



Ethics and Society

POLI 27

Background

- ▶ “All students will eventually confront **moral problems** with social, political, or legal dimensions in their roles as citizens, scholars, professionals, parents, members of their communities, and as human beings with responsibilities to other nations and peoples.”
- ▶ “Democracy works only when citizens have **sufficient knowledge and understanding** of moral theory and practice to make decisions that have a significant impact on the lives of others.”

Course Objectives

- ▶ Learn **how to conduct moral discussion** (what is right for me to do, or right for us to do) and how to clarify our political values.
- ▶ Learn about common **moral theories** and the reasons given for them.
- ▶ Learn how contemporary political philosophers **conduct argumentation and analysis.**
- ▶ Know some of the ways to understand the ideas of **liberty, equality, and justice.**

Course Objectives

- ▶ "Democracy works only when citizens have sufficient **knowledge** and **understanding** of **moral theory and practice** to make decisions that have a significant impact on the lives of others. Warren College is dedicated to the ideal of **informed, engaged, morally sensitive citizenship**, and considers Ethics and Society to be a principal means of achieving this ideal."
- ▶ POLI/PHIL 27 and 28 are taught either by **political theorists** from the Political Science Department or by **moral and political philosophers** from the Philosophy Department.
- ▶ *Political theory* is the subfield of political science that deals with **moral** and **conceptual** questions and the history of political thought. Compared to philosophers, political theorists tend to be more interested in questions of political morality and are often interested in the proper design of political institutions, especially justification and design of the state which claims coercive powers over us.

Where are we going?

- ▶ The course begins with an introduction to **moral reasoning** and **moral theories**. A common method of comparing values is **cost-benefit analysis** of a range of options. That has some relevant application, but we'll soon see how it can fall short.
- ▶ There are several families of moral theories, and each is an effort to make coherent commonly experienced and shared **moral intuitions**.
- ▶ After this, we'll look at **political belief systems**, examining the role moral theories play in their justification.
- ▶ Next, we'll examine **social norms**, the role they play in supporting a given moral order, and how norms might be changed.
- ▶ Finally, we'll think about the role of **government** in coordinating and setting these norms, and the **toleration** necessary to make it work.

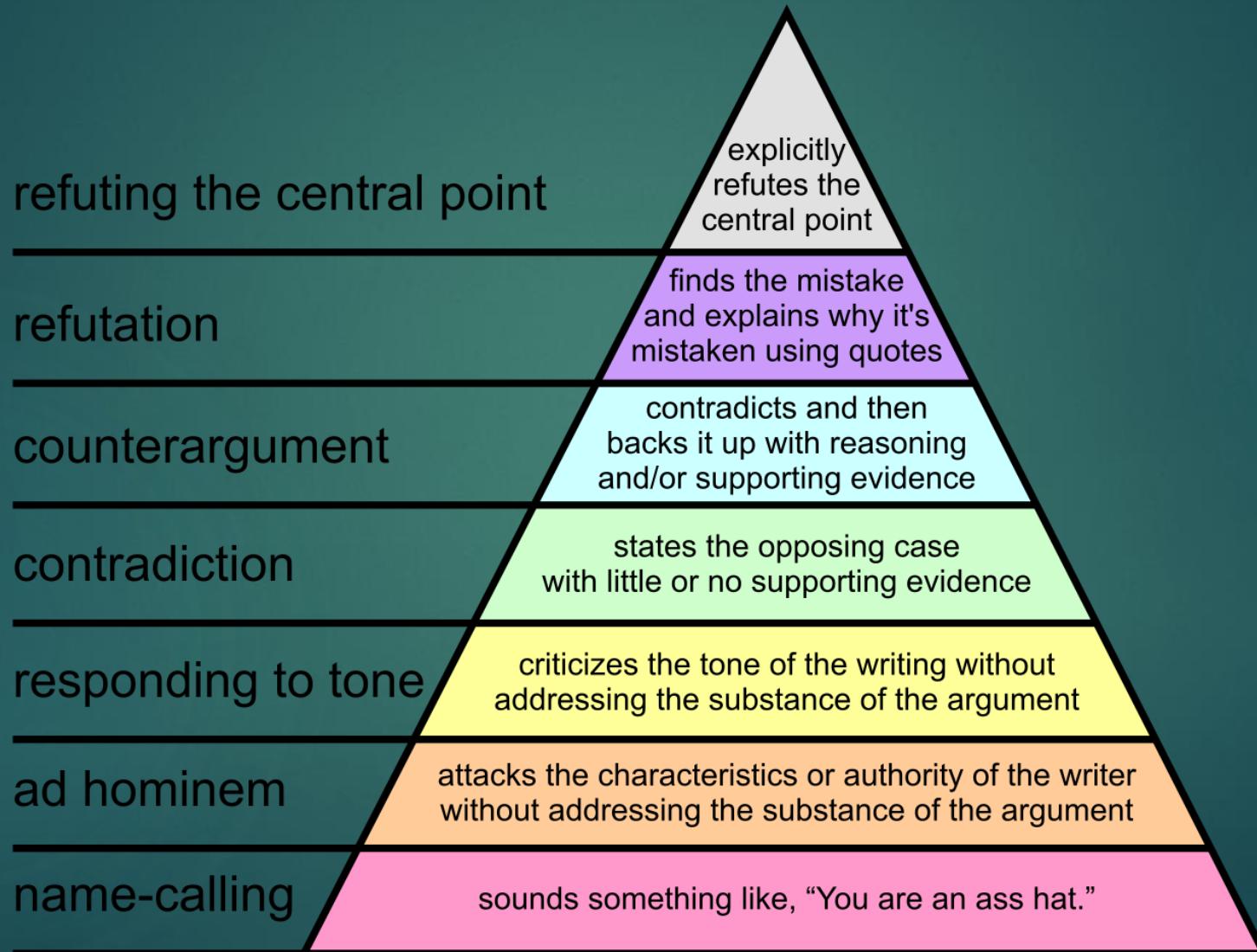
How to Succeed

- ▶ Attend the lectures or watch asynchronously
- ▶ Do the assigned reading
- ▶ Attend Tyler's weekly discussion section
- ▶ Participate in the online discussion board
- ▶ Plan ahead for the midterm and final
 - ▶ These will be essay exams
 - ▶ Prompts distributed in advance
 - ▶ This material is different. Plan ahead.

Here's how your **final grade** will be calculated:

- Discussion Section Attendance - 10%
- Discussion Section Participation - 20%
- Midterm Essay (due 8/18) - 30%
- Final Essay (due 9/3) - 40%

Graham's Hierarchy of Disagreements



Before we get started

- ▶ *You won't be graded on the basis of your political views.* In this course we will study and discuss personal and public values, conceptions of justice, and people's political and moral beliefs.
- ▶ Sometimes instructors may take a position opposite to the one on the floor in order to ensure that many considerations are brought to bear on the question; it need not be and probably is not their own view.
- ▶ You are encouraged to state and defend your beliefs forthrightly (or you may discuss the issues hypothetically and impersonally, as you please). All viewpoints are welcome.
- ▶ Participate! This is going to be fun.

Academic Integrity

- ▶ *Academic Integrity.* We will abide strictly by standards of academic honesty. That means you must compose your own answers to the writing assignments, and you must provide proper citations for written work that you submit. You are expected to review USCD academic integrity requirements here:
- ▶ <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/faq/index.html>Links to an external site.
- ▶ All student writing submitted in this course will be automatically scanned for plagiarism. If you didn't compose it yourself, don't submit it. If you used sources to help you develop your ideas, cite them.

Reading for Monday 8/2

- ▶ Michael Tomasello and Amrisha Vaish - Origins of Human Cooperation and Morality
- ▶ Herman Tavani - Ethical Concepts and Ethical Theories (selections)
- ▶ John Rawls - Selections on Reflective Equilibrium

Tomasello and Vaish - Origins of Human Cooperation and Morality

- ▶ “From an evolutionary perspective, morality is a form of cooperation.”
- ▶ Moral interactions are a subset of cooperative interactions.
 - ▶ “Arguably, the main function of morality is to regulate an individual’s social interactions with others in the general direction of cooperation.”
 - ▶ This means that moral interactions require *reshaping* or *redefining* self-interest.

Tomasello and Vaish - Origins of Human Cooperation and Morality

- ▶ Cooperation in chimpanzee bands: “cooperating in order to compete...the dominance of dominance.”
 - ▶ To what extent do chimpanzees cooperate?
 - ▶ They help others at low cost to themselves.
 - ▶ They share food with others reciprocally.
 - ▶ “Attitudinal reciprocity,” (positive affect), not “calculated reciprocity.”
 - ▶ They form alliances with non-kin for foraging and group defense.
 - ▶ They occasionally hunt collaboratively.
 - ▶ They even take revenge on those who wrong them (negative reciprocity).
 - ▶ What do they *not* do?
 - ▶ Joint attention; second-person engagement, third-party enforcement; concern for reputation.

Tomasello and Vaish - Origins of Human Cooperation and Morality

- ▶ How is *homo sapiens* different?
 - ▶ Cooperative behavior, altruistic actions, third-party enforcement, "cooperative breeding," communication of information the recipient would be interested in, normative expectations.
- ▶ What kind of normative expectations?
 - ▶ Moral norms, social norms/conventions, and social institutions.
 - ▶ Institutions establish joint goals and individual social roles ("status functions").
- ▶ How did this happen?
 - ▶ First stage: "mutualistic collaboration" and "prosocially motivated interactions with specific other individuals," prompted by ecological change. "Individuals had to be good collaborators or else starve."
 - ▶ Second stage: "abstract, agent-neutral, norm-based morality."

Tomasello and Vaish - Origins of Human Cooperation and Morality

- ▶ This change is a big deal. It led to the creation of what the authors call a “joint morality,” where everyone wants to be chosen as a collaborative partner (to improve their own chances of survival), leading them to resist or redefine their own self-interest.
- ▶ In a situation where groups like this were competing against each other, “group life in general became one big interdependent collaboration for maintaining group survival.”
- ▶ “This kind of group-mindedness, underlain by skills of collective intentionality, engendered truly impersonal, agent-neutral, objective social norms.”
- ▶ We may now be going through a new, post-agricultural period of adaptation.

Tomasello and Vaish - Origins of Human Cooperation and Morality

- ▶ How are human infants different from chimpanzees?
 - ▶ Fundamental drive to participate jointly in activities (even when unnecessary).
 - ▶ Prefer prosocial others to antisocial others.
 - ▶ Pay attention to context - help more if a collaborative context.
 - ▶ Imagining others' emotional states (comforting, but only when justified).
 - ▶ Equal division of the fruits of collaborative activities.
 - ▶ Progressive focus on relevant characteristics (desert, equity, need).
 - ▶ Third-party enforcement, agent neutral, disinterested.
 - ▶ Distinguish moral norms from conventional norms (Turiel 2006).
 - ▶ Anticipate others' judgment by applying norms preemptively to self.

Tomasello and Vaish - Origins of Human Cooperation and Morality

- ▶ The authors suggest a two-stage evolutionary account of human moral development.
 - ▶ In the first stage, "humans began to take a mutualistic rather than a purely individualistic approach to cooperative activity...such that they became deeply invested in not only their own but also their partners' welfare—they began to care about the joint nature of their cooperative activities—and they began to care about how they were perceived by others as partners.
 - ▶ In the second stage, "humans began to care not only about their personal interactions and histories with others but also about the more general functioning of the group, which meant keeping track of how individuals (including the self) contributed to or detracted from the group's well-being.

Tomasello and Vaish - Origins of Human Cooperation and Morality

- ▶ The authors suggest that the moral and social development of young children parallels our evolutionary history ("our ontogenetic account parallels our phylogenetic account").
 - ▶ "In their first step toward human morality, young children collaborate with and act prosocially toward other specific individuals.
 - ▶ In their second step, they begin to participate in the social norms and institutions of their culture. These two steps—an initial second-personal morality followed by a more norm-based morality—take infants into a full-fledged human morality."

Tavani - Ethical Concepts and Ethical Theories

- ▶ Ethics: the study of morality
- ▶ Morality: a system of public, informal rules for guiding human conduct, and principles for evaluating those rules.
 - ▶ Principles – the standards against which we evaluate moral rules
 - ▶ Moral systems “prevent harm and promote human flourishing”
 - ▶ Question: what is human flourishing? Harm?
- ▶ A moral dilemma: a situation where we face two choices, neither of which is desirable.

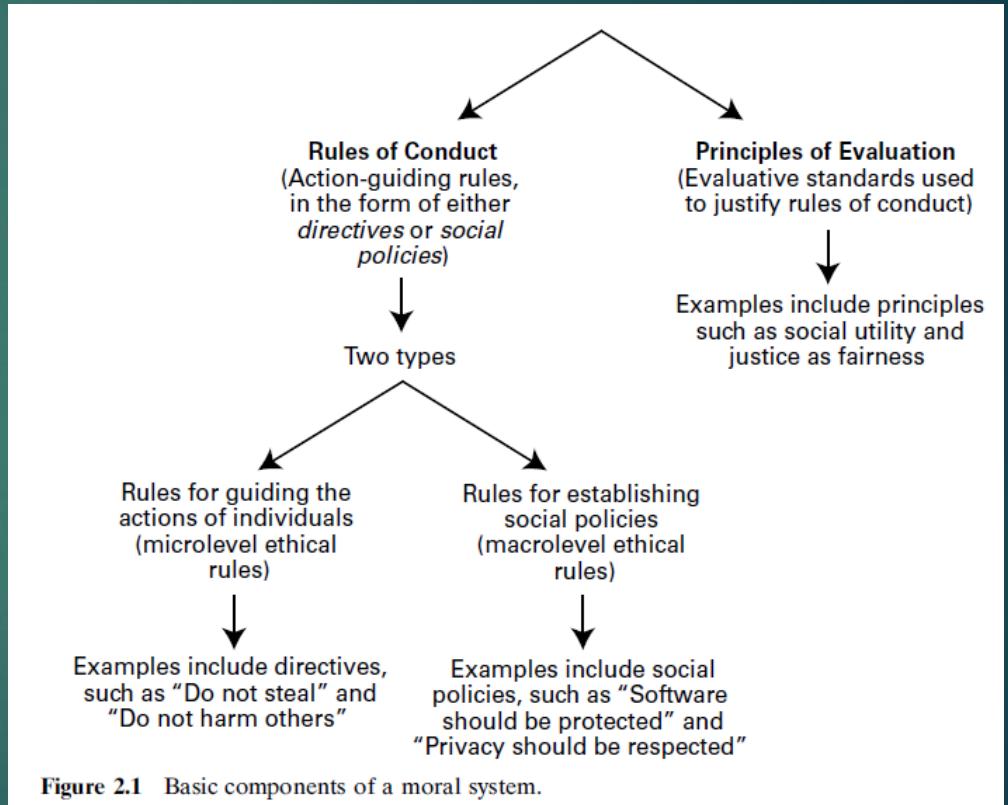


Figure 2.1 Basic components of a moral system.

Tavani - Ethical Concepts and Ethical Theories



- ▶ “Morality is also informal because a moral system has no formal authoritative judges presiding over it. Unlike games in professional sports that have rules enforced by referees in a manner that approaches a legal system, morality is less formal. A moral system is more like a game of cards or a “pickup game” in baseball or basketball. Here the players are aware of the rules, but even in the absence of a formal official or referee to enforce the game’s rules, players generally adhere to them.”
- ▶ *What makes a pickup game work?*

Tavani - Ethical Concepts and Ethical Theories

- ▶ Moral systems tend to be:
 - ▶ Rational
 - ▶ Impartial
 - ▶ Public
 - ▶ Informal
- ▶ Values tend to be either:
 - ▶ Instrumental, or
 - ▶ Intrinsic
- ▶ *Can the moral system (as a whole) ever be justified?*

