam (75% of the final mark; the take home exam will take place in the final week of the term). The course is taught entirely in English. Hausarbeiten are possible.

Indicative Reading List

Gold, Natalie (2019): "The limits of commodification arguments: Framing, motivation crowding, and shared valuations", *Politics, Philosophy, Economics* 18 (2): 165-192

Nussbaum, Martha C. (1998): "'Whether From Reason Or Prejudice': Taking Money for Bodily Services", *Journal of Legal Studies* 27: 693-723

Sandel, Michael J. (2012): *What Money Can't Buy. The Moral Limits of Markets*. Penguin

Satz, Debra (2010): *Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale. The Moral Limits of Markets*. Oxford University Press

The Ethics of War (Sommersemester 2021, Hauptseminar)

In his tremendously influential *Just and Unjust Wars* (Basic Books, 1977), Michael Walzer argues that when soldiers kill each other in war, the situation between them is morally symmetric. Even if one soldier is fighting an unjust war of aggression that the other soldier is rightly aiming to thwart, the moral symmetry remains, as the injustice of the former soldier's war is not his moral responsibility. Soldiers owe a duty of obedience to their armies, and this absolves them of responsibility for the justice or injustice of the wars that they are ordered to fight.

In the last two decades, moral philosophers such as Jeff McMahan, David Rodin, Cécile Fabre, and Helen Frowe have started to criticise Michael Walzer's view. According to their revisionist position, the morality of war rests on the morality of individual self-defence, which implies that Walzer's symmetry claims cannot ultimately be defended. Soldiers on the unjust side of a conflict may be morally *excused* if their killing is coerced, but this does not render their actions morally *justifiable*.

This course provides an introduction to the ethics of war, in particular to the extensive revisionist literature that has cropped up in the past twenty years or so. You should not, in general, choose this course unless you have some university-level familiarity with ethics. The course does not closely follow a textbook; it instead makes heavy use of recent academic papers that the lecturer will make easily available. Students are expected to read the equivalent of roughly two academic papers per week. The required readings will be complemented with further recommended readings that students can consult if they are interested in learning more about a particular issue. A textbook that covers much of the course content in an accessible manner is Helen Frowe's *The Ethics of War and Peace* (Routledge, 2016). The course is taught entirely in English.

An Introduction to Business Ethics (Sommersemester 2021, Proseminar)

Is it permissible to lie in a business negotiation? If only some lies are admissible, where should we draw the line, and why? As a buyer, may you pretend you are financially constrained when your financial situation is, in fact, perfectly fine? As a seller, may you give the impression that all your raw materials are locally sourced when this is not, in fact, the case? In this course, we discuss questions such as these – ethical questions that arise in the context of doing business. The course presupposes neither knowledge of ethics nor of business, but some acquaintance with each will make the course less demanding. Each week, we discuss a topic that is largely self-contained. The topics we cover include worker exploitation, the fairness or unfairness of executive compensation, the importance of privacy in the information age, how income and wealth are related to happiness, but also, for example, Milton Friedman's notorious claim that managers' primary moral responsibility is to promote shareholders' interests. While each week covers a largely self-contained topic, the course as a whole provides a systematic introduction to the main approaches in ethical theorising.

The course does not use a textbook. Each week, students are required to read up to two academic papers that the lecturer will make available. The required readings will be complemented with further recommended readings that students can consult if they are interested in learning more about a particular topic. If you would like to read a book in preparation for the course, I recommend Martin Sandbu's *Just Business* (Pearson, 2011). It is rather difficult, however, to get a hold of this book. As an alternative, easily digestible food for thought is provided also by Joseph Badaracco's *Defining Moments* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2016). The course is taught entirely in English.