

International Ethics

Course description

This course introduces students to the role of ethical considerations in international politics. It focuses primarily on ethical questions raised by the existence of an international system, that is, the fragmentation of humankind to territorially separated political and cultural communities. Does morality, as realists say, have almost no role to play in international politics? Or is it, in contrast, fundamental to how it functions? Do our ethical obligations cross borders? Are they rooted in our universal human nature or in particular cultural and political communities? Should we offer hospitality to outsiders? How can we think of war in ethical terms? These are some of the questions discussed during this course. A detailed list of readings and tasks will be distributed at the beginning of the semester.

Learning outcomes

Students who complete this course successfully will be able to:

- understand, contrast and apply the major approaches to ethics
- understand the specific ethical problems raised by the international and intercultural context of global politics
- recognize and appreciate the role of normative thinking in the making and analysis of foreign policy
- critically discuss some of the most important ethical dilemmas in international politics
- argue in speech and in writing with the use of ethical arguments

Assessment

Participation in class discussions

Short weekly assignments on the readings

Discussion inner circles

Take-home exam

Indicative content of the course

1. Introduction: asking and answering ethical questions
2. What are our obligations towards the poor? Global poverty and cosmopolitanism(s)
3. Cosmopolitanism and ethical theories: utilitarianism and deontology
4. Cultural relativism and pluralism
5. The ethics of realism
6. Borders I. Patriotism and nationalism
7. Borders II. Migration and refugees
8. Borders III. Cross-border harm: the ethics of climate change
9. Just war theory I. Going to war – Iraq 1991, 2003
10. Just war theory II. Conducting a war – Israel in Gaza
11. Just war theory III. Humanitarian intervention – Kosovo
12. Just war theory IV. Sanctions – Venezuela
- 13-14. Transitional justice and post-conflict reconciliation / The ethics of automated weapons / Drone warfare and targeted assassinations / The virtues of the decision-maker