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"Office hours" via zoom: by appointment (via email)

Seminar – Future Ethics

Summer Semester 2021

Due to the Corona pandemic, the seminar will be held online via zoom, from the week starting on the 12/04/2021. Zoom link:

https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3139020151?pwd=azlFQ3E3ZjJTUGphT2RiWHpLTXV2Zz09

Important: Please read this document carefully and in full, to make sure you understand how the course will operate, and what you will need to do. Your Stud.IP account needs to be linked to an email account that you check regularly, so you can keep track of all announcements and updates. The materials for this seminar will be made available to you via Stud.IP.

Course Description

Some choices we are facing today – such as how to tax carbon emissions – may have far-reaching consequences for future generations: our choices may affect the well-being of future individuals, or may affect who (if anyone) will exist in the first place. How ought we to incorporate the interests of possible future beings into these choices? We will introduce a framework in which this question can reasonably be considered, by drawing on literature from philosophy and economics. We will then apply this framework to discuss concrete choices – concerning climate change, procreation, human enhancement, and artificial intelligence – where important issues of future ethics arise.

Objectives

1. Become familiar with some of the main arguments that have been made in philosophy and economics for and against a high discount rate.
2. Understand the main difficulties that different possible people or different numbers of people pose for ethical theory.
3. Develop the ability to critically assess policy decisions concerning climate change and the other topics discussed in this course.
4. Develop the ability to extract the main messages and arguments out of complex texts.
5. Enhance ability to engage with philosophical debate in English (in particular, development of the ability to engage in written philosophy).

Course Schedule

Subject to revision

Session	Date	Topic and Readings
1	15/4/2021	**Introduction** T. Ord, *The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity* (Chapter 1, "Standing at the Precipice") (*Background Reading*)
2	22/04/2021	**Future People: The Non-Identity Problem** D. Parfit, "Energy Policy and the Further Future: The Identity Problem"
3	29/04/2021	**Thinking about Future Generations: The Discount Rate** J. Broome, "The Ethics of Climate Change"
4	06/05/2021	**Individual Responsibility for Climate Change?** W. Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's not my fault: global warming and individual moral obligations" OR J. Broome, "Against denialism" *Be prepared to defend your chosen reading in class!*
5	20/05/2021	**Population Size and Climate Change** H. Greaves, "Climate Change and Optimum Population"
		mid-semester break
6	03/06/2021	**Population Ethics I: The Repugnant Conclusion** D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Chapter 17, "The Repugnant Conclusion", pp. 381-390)
7	10/06/2021	**Population Ethics II: Should We Accept the Repugnant Conclusion?** M. Huemer, "In Defence of Repugnance" OR M. Budolfson and D. Spears, "Does the Repugnant Conclusion have important implications for axiology or for public policy?"
8	17/06/2021	**The Distant Future, Existential Risk, and Effective Altruism** N. Bostrom, "Astronomical Waste: The Opportunity Cost of Delayed Technological Development"

9	24/06/2021	**Human Enhancement I** T. Douglas, "Moral Enhancement"
10	01/07/2021	**Human Enhancement II** J. Harris, "Moral enhancement and freedom"
11	08/07/2021	**Artificial Intelligence** N. Bostrom, E. Yudkowsky, "The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence"
12	15/07/2021	**Artificial Intelligence II, or buffer session**

Course Requirements

The coursework (**Studienleistung**) consists of the following:

1. Read the scheduled material carefully, and set aside some time to look into any concepts or terms that you don't understand, and to think about the issues raised.
2. Attend the seminars regularly (do not miss more than 1 meeting).
3. Participate actively in the seminar discussions.
4. In addition, write one essay (1500 words) dealing with a topic covered in the course. This will be due on the **22/07/2021**. For an essay of this length, you should reference at least 3 sources (this means you will need to read more than this, because some of the things you read will not find their way into the essay).

I will post a list of essay topics/questions on Stud.IP later in the term. You are free to craft your own question for this essay, but you must run it past me before you start writing. If you want suggestions or assistance with this, please contact me.

Your essay should correspond to the following guidelines (that means please read them well in advance of writing your essay – you are unlikely to do well in your essay if you have not read them): J. Pryor, "Guidelines on writing a philosophy essay" http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html

An examination (**Prüfungsleistung**) consists of, in addition to the coursework: A term paper of 3000 words, due on the **31/08/2021**. You should devise your own essay question/topic for this essay, but you need to run it past me before you start writing. I also highly recommend that you talk to me about your PL essay well before it is due, either by sending a short outline (of about a page) via email, or scheduling an online meeting, or both. If you have any questions or want to discuss anything to do with the essay, please get in touch.

Important: Your term paper should focus on a topic that you did not focus on in the Studienleistung assessment. Your essay will be graded on the basis of how well it

corresponds to the guidelines above. For an essay of this length, you should reference at least 6 sources.

Tips for essays

Make sure that you properly cite and reference all material that you use in the essay. I recommend the following style of citation:

https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

You are free to use another style if you prefer, but make sure you stick to the guidelines for your chosen style, remain consistent, and include all the necessary details for any reference.

Plagiarism is taken very seriously - it will result in an automatic fail, and may need to be reported to the university. Avoid plagiarism at all costs! Here is a guide to help you do this:

https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/applying-to-oxford/university-policies/plagiarism?wssl=1

If in doubt about anything to do with plagiarism, please contact me – even accidental plagiarism will result in a failing grade.

Tips for online research

The TIB (university library) provides access to many online resources, which you can search for here: https://www.tib.eu/en/

The TIB offers many resources for students who are trying to do research online, including daily webinars, see their website for details.

You can sometimes gain access to these resources by entering the details from your library card, however, accessing this material works best if you use the VPN client – you can find out how to download it here: https://www.luis.uni-hannover.de/netz_vpn.html?&L=1

As well as providing easy access to material you find through the library catalogue, the VPN client also allows you to search philosophy databases like https://philpapers.org/ or academic databases like https://scholar.google.com and automatically access the papers that the university has a subscription for.

Please note that no late submissions (without a pre-arranged extension) will be accepted!

If you have any questions that are not covered here, please get in touch with me!