ETHICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

TOPICS

Policymaking shapes the contour and content of our life choices. Political leaders can constrain our options without our knowledge, attach strings to policy benefits, and manipulate us in diverse ways. Lawmaking and campaigning, then, seem to demand heightened moral scrutiny. This course explores whether there are special vulnerabilities that arise in democratic settings. Does our ideal of citizenship make us uniquely susceptible to certain forms of manipulation, from nudging to gaslighting? How can citizens inoculate themselves from the manipulative practices that democracy sustains?

SCHEDULE

1. INTRODUCTION
   Cass R. Sunstein, “Fifty Shades of Manipulation”
   Jason Stanley, “The Emergency Manager: Strategic Racism, Technocracy, and the Poisoning of Flint’s Children”
   30 JAN.

2. NUDGING
   Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, Nudge
   Jeremy Waldron, “It’s All for Your Own Good”
   6 FEB.

3. MANIPULATING CITIZENS: BACKGROUND
   Anne Barnhill, “You’re Too Smart to Be Manipulated By This Paper”
   Moti Gorin, “Do Manipulators Always Threaten Rationality?”
   Case Study Collection Project
   13 FEB.

4. ATTACHING STRINGS
   Ruth Grant, “Why Worry about Incentives?”
   In-Class Simulation: The Moral Limits of Incentives
   20 FEB.

5. INDUCING WORK
   Peter de Marneffe, “Avoiding Paternalism”
   Arthur Ripstein, “Beyond the Harm Principle” (selection)
   Stuart White, “What’s Wrong with Workfare?”
   Jonathan Wolff, “Fairness, Respect, and Egalitarian Ethos”
   27 FEB.

6. POVERTY, FREEDOM, AND THE WELFARE STATE
   Case Study: Designed Unfreedom
   6 MAR.
MANIPULATION: ON- AND OFF-STAGE

7. ELECTORAL GAMING
    James Fishkin, “Manipulation and Democratic Theory”
    Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, Democracy for Realists (selection)
    Niko Kolodny, “Democracy for Idealists”

    Research Paper Prospectus Due: 15 MAR.

8. EXPLOITING IMPLICIT BIAS
    Rima Basu, “The Specter of Normative Conflict”
    Latanya Sweeney, Airbnb
    TBD

9. BULLSHITTING
    Jennifer Saul, “Just Go Ahead and Lie”
    Seana Shiffrin, On Lying, Morality and the Law (selection)
    Todd Rogers, Paltering

10. GASLIGHTING
    Kate Abramson, “Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting”
    Eric Beerbohm and Ryan Davis, “Gaslighting Citizens”

11. CIVILITY, SERVED WARM OR COLD
    Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke, “Moral Grandstanding”
    Cheshire Calhoun, “The Virtue of Civility”
    Jeremy Waldron, “Civility and Formality” & Taunting Lecture

    Optional Draft Research Paper Due: 19 Apr.

12. PANELED PRESENTATIONS: PART 1

13. PANELED PRESENTATIONS: PART 2
    Research Paper Due: May 8

MATERIALS

All course reading are available in PDF form on the course website:

https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/50434
ASSIGNMENTS

(1) Participation:
   a. Active participation in discussion (15%)
   b. Weekly questions (10%): Each week students are expected to submit one or two
      questions the day before the class meeting (Tuesdays, 9p). Points of confusion,
      puzzlement, and bewilderment are encouraged.

(2) Seminar Presentation (15%): This presentation engages with a particular argument in the week’s
    readings. It is based on a short (4-5 page paper), which will be emailed to me by Monday, 5p
    before our Wednesday meeting. Presenters will distribute a handout outlining their argument.

(3) Presentation Response (10%): This two-page paper responds to the week’s seminar presentation.
    A handout is recommended.

(4) Prospectus (10%): This 4-5 page paper proposes the argument of the research paper.

(5) Research Paper (40%): A seminar paper of 25 pages is due May 8. Guidelines on writing a
    research paper will be provided in class. This research paper may be a revised and expanded
    version of your seminar presentation.

The following policies will apply to written assignments: (1) Late papers will be penalized at the rate
of 1/3 of a grade a day; (2) This grade penalty will only be waived in the case of medical emergencies;
(3) Plagiarism, the presentation of another person’s work as one’s own, will be reported to the
Harvard administration; (4) All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Students who need academic accommodations for a disability should contact Student Disability
Resources, 20 Garden Street, (617) 496-8707, TTY: (617) 496-3720, sdr@fas.harvard.edu.