MORAL INNOVATION SEMINAR

2014-15

Sponsored by Georgetown University’s Normative Orders Collaborative

Georgetown’s Moral Innovation Seminar will run for the full academic year, 2014-2015. The meetings will be led by a stellar list of leading thinkers from around the world. The schedule of meetings may be found below.

The seminar will function simultaneously as a full-year graduate seminar with its home in the Philosophy Department (Phil. 680 in the fall) and as a faculty seminar drawing participants from Georgetown and from other universities in the Washington area. The instructors leading the seminar will be Professors Terry Pinkard and Henry S. Richardson. Although the questions being addressed by the seminar are philosophical, these questions demand, and will receive, some attention from other disciplines, including law, political theory, and history. Students and faculty from other departments are welcome. A separate discussion section will be arranged for the graduate students taking the seminar for credit. Because we expect that there may be more people interested in attending than the room will hold, students may register in the seminar only with the instructors’ permission. For the same reason, faculty interested in attending the seminar should please contact Professor Richardson.

Each term, graduate students taking the course for credit will be required to write a term paper.

The principal question to be posed by the seminar is whether social and cultural changes can ever generate objective moral innovation, objectively filling out or specifying people’s moral rights, duties, privileges, and responsibilities in new, more concrete ways. Moral relativists and historicists will answer “no,” for they deny that the content of morality is ever objective: all one ever has is the set of moral views and practices of a specific culture and time. Moral rationalists will also answer “no,” for they consider objective morality to be a priori and eternal. But an affirmative answer to this question was posed tentatively in Kant and then more fully in Hegel: specific social practices and institutions are necessary to realizing morality’s objective demands; in so doing, they refine and work out those demands in concrete detail, arriving via an historical process at a more fully determinate objective morality. If this is possible, then it would allow for objectivity without abstraction and social embeddedness without relativism.

Guided by philosophical hypotheses that build on and extend these ideas, the seminar will explore this question both theoretically and by concretely examining a series of cases. For example, did Nelson Mandela’s institution of a truth and reconciliation commission importantly shift the kind of restitution that might morally be demanded by the victims of apartheid? Did the rise, in the 1980s, of a global consensus on the ethical guidelines applicable to medical research change the moral rights of research subjects or the moral duties of medical researchers, or did it simply establish some conventional regulations? In addition, over the course of the year the
seminar will devote four sessions each to two moral issues that are in flux and that pose challenges to the idea of objective moral change: the ethics of climate change and the issue of religious freedom. In the spring semester, these issues will be approached comparatively, drawing on our collaborators in Frankfurt and in Fudan. All of these cases will enable us to ask concretely whether the relevant social and cultural changes have any constitutive impact on people’s objective moral rights and duties.

The seminar will explore a two-part hypothesis about what it takes for fruitful—let alone objective—moral change to occur. First, it must arise from an initial moral division of responsibilities that, while not yet fully adequate to the problem at hand, calls upon some to exercise moral discretion. Second, for any moral change to establish itself, moral beliefs and practices must become reflectively convergent. These two complementary aspects of moral change will be addressed in the second semester.

Thursdays, 2:00-4:30

New North 204, Georgetown Main Campus

Professors Terry Pinkard & Henry S. Richardson

Schedule of confirmed visitors & sessions

FALL 2014

Segment I: Introduction: On the possibility of objective moral innovation

1. [Aug. 28] Objectivity, relativism, and embeddedness in cultural practices and social institutions

   Robert Pippin (University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought)


   Adam Rothman (Georgetown, History)

3. [Sept. 11] The possibility of objective moral innovation: an initial sketch

   Henry S. Richardson (Georgetown, Philosophy)

4. [Sept. 18] The Genesis of Values
Hans Joas (Freiburg University and Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago)

5. [Sept. 25] Motivating case 1: The establishment of medical research ethics
   Tom L. Beauchamp (Georgetown, Philosophy)

   Barbara Herman (UCLA, Philosophy)

Segment II: Historical Interlude

   Kyla Ebels-Duggan (Northwestern, Philosophy)

8. [Oct. 16] Hegel on embodying morality in social & cultural institutions
   Terry Pinkard (Georgetown, Philosophy)

   William Blattner (Georgetown, Philosophy)

Segment III: Preview of the following semester’s trilateral-comparison issues

10. [Oct. 30] Introduction to the issue of religious freedom
    Michael Kessler (Georgetown, Government, Law, and Berkley Center)

11. [Nov. 6] Introduction to the ethics of global warming
    Madison Powers (Georgetown, Philosophy)

Segment IV: Intertemporal cases: Moral change in progress

12. [Nov. 13] The predicament of illegal immigrants: an anthropologist’s perspective
    Denise Brennan (Georgetown, Anthropology)
13. [Nov. 20] The brave new world of contemporary privacy: a lawyer’s perspective

Anita Allen (U. of Pennsylvania, Law)

14. [Dec. 4] Efforts at urban sustainability: an ecologist’s perspective

Ali Whitmer (Georgetown, Biology)

SPRING 2015

Segment V: The articulation of the moral community via practices and institutions

15. [Jan. 8] Rights, moral powers, and directed duties

Henry S. Richardson (Georgetown, Philosophy)

16. [Jan. 15] Speech acts and the space of reasons

Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance (each Georgetown, Philosophy)

17. [Jan. 22] The critique of cultural practices and social forms

Rahel Jaeggi (Humboldt University, Berlin, Philosophy)

Segment VI: First trilateral comparison: Global warming and the claims of future generations

18. [Jan. 29: German perspective; topic tbd]

Anja Karnein (Goethe University, Frankfurt, Political Science)

19. [Feb. 5: Chinese perspective; topic tbd]

Zhang Xianglong

20. [Feb. 12: U.S. perspective; topic tbd]

Dale Jamieson (NYU, Environmental Studies and Philosophy)

Segment VII: Knitting together a moral community

   **Samuel Freeman (University of Pennsylvania, Philosophy)**

22. [Feb. 26] Religious freedom in the U.S. (see Segment VIII)

   **Martha C. Nussbaum (U. of Chicago, Philosophy, Law, and Divinity)**

23. [Mar. 5] From the governmental to the deliberative social self-determination of rights

   **Klaus Günther (Frankfurt, Law)**

24. [Mar. 19] Socially embodied freedom as a precondition of legitimate social change

   **Christoph Menke (Goethe University, Frankfurt, Philosophy)**

25. [Mar. 26] [topic tbd]

   **Charles Larmore (Brown University, Philosophy)**

_Segment VIII: Second trilateral comparison (cont.): Religious freedom_

26. [Apr. 9] Religious freedom in the People’s Republic of China

   **Li Tiangang (Fudan, History) and Sun Xiangchen (Fudan, Philosophy)**

27. [Apr. 16] Religious freedom in Canada

   **Charles Taylor (McGill, Philosophy)**

_Segment IX: Closing session_

28. [Apr. 23] Justification and ratification

   **Rainer Forst (Goethe University, Frankfurt, Philosophy)**