

Small acts and big effects

Why should individuals act in a way that promotes Agenda 2030 goals and can we make them do so?

Teachers: Mattias Gunnemyr (Practical philosophy) and Annika Wallin (Cognitive science) plus invited guests.

The course gives a deeper understanding of collective harm cases and the inefficacy problem. Collective harm cases are situations where there will be bad consequences if enough people act in a certain way, but where no individual act makes a difference to the outcome. Climate change, pandemics and consumer choices provide examples. In such situations, each individual might reason along the following lines: "Since my act does not make a difference to the outcome, I have no reason to refrain from performing it". Standing at the supermarket, someone might for instance think "one purchase of a factory farmed chicken does not make any difference to the number of future chickens that are hatched, raised and slaughtered, so I might as well buy one". Still, you might think that this line of reasoning is mistaken. Surely, you might think, she has a reason not to buy the chicken. More generally, you might think that we have reasons not to drive fossil fuel powered cars, ride buses when we are ill, buy factory-farmed chickens, etc. The problem is to tell where the above line of reasoning goes wrong. This is *the inefficacy problem*. During the course, we read and discuss renowned solutions to this ethical problem, including consequentialist solutions, macro-economic solutions, and more.

To this general framework a series of concrete cases are added. Each case centers around what we know about how willing individuals are to promote good outcomes, and what the possible mechanisms for changing individuals' propensity to do so are. The themes relate to how individuals understand issues related to sustainability and how this affects their behaviour (irrespective of good intentions). Cases that will be discussed include (but is not limited to) climate change, consumer choices and dehumanization.

The course consists of a series of seminars, with some invited lecturers, and is planned for week 37 (Monday September 12 - Friday September 16) and week 39 (Monday September 26 - Friday September 30). We plan for 3 meeting days per week (morning + afternoon). The preliminary plan is that we meet Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but we might have to switch from Wednesday to Thursday. A mandatory seminar where students present drafts of their papers is planned for Monday October 24. Final versions of the paper are to be handed in no later than Friday December 2.

Assessment

Examination takes the form of a written paper and a mandatory seminar. First deadline for preliminary course papers is Tuesday October 18. A mandatory seminar where students present drafts of their papers is planned for Monday October 24. Final versions of the paper are to be handed in no later than Friday December 2.