

KS Empirical Ethics

University of Graz | Department of Philosophy | Winter Term 2022/23

Time: Thursdays, 15:15 – 16:45 (unless otherwise stated)

Venue: SR 34.K1, Attemsgasse 25/K, 8010 Graz

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Description

Ethics is about what we morally ought to do. Traditionally, judgements and theories in this area have been justified from the philosopher's armchair. The novel approach of empirical ethics challenges this methodology. Its proponents hold that ethicists can or must (also) consider the findings of empirical sciences such as psychology, neuroscience or anthropology. In this course students will be introduced to empirical ethics. First we will discuss the nature, potentials and limitations of this approach. Then we will exemplarily consider several arguments in empirical ethics — arguments that concern, among others, the existence of moral virtues, the reliability of moral intuitions, the evolution of human morality and people's beliefs about moral objectivity. For each argument we will ask two main questions. First, is the scientific research that it is based on valid and reliable? And second, does this research really have the ethical implications that it is claimed to have?

Aims

Having completed the course, students should be able to:

- explain the nature, aims and methods of empirical ethics;
- assess the potential and limitations of empirical ethics;
- critically reflect on the assumptions, methods and results of scientific studies of morality;
- evaluate a number of particular arguments in empirical ethics, such as about moral disagreement, moral evolution and moral emotions;

- identify and explain connections between these arguments, and between the arguments and more general philosophical issues.

Schedule and Topics

- 10/06/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: Preliminary Discussion [IN-PERSON]
- 10/13/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: **Introduction 1** [ONLINE / AYSNC]
Kauppinen: Ethics and Empirical Psychology
- 10/20/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: **Moral Duties and Consequences** [IN-PERSON]
Greene: The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul
+ Sauer: Morally Irrelevant Factors: What's Left of the Dual Process-Model of Moral Cognition?
- 10/27/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: **Introduction 2** [ONLINE / ASYNC]
Machery and Doris: An Open Letter to Our Students: Doing Interdisciplinary Moral Psychology
- 11/03/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: **Moral Emotions** [IN-PERSON]
Prinz: The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgment
+ Pölzler: Moral Judgements and Emotions: A Less Intimate Relationship than Recently Claimed
- 11/10/2022, 15:15 – 17:30: **Presentations 1** [ONLINE / SYNC]
Knobe and Nichols: Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions
Buckwalter and Turri: Inability and Obligation in Moral Judgment
- 11/17/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: **Moral Virtue** [IN-PERSON]
Doris: Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics
+ Jayawickreme et al.: Virtuous States and Virtuous Traits: How the Empirical Evidence regarding the Existence of Broad Traits Saves Virtue Ethics from the Situationist Critique
- 11/24/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: **Moral Disagreement** [IN-PERSON]
Doris and Plakias: How to Argue about Disagreement: Evaluative Diversity and Moral Realism
+ Meyers: Defending Moral Realism from Empirical Evidence of Disagreement
- 12/01/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: **Moral Objectivity** [IN-PERSON]
Colebrook: The Irrationality of Folk Metaethics
+ Bush and Moss: Misunderstanding Metaethics: Difficulties Measuring Folk Objectivism and Relativism

12/15/2022, 15:15 – 16:45: **Discussion Seminar Papers** [ONLINE / ASYNC]

01/12/2023, 15:15 – 17:30: **Presentations 2** [ONLINE / SYNC]

Schwitzgebel and Rust: The Moral Behavior of Ethics Professors

Horvath and Wiegmann: Intuitive Expertise in Moral Judgments

01/19/2023, 15:15 – 16:45: **Moral Evolution** [IN-PERSON]

Street: A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value

+ Levy and Levy: Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Meet Evolutionary Science

01/26/2023, 15:15 – 16:45: Final Discussion [ONLINE / ASYNC]

All texts can be downloaded from the course's Moodle page (moodle.uni-graz.at).

Assessment

Seminar Paper (50%)

Your seminar paper should address a specific and interesting research question in the area of empirical ethics. For example, you may compare the arguments of two or more authors, criticize the arguments of a particular author, or defend a thesis of your own. You can choose your research question freely. Make sure that your paper involves sound arguments that support your answer to this question.

The language of your seminar paper should be clear, succinct and intelligible. Its structure should be logical and aid understanding. In particular, you should motivate and explicitly state your research question in an introductory section, and summarize your thesis and most important arguments in a concluding section. A first proposal of your seminar paper is to be submitted via Moodle by January 8, 2023.

Your seminar paper should be between 1.500 and 3.000 words (excluding title page, index, footnotes, bibliography, etc.), and refer to at least three relevant sources. These sources can be texts that we discussed in class, additional texts provided on the course's Moodle page or texts which you researched yourself. Please submit your seminar paper Moodle by February 28, 2023.

The grade will be primarily based on the following criteria: (1) the adequacy and interestingness of your research question, (2) the soundness and relevance of your arguments, (3) your compliance with the rules of academic writing (citation, style, etc.), (4) the clarity, succinctness and intelligibility of your language, and (5) the adequacy of your paper's structure.

Class Participation (35%)

Please read all required texts carefully and participate actively in our discussions. For example, ask questions, raise objections or point out interconnections. By doing so you demonstrate that you are well-prepared.

Each student will function as an expert in one in-person session. Being an expert involves reading the additional recommended text for the respective session (marked "+") and contributing to discussions by reference to this text. You can select your expert session in a doodle survey in the second week of the semester.

In asynchronous online sessions you will be asked to complete certain tasks online. The tasks will be made available by Tuesday, 14:00 before the respective session. They can involve quizzes, essay questions, proposal uploads and forum comments. Please complete the tasks by Thursday, 23:59 of the respective week. Afterwards you will receive general feedback by e-mail as well as, in some cases, individual feedback in forums. The tasks and my feedback constitute the respective sessions. That is, at the time at which the session is scheduled in UGO, there will not be any additional video-conference meeting.

Presentation (15%)

Two sessions will be dedicated to student presentations. The topics for these presentations are listed in the section "Schedule and Topics". You will be able to choose your topic in the second week of the semester in a doodle survey. Special care should be taken to present the papers in clear and simple terms. To facilitate understanding you are also asked to either provide a PowerPoint presentation or a one-page handout.

The procedure of each presentation session will look as follows: (1) introduction of the topic by me (max. 5 minutes), (2) presentation of the student group (max. 25 minutes), (3) discussion of the topic/paper by all students (max. 30 minutes). The presentations will be assessed individually, not collectively, on the basis of the following criteria: (1) organization, (2) content, (3), delivery, (4) visual aids.

Students in the Knobe/Nichols group should pre-read the Schwitzgebel/Rust paper and *vice versa*. Students in the Buckwalter and Turri group should pre-read the Horvath and Wiegmann paper and *vice versa*. Reading the other presented texts is not obligatory.

General Policies

Attendance

To complete the course in a regular way you must not be absent from more than two of our thirteen sessions (one session = 1.5 hrs). In case you miss three or four sessions I ask for an explanation (e.g., doctor's confirmation) and some compensatory task (e.g., a longer seminar paper). In case you miss five or more sessions you cannot successfully complete the course. If a session is held online, attendance is constituted by completing the required tasks.

Deadlines

Late submissions of seminar papers and comments/questions will not be considered.

Academic Honesty

Violations of academic honesty (e.g., using others' ideas without citing them) will automatically lead to a negative assessment of the seminar paper or comment/question in which they occur.

Discussion Rules

For our course to succeed it is essential that we treat each other politely and with respect (even when our opinions on some matter diverge).

Laptops, Smartphones, etc.

Please limit the use of electronic devices as much as possible (except for note-taking).