Moral responsibility

Advanced research seminar + essay writing class

LMU Munich, Department of Philosophy

Summer term 2015, Mondays 14-16 in M210, starting on Apr 20

Instructor: Dr Jan-Christoph Heilinger
Office hours: Tue 13-15 in M212

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Course description

Responsibility is a core concept in moral philosophy. When we act or fail to act in a morally significant way, a certain kind of moral response to our act or omission – such as e.g. praise or blame – seems often appropriate.

In this seminar we will enquire into the idea of moral responsibility, we will learn about the structure and conditions of moral responsibility, about its relation to other concepts such as duty and obligation, we will distinguish different sorts of moral responsibility (such as individual, collective and shared responsibility; as well as causal and remedial responsibility) and contrast moral responsibility with other forms of responsibility (such as legal or role responsibility).

During the course of the seminar, the theoretical considerations about the concept will be confronted with practical challenges such as the topical problem of individual moral responsibility for global warming and climate change.

We will be reading texts by Derek Parfit, H.L.A. Hart, Iris Young, Henry Shue, Shelley Kagan, Simon Caney, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, and others.

Course requirements

Students may either write four short essays (ca. 2.200 words each) during the term or a “Hausarbeit” (ca. 7.500 words) during the term break. Students are expected to participate actively in class and to give a brief presentation of one of the readings.
Schedule

Apr 20  Introduction (Reading recommendation: Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Entry on Moral Responsibility)

+ The Concept of Responsibility +

Apr 27  David Miller: Two Concepts of Responsibility

May 4   David Miller: National Responsibility

May 11  H.L.A. Hart: Responsibility and Retribution

May 18  Matthew Braham/Martin van Hees: An Anatomy of Moral Responsibility

May 25  – no class, Pentecost –

+ Global Warming and Individual Moral Responsibility +

Jun 1   James Dwyer: On Flying to Ethics Conferences. Climate Change and Moral Responsiveness

Jun 8   Walter Sinnott-Armstrong: It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations

Jun 15  Derek Parfit: Five Mistakes in Moral Mathematics (from Reasons and Persons)

Jun 22  Shelley Kagan: Do I Make A Difference?

Jun 29  Henry Shue: Subsistence emissions and luxury emissions

Jul 6   Simon Caney: Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change

+ Responsibility for Global Justice +

Bibliography


Assessment criteria for written assignments

Standards for written assignments will be graded according to the following criteria.

1. Structure and organisation
   Is the assignment well organised?
   Does it have a clear introductory paragraph, thesis statement, and concluding paragraph?
   Are there clear transitions between paragraphs and sections of the assignment?

2. Exposition and interpretation
   Do you give a clear and charitable interpretation of the view(s) under consideration?
   Do you make clear the underlying assumptions of the view(s) as well as their implications?
   Do you support your interpretations with relevant citations from the text?

3. Argument and critical evaluation
   Do you provide good arguments for the claims you make? Is it obvious what they are?
   When critiquing a view, do you consider possible responses to that critique?
   Do you show that you have thought independently about the problem in question?

4. Writing style
   Is your prose style clear and easy to understand?
   Are there any recurring grammatical or spelling errors?
   Do you avoid awkward and confusing sentence structures?