

Lecture 01: Central Themes

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The six themes:

- *Mind* What good is your perceptual awareness of the objects around you?
- *Thought & Language* What's special about having two names for one thing?
- *Politics* Are you responsible for the harm of world poverty?
- *Metaphysics* What is necessary for your personal survival?
- *Action* Of the events involving you, what determines which are your actions?
- *Ethics* Who, if anyone, has the right to determine whether you should die?

1. Mind

'If psychologists can really identify something that deserves to be called perception without awareness, they must have an operational grasp on not only what it takes to perceive something, but on what it takes to be conscious of it. If this is really so, philosophers have something to learn from them [...] about what consciousness [...] does' (Dretske 2006, p. 148)

2. Politics

'The usual moral debates concern the stringency of our moral duties to help the poor abroad. Most of us believe [...] that it isn't very wrong of us to give no help at all. Against this popular view, some (Peter Singer, Henry Shue, Peter Unger) have argued that our positive duties are quite stringent and quite demanding; and others (such as Liam Murphy) have defended an intermediate view according to which our positive duties, insofar as they are quite stringent, are not very demanding. Leaving this whole debate to one side, I focus on what it ignores: our moral duties not to harm. We do, of course, have positive duties to rescue people from life-threatening poverty. But it can be misleading to focus on them when more stringent negative duties are also in play: duties not to expose people to life-threatening poverty and duties to shield them from harms for which we would be actively responsible' (Pogge 2005, p. 5).

'The common assumption [...] is that reducing severe poverty abroad at the expense of our own affluence would be generous on our part, not something we owe, and that our failure to do this is thus at most a lack of generosity that does not make us morally responsible for the continued deprivation of the poor' (Pogge 2005, p. 2).

3. Ethics

'Velleman (1999) [...] considers that a person's well-being can only matter if she is of intrinsic value and so that it is impermissible to violate a person's rational nature (the source of her intrinsic value) for the sake of her well-being. Accordingly, he holds that it is impermissible to assist someone to die who judges that she would be better off dead and competently requests assistance with dying. The only exception is when a person's life is so degraded as to call into question her rational nature, albeit he thinks it unlikely that anyone in that position will remain competent to request assistance with dying. This position appears to be at odds with the well-established right of a competent patient to refuse life-prolonging medical treatment, at least when further treatment is refused because she considers that her life no longer has value for her and further treatment will not restore its value to her' (Young 2019).

References

- Dretske, F. (2006). Perception without awareness. In T. S. Gendler & J. O. Hawthorne (Eds.), *Perceptual Experience* (pp. 147–180). Oxford: OUP.
- Pogge, T. W. M. (2005). World Poverty and Human Rights. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 19(1), 1–7.
- Young, R. (2019). Voluntary Euthanasia. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 ed.). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.