

THE MORAL POINT OF VIEW

IDH 3035

SPRING 2023

MWF 1:00-1:50 P.M.

AHC-4 302

Most ethical views or theories can be subsumed under one of four major approaches: Objectivist, Consequentialist or Utilitarian, Naturalistic, and Divine Command.

NATURALISM: Working within the post-Darwinian naturalistic consensus, John Mackie (d. 1981), among others, defends subjectivism from a naturalistic perspective that sees ethics or morality as something we human beings have “invented.” Although no less a naturalist than Mackie, W. V. Quine (d. 2000) suggest in his one article on ethics that naturalism is not devoid of resources that can yield a measure of *practical* objectivity and normativity, although not the kind of absolute, trans-cultural, transcendent objectivity that thinkers from Plato to Kant insisted any view that claims the status of morality must have.

OBJECTIVISM: Kant (d. 1804) argued, on the contrary, that we are moral agents who have rational insight into an objective realm of values that transcends our animal or biological nature. Although sympathetic to moral objectivism and offering a distinctly non-naturalistic approach to ethics, David Wiggins (b. 1933) and Hilary Putnam (d. 2016) offer a defense of what I call “soft” objectivism, something below the “hard” objectivism of Kant, but beyond the subjectivism of Mackie (whom Wiggins challenges directly). Whether the Wiggins-Putnam view will get any traction remains to be seen. We will also look at St. Thomas Aquinas’s defense of Natural Law as the foundation of moral objectivity.

CONSEQUENTIALISM: In the second half of the 19th century John Stuart Mill (d. 1873) proposed, against Kant, a defense of objectivism he called Utilitarianism (or Consequentialism), that appealed to the consequences of our actions as the decisive element in morality, without reliance on any kind of rational intuition. Because Utilitarianism comports quite well with a post-Darwinian evolutionary naturalism and scientific empiricism, Utilitarianism has come to stand today as the major alternative to Kantian and other forms of naturalistic ethics.

DIVINE COMMAND: Lastly, despairing of Reason in an age dominated by scientific naturalism, some thinkers like Robert Merrihew Adams (b. 1937) have argued that a Divine Command ethics is the only way to overcome subjectivism or moral nihilism. To these thinkers Kantian rationality has proved to be a failed god, and Utilitarianism is far from delivering a firm and truly objectivist ethics. Merrihew Adams goes as far as arguing that either morality is based on the commands of a loving god, or there is not morality at all.

In IDH 3035, we will examine the following influential instantiations or variations of these four approaches to ethics: DIVINE COMMAND: 1) Callicles' "Might Makes Right," 2) Merrihew Adams' "Modified Divine Command," 3) Hastings Rashdall, "The Moral Argument for God's Existence"; KANTIAN: 4) Kantian ethics; CONSEQUENTIALISM: 5) Mill's Utilitarianism; NATURALISM: (6) Max Stirner's Ethical Egoism, (7) Ethical Relativism, (8) John Mackie's Moral Subjectivism, (9) W. V. Quine's Naturalized Ethics; REJECTIONS OF SUBJECTIVISM AND NATURALISM: (10) W. D. Ross, (11) David Wiggins, (12) Hilary Putnam; and (13) St. Thomas Aquinas' Natural Law theory as the objective basis of morality.

Honors Fellows Hours	Office Phone	Office
Professor Dan Alvarez	DM 304	TBA

Email address: alvarezd@fiu.edu; Canvas App best way to communicate with me.

Required Texts:

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 1 and 2. ISBN 9780872206052

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Parts I and II. ISBN 9871107401068

Readings for Class presentations available on Canvas:

John L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Morals," early version of chapter 1 of *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*.

W. V. Quine, "On the Nature of Moral Values" (on Canvas).

Folke Tersman, "Quine on Ethics" (on Canvas).

Callicles, "Might Makes Right" (on Canvas).

Max Stirner, selection from *The Ego and its Own* (on Canvas).

Rosaldo Renato, "The Headhunter's Rage" (on Canvas).

David Wiggins, "Objectivity in Ethics: Two Difficulties, Two Responses" (on Canvas).

W. D. Ross, selection from *The Right and the Good* (on Canvas).

Hilary Putnam, "Objectivity and the Science/Ethics Distinction" (on Canvas).

Thomas Aquinas, on Natural Law (selection on Canvas).

Hasting Rashdall, argument for Divine Command (selection on Canvas).

Robert Merrihew Adams, "Divine Command Modified" (on Canvas).

Supplement to Robert Merrihew Adams Divine Command Theory (on Canvas).

Suggested Readings (not required):

John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory."

_____, "The Independence of Moral Theory."

Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*.

Thomas Nagel, "Value," selection from *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Neo-Darwinian Naturalistic Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*.

Thomas Nagel, *The Limits of Objectivity*.

J. P. Moreland, "Review of Thomas Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos: Slouching Towards Theism*" (Divine Command).

Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us" (Interview).

Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism."

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of this course:

1. Students will be able to think critically and do in-depth research about some of the most vexing questions and issues in moral philosophy and propose their own answers and approaches to those questions.

2. By engaging the most seminal problems in ethical theory through their most representative theories, student students will be able to compare and contrast different approaches to ethics and gain greater clarity about their strengths and weaknesses.

3. Students will have been exposed to some of the most demanding and substantive thinking not only about ethics *per se*, but about a host of related concepts (such as truth, what it means to be human, how is morality related to knowledge, is moral objectivity attainable, and is there a transcendent ground to morality) whose importance to their lives and their formation as thinkers and human beings transcends the boundaries of this course.

4. Building on the foundation of the classic approaches to ethics (Kant and Mill in particular) contemporary approaches, including contribution from the social sciences (anthropology and psychology), and critiques of the dominant options in ethical theory will be studied, thus giving students a broad, interdisciplinary approach to the study of ethics.

5. Through group discussions students will be able to critically respond to each other's work and in the process benefit from each other's reflections and points of view.

Course Requirements

- Two essays (minimum 3-5 pages each, double spaced) based on topics provided by the instructor (50% of final grade).

THIS ASSIGNMENT MEETS THE RESEARCH AND INTERDISCIPLINARY SKILLS
HONORS COLLEGE LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Class presentation (2-3 pages, double spaced) based on weekly reading (20% of final grade).

THIS ASSIGNMENT MEETS THE LEADERSHIP HONORS COLLEGE
LEARNING OUTCOME

3) Four (4) Discussions (25% of final grade).

THIS ASSIGNMENT MEETS THE CONNECTIVITY AND RESEARCH HONORS COLLEGE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Religious Observances

Every effort will be made, where feasible and practical, to accommodate students whose religious practices coincide with class requirements or scheduling. Please make sure to notify your instructor at the beginning of the semester of which dates you will be absent or any anticipated problems with completing course work.

Physical, Mental and Sensory Challenges

The Disability Resource Center collaborates with students, faculty, staff, and community members to create diverse learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and sustainable. The DRC provides FIU students with disabilities the necessary support to successfully complete their education and participate in activities available to all students. If you have a diagnosed disability and plan to utilize academic accommodations, please contact the DRC at 305-348-3532 (MMC) or at 305-919-5345 (BBC) to schedule an appointment. You can also visit them in person in GC 190 at MMC or in WUC 131 at BBC campus.

Honors College Requirements

Academic Misconduct Procedures and Policies

In The Honors College, the term “honor” refers both to academic accomplishment and character. Students in Honors should therefore adhere to and be held to the highest standards of personal academic accountability. Academic dishonesty in any form, including plagiarism, is antithetical to the very definition of being an Honors student at FIU. Consequently, an Honors College student found responsible for academic misconduct will be dismissed from the College.

An Honors faculty member may bring charges of academic misconduct against an Honors student if the faculty member suspects plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. The faculty member will decide whether to pursue informal resolution, file formal resolution charges, or take no further action, and will follow the procedures outlined in the Academic Misconduct Procedures available

at <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/get-support/student-conduct-and-academic-integrity/academic-integrity/index.php>Links to an external site. . Please refer to the following documents for additional information:

FIU Student Handbook: <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/about/student-handbook/index.php>Links to an external site.

Student Portfolios

The Honors College will be using a portfolio method to assess students' learning outcomes. The portfolio allows for maximum flexibility in gauging student learning. Students decide (with instructor consultation) what "artifacts" or assignments to include for consideration in their portfolios to demonstrate successful achievement of each of five key student learning outcomes over the 4-year Honors experience. Portfolios provide a rich context for students to show what they have learned and to explain their learning process. Because the Honors curriculum is meant to be thought-provoking and reflective, student self-assessment through portfolios will facilitate learning and provide in-depth assessment. Each Honors College course includes at least one assignment that could potentially fit portfolio requirements. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/portfolio/>Links to an external site.

Honors Engagement

Requirements Honors College students are required to accumulate at least 20 engagement points each academic year (Fall and Spring) by attending Honors College activities. Students attending only one semester (Fall or Spring) are required to accumulate 10 engagement points. Each activity has a point value. Students may select which events and activities they want to attend. The new system is designed to be more flexible for students, offering events at various days and times (including some weekend events) and allowing for a variety of ways to meet the requirements. Please plan accordingly. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/citizenship/>

Community Service

Honors College students must also complete 20 volunteer service hours. These hours DO NOT count toward the 20 engagement points discussed above. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/community-service/>

Honors Education in the Arts (HEARTS)

The HEARTS program is designed to give Honors College students opportunities to "explore and appreciate different artistic and cultural traditions and modes of artistic expression. HEARTS will also serve as a clearinghouse (and curatorial framework) for our students to experience the arts on campus and in the community by providing them with information about cultural activities and access to performances with free or discounted tickets. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/hearts/>Links to an external site.

Resources:

Panthers Care & Counseling & Psychological Services

If you are looking for help for yourself or a fellow classmate, Panthers Care encourages you to express any concerns you may come across as it relates to any personal behavior concerns or worries you have, for the classmate’s well-being or yours; you are encouraged to share your concerns with FIU’s Panthers Care website.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers free and confidential help for anxiety, depression, stress, and other concerns that life brings. Learn more about CAPS at caps.fiu.edu. Professional counselors are available for same-day appointments. Don’t wait to call 305-348-2277 to set up a time to talk or visit the online self-help portal.

GL Learning Outcomes

GL Learning Outcomes for IDH 3034-5

- Global Awareness: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems.
- Global Perspectives: Students will be able to develop a multi-perspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems.
- Global Engagement: Students will be able to demonstrate a willingness to engage in local, global, international, and intercultural problem solving.

Assignments must be able to assess the students’ ability to demonstrate these outcomes. We will be collecting them at the end of the academic year (spring).

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For Convocation Week, Excellence Lecture, and Fall Awards Assembly

Check the Honors College Calendar

Spring 2023

- Week 1 Introduction, Syllabus, Requirements
 Might-Makes-Right: Callicles
Required Reading: Frankena, 1-11; "Might Makes Right" (handout).
- Week 2 Subjectivism: J. L. Mackie
Required Reading: 12-28; Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Morals."
- Week 3 Ethical Egoism: Max Stirner
Required Reading: Frankena, 28-43; 62-73; 103-116; Stirner, selection from *The Ego and its Own* (1845).
- Week 4 Ethical Relativism: Renato Rosaldo
Required Reading: Rosaldo, "The Headhunter's Rage"
- Week 5 Ethical Naturalism: W. V Quine
Required Reading: Quine, "On the Nature of Moral Values"; Reply to Quine: Folke Tersman, "Quine on Ethics."
- Week 6 Divine Command Theories: Hastings Rashdall and
 Robert Merrihew Adams
Required Reading: Rashdall, Moral Argument for God's Existence; Adams, "Divine Command Modified"; Supplement to Adams' Divine Command Theory"; Thomas Nagel, "Value" (from *Mind and Cosmos*).
- Week 7 (Rule) Deontology: Immanuel Kant
Required Reading: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Part I
- Week 8 Kant, *Groundwork*, Part II

- Week 9 (Rule) Utilitarianism: John Stuart Mill
Required Reading: Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapters 1 and 2 of *Utilitarianism*.
- Week 10 (Act) Deontology: W. D Ross and Intuitionism
Required Reading: Ross, selection from *The Right and the Good*.
- Week 11 Natural Law Theories: Aquinas and Virtue-based Ethics
Required Reading: Selections from Aquinas; for Virtue ethics, Frankena, 62-71.
- Week 12 David Wiggins, "Objectivity in Ethics" (Reply to Mackie)
- Week 13 Wiggins, concluded
- Week 14 Hilary Putnam, "Objectivity and the Science/Ethics Distinction"
- Week 15 Putnam, concluded