UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Moral Philosophy

2425-1-E1901R017

Course title

Making Justice: Judgment, Responsibility, Vulnerability

Topics and course structure

"What elements in our experience make us evaluate a choice or situation as ethically just or unjust? "
"Can historical contexts and media influences override our ability to judge what is right? "
"How far do our ethical responsibilities extend beyond the boundaries of our personal lives? "
"Are the conditions of widespread dependence, precariousness and vulnerability of bodies an obstacle to freedom? "

These questions, partly ancient and partly extremely contemporary, bring into play some traditional concepts of moral philosophy: judgment, responsibility, vulnerability. At the same time, they force us to ask whether they are still relevant concepts, whether some of them should be abandoned, or whether in fact they are already being profoundly transformed in the face of the changes that have disquieted our societies in recent decades.

Moral philosophy, yesterday as today, asks these questions, stimulating us to reflect critically on our ability to "do justice" in the world through our choices in the different contexts of personal decision-making, civic engagement and professional educational activity.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge and understanding
At the end of the teaching, the student will know the concepts underlying the main philosophical models of evaluating and justifying ethical choices, with reference to their origin in the work of classical and modern authors such as Aristotle, Kant and Bentham. Will be able to distinguish between principles and consequences, epistemic virtues and moral virtues. Will be able to appreciate the ethico-political relevance of the philosophical concepts of

social justice and the common good, care and judgment, responsibility and vulnerability.

Ability to apply knowledge and understanding
Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to analyze the critical issues that characterize our capacity for moral judgment, with particular consideration for the historical and media conditions within which this capacity is exercised. Explain emerging ethical issues in relation to human technological development and the issue of climate justice. Identify the most relevant ethical issues that have arisen within contemporary feminist reflection on the ethics of care, processes of capacitation, and the vulnerability of bodies. Deliberate, individually and in groups, about the course of action to take when faced with ethically problematic and dilemmatic situations.

Autonomy of judgment
By the end of the course, the student will be able to philosophically articulate some basic ethical justifications for his or her own conduct and to reflexively evaluate his or her own role as a professional in education in light of a plurality of ethical-political ideals and values.

EXTENDED COURSE PROGRAM

The course program is divided into sections that, in succession, make up the proposed course.

1. Ethical choice.
This introductory section identifies some philosophical issues that lie at the heart of any personal and professional choice that seeks to qualify as "right" not only because it is technically "correct" or because it is "respectful" of existing laws, but because ethically it is what it appears good to do and right to do. Starting with some cases, both theoretical and historical, some of the most influential ethical models in the history of philosophical thought will be explored: deontological ethics (I. Kant), utilitarian ethics (J. Bentham), and virtue ethics (Aristotle). Consideration will be given in particular to how these different models highlight different aspects of moral experience (principles, values, consequences, habits) and how ethically difficult choices in personal and professional settings can be read differently on that basis.

2. Judgment
This section examines a first key concept in moral reflection, that of "judgment" as the ability to discern good and evil, justice and injustice. In particular, it considers how the experience of propaganda and totalitarianism in the twentieth century prompted a critical revision of this concept, which is again in question today in the debate over the powerful influence of the Internet and social media on individuals' opinions and orientations. Discussing some examples of contemporary crises of democratic principles of freedom and equality (rise of authoritarian movements, persecution of minorities, polarization of political opinions) we will look for some possible response strategies in the texts of authors such as Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil and Byung-Chul Han.

3. Responsibility
This section will examine a second key concept in moral reflection, that of "responsibility" as a need to "answer for" one's actions but also as a desire to "respond to" situations of suffering and injustice. In particular, it will consider how since the second half of the twentieth century the realization of the impact that technological development is having on the planet has led to a reconsideration of the very idea of responsibility, extending it from its previous boundaries. Texts by authors such as Hans Jonas and Bruno Latour will be discussed, to explore these changes and question our ability to make ethical-political choices in relation to the future.

4. Vulnerability
This section examines a third key concept in moral reflection, that of "vulnerability," which has become increasingly central to the recognition of the ethical weight of the bodily dimension of human experience, with its diversity and fragility. A number of texts by philosophers Eva Feder Kittay, Martha Nussbaum and Judith Butler will offer theoretical and practical insights to focus on the contribution of feminist reflection and discuss some ethically problematic cases drawn from the field experience of educators and social workers in light of the ambivalent relationship between ethics of care and social justice.

Conclusions: ethics education and ethics of education

In this last, short section of the course, we ask about the ancient but ever-present relationship between ethics and education. In light of the course taken, it will be highlighted how the development of ethical reflection in contemporary times goes hand in hand with the responsibility to introduce each person to the exercise of judgment, the extension of responsibility and the recognition of vulnerability. In this sense, an ethical component is inscribed in the task of the educator, not simply as a set of norms or principles that are added from the outside to educational practice, but as an impulse that informs educational practices by directing them to the liberation of people.

Objectives

The course aims to provide basic philosophical tools to **analyze difficulties and dilemmas in personal and professional ethical choice, exploring how some contemporary issues have led to a reconsideration of some key concepts** from the great traditions of moral philosophy.

In particular, students are offered a pathway that, after introducing some of the major models of ethical thought:
(i) considers the challenges that authoritarian systems and communication technologies pose to individuals' capacity for moral **judgment**;
(ii) investigates the progressive broadening of the concept of **responsibility** to include natural and environmental dimensions;
(iii) focuses on the growing centrality of the category of **vulnerability** within the debate on the ethics of care and social justice.

In general, starting with the analysis of ethical cases and public controversies, we aim to develop, individually and in groups, the capacity for ethical reflection and deliberation in these different areas, with a particular focus on the relationship between ethical reflection and places of education.

Methodologies

The course uses a combination of different teaching methods. **All lectures consist of a part in which ideas, authors and texts are presented** (delivery mode for about **60%** of the lecture) and **a part devoted to critical discussion of lecture topics and group deliberation on ethical cases** (interactive mode for about **40%** of the lecture).

Overall therefore, the teaching consists of **28 lectures of 2 hours for a total of 56 hours divided into approximately 33 hours of didactic delivery and 23 hours of interactive teaching**.

All activities are conducted in presence but at the same time a curated selection of the teaching conducted in class is video-recorded and made available to non-attending students to support their study activities.

Teaching is delivered in **Italian**, but the professor is available to support students speaking in **English and French** outside of class.
The entire course bibliography is also available in English.
The **final exam** can be taken by international students **also in English and French**.

Online and offline teaching materials

The materials used during the course will be made available to students in parallel with the lessons.

Open discussion, the answer to shared questions and the discussion of ethical cases drawn from the field experience of professionals and educators constitute a central element of the course. In this sense, **the presence and interactive participation of the greatest number substantially enriches everyone's learning experience**.

At the same time, for **working and non-attending students**, audio-video recordings will be made available to support personal study: these will be short videos dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the texts included in the bibliography. The **purpose of this approach is to ensure to all those who cannot attend the course that they can still access a selected collection of small video-lessons** which facilitate them in the choice of texts to present for the exam and support them in their reading.

Programme and references

The bibliography of the course includes a reading of your choice for each of the sections of the course. The study of these texts is accompanied by the study of the materials used in class and always available online. The texts will all be presented during the course, thus facilitating the choice according to the interests of each. No preliminary reading is required for the course itself.

1. For the section "Ethical choice"

Michael Sandel, *Justice. What's the Right Thing to Do?*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2010, ch. 1, 2, 5, 8.

2. For the section "Judgment"

Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, Schocken Books, New York 2003, Part I ch. 1, 3, 4 and Part II ch. 3.

OR

Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*, Stanford University Press, Redwood 2015.

3. For the section "Responsibility"

Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, ch. 1, 5.

OR

Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth. Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2018,

4. For the section “Vulnerability”

Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor. Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*, Routledge, London and New York 2020, Introduction and ch I, II, VI.

OR

Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development. The Capabilities Approach*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, Introduction and ch. II, IV.

OR

Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2015, ch. 1, 4, 6.

Programme and course bibliography are the same for attending and non-attending students. Audiovisual materials will be available to support the non-attending students in choosing and approaching the books in bibliography.

For non-attending students who seek further support to their understanding of the course framework, it is possible to read:

5. Mark Timmons, *Moral Theory. An Introduction*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham and New York 2013.

Assessment methods

Method of verifying learning

The assessment is through a final oral-only test, structured in four questions, each of which tests a specific area of learning, as follows: one question on the introductory course section on Ethical Choice, one question on the section on Judgment, one question on the section on Responsibility, one question on the section on Vulnerability. There are no midterm exams.

The final exam can also be taken by international students in English and French.

Evaluation criteria

The final grade is expressed in thirtieths and takes into account, according to a weighted average, the evaluation of three areas of knowledge and competence:

(a) Knowledge of the basic theoretical elements contained in the lecture materials and texts in the bibliography (40% of the grade);

(b) Argumentation and analysis skills applied to the connections between the course topics and the ethical cases considered (35% of the grade);

(c) Ownership of language, precision and order in the exposition of the topics during the colloquium (25% of the grade).

Office hours

The teacher is gladly available to students to arrange a meeting by appointment, in person or remotely.

Programme validity

The programs are valid for two academic years.

Course tutors and assistants

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Sustainable Development Goals

NO POVERTY | QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS