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 the 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”

2. PATERNALISM: SOFT AND HARD
   Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, *Nudge*
   Jeremy Waldron, “It’s All for Your Own Good”
   Richard Arneson, “Nudge and Shove”

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

4. ATTACHING STRINGS
   Ruth Grant, “Why Worry about Incentives?”

5. INDUCING WORK
   Stuart White, “What’s Wrong with Workfare?”
   Lucas Stanczyk, “Productive Justice”
   Jonathan Wolff, “Fairness, Respect, and Egalitarian Ethos”
   Andrew: Kyle

6. POVERTY, FREEDOM, AND THE WELFARE STATE
   Bernardo Zacka, Two papers and interview
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”
   Micro-targeting in campaigns/experiments in elections/Victory Lab
   Parker:
   Colton:

   Research Paper Prospectus Due: 15 MAR.

8. EXPLOITING IMPLICIT BIAS
   Rima Basu, “The Specter of Normative Conflict”
   Latanya Sweeney, Airbnb
   Parental Leave Policies: comparative, Denmark vs. Sweden
   *Vox*, “Denmark gives new fathers paid leave. Why do so few take it?”
   Justas/Ashley

9. INTERGENERATIONAL POLICYMAKING
   Lucas Stanczyk, The place of cost-benefit analysis in a theory of intergenerational justice
   Environmental Preservation and Second-Order Procrastination
   Derek Parfit, Future People, the Non-Identity Problem, and Person-Affecting Principles

10. GASLIGHTING
    Kate Abramson, “Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting”
    Eric Beerbohm and Ryan Davis, “Gaslighting Citizens”
    Seana Shiffrin, On Lying, Morality and the Law (selection)

11. PRIVATIZATION
    Jon Michaels, “Privatization’s Pretenses”
    Chiara Cordelli, ***
    Debra Satz, “Some (Largely) Ignored Problems with Privatization”
    Eric Beerbohm, “The Free Provider Problem”

   Optional Draft Research Paper Due: 19 Apr.

12. TECH & DEMOCRACY

13. MINI-CONFERENCE/DINNER (3–6P)

   Research Paper Due: May 8
MATERIALS

All course readings are available in PDF form on the course website.

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.