

PHIU9HI Humanity as an Ethical Idea

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Course Description

In this course, we will critically examine various uses and the limitations of humanity as an ethical idea to provide a normative standpoint for critically assessing various oppressive social conditions and practices in the tradition of Aristotelian ethics, Kantian ethics and theories of human rights. We will begin with a discussion of the Aristotelian ideal of human flourishing through the lens of Martha Nussbaum's 'capabilities approach' and how it has been employed in environmental ethics and climate justice. We will then look at the Kantian 'formula of humanity' as a foundation to critically examine forms of sexual objectification and oppressive work structure. Next, we will turn to theories of human rights as norms that aspire to protect all people from political and social oppression, with a focus on the contested human right to democracy and immigration. Finally, we will critically examine the assumption that there is an ontological divide between humans and nonhuman animals and nature, which underlies the moral thoughts which put *human* flourishing, dignity and rights at the centre.

Meetings

Lecture Mondays 9-11 (Week 2-6, 8-11, 13) Room C.2B84

Tutorial 1 Mondays 12-13 (Week 2-6, 8-11, 13) Room P.H5

Tutorial 2 Mondays 13-14 (Week 2-6, 8-11, 13) Room P.C21

Assessments

Each week has a small task, where you are required to write a short reflection (it could be a summary or an extended question) on the main reading (300 words max) in order to pass the participation assessment. The main assignment is a 2500 words essay.

Assignment	Description of Assignment	%	Due
Essay	Written essay of max 2500 words (excl. Bibliography)	50%	March 13 th @12 noon
Take home Exam		50%	

Essay Questions

1. Critically discuss Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach:
 - 1a. Does Nussbaum make a convincing case for the idea that the 10 central capacities are necessary for a flourishing human life?
 - 1b. Does Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach provide an adequate theory of climate justice?
2. Does pornography objectify women?

3. Does the formula of humanity set an adequate moral standard for evaluating oppressive work structure?

You can find some helpful writing guidelines on how to write a good philosophy essay [here](#) and [here](#).

Course Outline

SESSION 1: Human Flourishing (30/1/2023)

We start off by considering the Aristotelian conception of human flourishing and the ethics that derived from it.

Essential Reading:

- "Nichomachean Ethics: Book I" (especially chapters 1 and 7–8).

Additional Readings:

- Whiting, J. 1988 "Aristotle's Function Argument: A Defense", *Ancient Philosophy* 8, 33-48
- Korsgaard, C. 2008. "Aristotle's function argument"
- Annas, Julia. 2007. "Virtue Ethics." Chapter 18 in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*.
- Gilbert, Human. 1983. "Flourishing, Ethics, and Liberty"

SESSION 2: Human Flourishing and the Capabilities Approach (6/2/2023)

One influential contemporary development of Aristotelian Ethics is the Capabilities Approach. On this approach, human flourishing should be understood in terms of capabilities and functioning. We will look at how this approach has been employed in environmental ethics and climate justice.

Essential Reading:

- Nussbaum, Martha. *Creating Capabilities* Chapter 2.

Additional Readings:

- Okin, Susan. "Poverty, Well-being, and Gender: What Counts, Who's heard?", in *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 31(3):280-316
- Jaggard, Alison M., 2006, "Reasoning About Well-Being: Nussbaum's Methods of Justifying the Capabilities," in *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 14(3): 301–22.
- Holland, B., 2008, "Justice and the Environment in Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach: Why Sustainable Ecological Capacity Is a Meta-Capability", *Political Research Quarterly*, 61: 319–32.
- Schlosberg, D., 2012, "Climate Justice and Capabilities: A Framework for Adaptation Policy", *Ethics & International Affairs*, 26(4): 445–461.

SESSION 3: Human Dignity (13/2/2023)

We move on the Kantian tradition which puts the conception of human dignity at the heart of ethics. We will discuss the 'formula of humanity', the claim that we must treat others as ends in themselves, that is, as autonomous and rational agents who must make their own decisions free from manipulation and coercion.

Essential Readings:

- Kant, Immanuel: *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* section 2. It is very helpful when reading Kant to have Timmermann's line-by-line commentary (*The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary*, CUP, 2010).

- Sensen, Oliver. 2009 “Dignity and the Formula of Humanity”, in Jens Timmermann (ed.) *Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide*.

Additional Readings:

- Thomas Hill, Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant’s Moral Theory (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) p.38-46
- O’Neill, Onora, *Constructions of Reason* (CUP 1989) ch.7
- Engstrom, Stephen. *The Form of Practical Knowledge* (HUP, 2009), ch 6.

SESSION 4: Human Dignity and Sexual Objectification (20/2/2023)

This week, we look at feminist work on sexual objectification influenced by the Kantian conception of humanity. Feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin have famously argued that women as a group are reduced to the status of mere tools as a result of men’s consumption of pornography.

Essential Reading:

- Papadaki, E. L. (2007). Sexual objectification: From Kant to contemporary feminism. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6(3), 330-348.

Additional Readings:

- Mikkola, Mari (2019): *Pornography: A Philosophical Introduction*. Chapter 5. Oxford University Press
- Saul, J. M. (2006). On treating things as people: Objectification, pornography, and the history of the vibrator. *Hypatia*, 21(2), 45-61.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1995). Objectification. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 24(4), 249-291.
- Langton, Rae. Exclusion and Objectification in: Fricker/Hornsby, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 2000

SESSION 5: Human Dignity and Oppressive Work (27/2/2023)

This week, we examine the idea that formula of humanity entails that oppressive work structure that diminishes the agential capabilities of a person for the sake of profit, productivity or efficiency is morally impermissible. We will discuss forms of dehumanizing work and proposals for a universal basic income on the ground of liberating people from oppressive work.

Essential Reading:

- Veltman, Andrea. (2016). *Meaning Work* Chapter 3

Additional Readings:

- *Autonomy, Oppression and Gender* ed. Andrea Veltman & Mark Piper (OUP, 2014) (for an overview of dimensions of autonomy)
- Friedman, Marilyn. (2003). *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*. Chapter 1.
- Young Iris. “Five faces of oppression.” *Justice and the Politics of Difference* Chapter 2
- Van Parijs, “Basic Income: A Simple and Powerful Idea for the Twenty- First Century,” in *Redesigning Distribution*, ed. Bruce Ackerman, Anne Alstott, and Philippe Van Parijs (London: Verso, 2006)
- Weeks. Kathi. (2011) *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*. Chapter 1

SESSION 6: Theories of Human Rights (13/3/2023)

Another influential use of humanity as an ethical idea is the thought that all people possess human rights in virtue of their humanity. This week provides an overview of the philosophical debate concerning the nature, ground, and scope of human rights.

Essential Reading:

- Rowan Cruft, S. Matthew Liao and Massimo Renzo, ‘The Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights: An Overview’ in *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights* (OUP 2015)

Additional Readings:

- Griffin, James. *On Human Rights*. Chapter 2. (OUP 2008)
- Rawls, John. *The Law of Peoples*. Chapter 10. (1999 HUP)
- Gilibert, Pablo. *Human dignity and Human rights*. Chapter 2 “Humanist and Political Perspectives on Human Rights”

SESSION 7: Human Rights and Democracy (20/3/2023)

John Rawls advocated a limited list of human rights, one that leaves out rights of political participation, partly on the ground that the list must be accepted by all reasonable countries, not just liberal democracies. Is there a human right to democracy? This week examines the question in relation to the nature and justification of human rights.

Essential Reading:

- Gilibert, Pablo. (2018) *Human dignity and Human rights*. Chapter 10 “Political Rights”

Additional Readings:

- Chritiano, Thomas.(2015) “Self-determination and the Human Right to Democracy” in *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*.
- Fabienne Peter.(2015) “A Human Right to Democracy?” in *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*.

SESSION 8: Human Rights and Immigration (27/3/2023)

This week we consider another contested human right – the right to immigrate. Is there a human right to cross state borders? On the one hand, the right to migrate seems necessary to safeguard other human rights. Furthermore, it seems inconsistent to recognize a right of free movement within state borders while denying the right of free movement across state borders. On the other hand, some have argued that states have a legitimate interest in controlling immigration.

Essential Reading

- Miller, David. “Is There a Human Right to Immigrate?” in *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*.(2016 OUP)

Additional Readings

- Oberman, Mieran. “Immigration as a Human Right” in *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*.(2016 OUP)
- Fine, Sarah. & Ypi Lea. “The Ethics of Movement and Membership: An Introduction.” in *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*.(2016 OUP)

SESSION 9: Are All Animals Equal? (3/4/2023)

So far, we have considered ethical theories that put *human* flourishing, dignity and rights at the centre. This week we critically assess the idea that there is a moral hierarchy between human and non-human animals. We look at Peter Singer’s theory which extends moral concepts to include nonhuman animals in the moral community by granting moral status to non-human animals.

Essential Reading

- Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. Chapter 1 “All Animals Are Equal”

Additional Readings

- Williams, Bernard. “The Human Prejudice”

- Kagan, Shelly. 2016. “What’s Wrong with Speciesism?(Society for Applied Philosophy Annual Lecture 2015).” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33 (1): 1–21.
- Steinbock, Bonnie. “Speciesism and the Idea of Equality”. *Philosophy* 53 (204):247 - 256

SESSION 10: Ecofeminism, Challenging *Andropocentrist* (men-centred) Conceptual Framework (17/4/2023)

We end our journey by critically examining the assumption that humans as rational agents are separate from and superior to nature. We will examine the interconnections among the unjustified dominations of women, nonhuman animals and nature.

Essential Reading

- Warren, Karen J. (1990). “The power and the promise of ecological feminism.” *Environmental Ethics* 12 (2):125-146.

Additional Readings

- Adams, C., 1990, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Chapter 3 “Masked Violence, Muted Voices”
- Mellor, M., 2000, “Feminism and Environmental Ethics: A Materialist Perspective”, *Ethics and the Environment*, 5(1), 107–123.
- Warren, Karen J. 2000, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.