LECTURE III: Identifying Bias

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Response Paper I

- Paper Format
- "That" vs. "which"
- Citations
- "etc."
- American vs. British English
  - Commas
  - Footnotes
- Tense
- Dating Systems
Response Paper I

Concerns?
The Failure of Second-Tier Contractualism as a Meaningful Standard for “Reasonableness” and the Consequent Curiosity of Contractualist Reasonableness Assessments.

Or: You Shouldn’t Have Told Your Cousin’s Exams, But You Didn’t Need Someone to Tell You That

How a particular ethical philosophy acquires the answers it does is a question whose difficulty justifies its response. Unlike in a highly theoretical field such as mathematics, the output of ethical reasoning is often obscured by the complexities introduced by natural-language processing and emotional interference. But unlike a highly empirical field such as the experimental sciences, the object that reasoning studies—right and wrong—is difficult to define and may not exist at all. It may seem, then, that the output of moral decisions cannot be grounded in anything substantive. If the methods behind them are prone to subjectivity and error but their accuracy impossible to verify through comparison with some external object, it might be very difficult to prove that they have any meaning beyond their input. Discerning the nature of this input, then, seems an important step in understanding moral decision-making.

Contractualism is a moral philosophy developed within the last two decades by Harvard professor T.M. Scanlon, for which such a discernment of input is particularly interesting. Contractualism holds that “an act is wrong if and only if any principle that permitted it would be one that could reasonably be rejected by people with the motivations [to find principles for the general regulation of behavior].” To a contractualist, wrongness is not a property to be discerned in nature but rather a quality that humans define as “mirroring the possibility of reasonable rejection by others.”

According to contractualism, a moral decision is characterized by the following statements:

- First, a moral agent assesses her reasons for a particular action, a feat that Scanlon holds can be achieved with satisfactory accuracy by a person so motivated. A Scanlonian “reason” is an incredible primitive explanation for one’s behavior. Reasons are “irreducibly primitive” because they evince all justifications (desire, intention, belief, etc.) for a particular action. Regardless of the irreducibility, however, their content is highly variable. A reason for an agent’s refusal to tell the lieousness of a lie is left to be by a late reviser, for example, may range from agent-revised justifications.

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1 While the term “contractualism” has a history longer than that of Scanlon’s work in the field, a variety of the work in the paper refer to the Scanlonian sources on account of his 1988 book, What We Owe to Each Other (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1988).

2 Scanlon, T.M., What We Owe to Each Other (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1988).

3 The scope of what constitutes an “act”—as one can refer to, for example, the act of believing—is an interesting question that is, however, not central to this analysis.

4 The language of reasons is central to an adequate description of the structure of our own practical reasoning and also to our relations with others, such as the organization of our forms of communication and our recognition of acts as offshoots.
Correct: The Kingdom of Wei was the Three Kingdoms-era region that was managed by Cao Cao.

Incorrect: The Kingdom of Wei was the Three Kingdoms-era region, which was managed by Cao Cao.

Incorrect: The Kingdom of Wei was the Three Kingdoms-era region.
“That” vs. “Which”

Incorrect: One example of such a region was the Kingdom of Wei *that was managed by Cao Cao*.

Correct: One example of such a region was the Kingdom of Wei, *which was managed by Cao Cao*.

Correct: One example of such a region was the Kingdom of Wei.
Citations

- Require footnotes and bibliography
- Chicago Manual of Style
- FULL citations required
- Can say “Ibid., x-y” for serial citations from same source (in footnotes only)
- Do NOT necessarily follow citation format of sources!
Citations

- **Book**

- **Article in a scholarly journal**
  - **Footnote:** Richard Jackson, "Running Down the Up-Escalator: Regional Inequality in Papua New Guinea," *Australian Geographer* 14 (May 1979): 180.

- **Lecture**
  - **Footnote:** Stacy D’Erasmo, “The Craft and Career of Writing” (lecture, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, April 26, 2000).
"Etc."

- Suggests lack of thought and intellectual sloppiness
- Use more precise alternatives:

**Bad:** The early Mesopotamians cultivated wheat, rice, barley, etc.

**Better:** The early Mesopotamians cultivated wheat, rice, barley, and other crops.

**Best:** The early Mesopotamians cultivated wheat, rice, barley, and other cereals.
Common British-English Mistakes: Footnotes

Incorrect (British English)
“After an investigation of virtues and a discussion of talents, no one was found to match the marquis of Chieh-tu-t’ing, Liu Hung... May Liu Hung be the heir of the late emperor.”

Correct (American English)
“After an investigation of virtues and a discussion of talents, no one was found to match the marquis of Chieh-tu-t’ing, Liu Hung... May Liu Hung be the heir of the late emperor.”
Some reasons behind the decline of centralized power in the Eastern Han include factional politics, popular uprisings and natural disasters.

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Historical argumentation: Past

Direct analysis of a document: Present

Key Concept: CONSISTENCY!
B.C./A.D. vs. B.C.E./C.E.

B.C.E. (before Common Era)  C.E. (Common Era)
B.C. (Before Christ)       A.D.: (Anno Domini: In the year of our Lord)

C.E./B.C.E. secular and therefore preferred.
Again, consistency is the key here!
Vocabulary Quizzes

- Extremely important
- Must study in small pieces
- Grades matter because grades = effort

ASSIGNMENT: Write a coherent paragraph using every word that you missed (in either spelling or definition) at least once. Please include this paragraph in the same file as Response III.
“My teacher said that the school has tough new standards and I need to improve my vocabulary. What’s vocabulary?”
What is bias?

Is it intentional or unintentional in research academia?

Why might it be intentional?

Why is it important to recognize it?

Can we avoid it?
Close Reading for Bias
Tone

Sympathetic

Condemnatory

Laudatory

Conciliatory

Adamant

Self-righteous

... and myriad other attitudes
“The dynasty established by Liu Xiu was even more autocratic than the Western Han. Although he gave titles and fields to his followers, he did not allow them to share in real power. He also took direct control of the department handling imperial documents, making it an office directed by the emperor which could decide on policy and issue orders to the whole country. The reputed three chancellors, i.e., the chancellor of civil administration, the chancellor of military affairs and the great censor, no longer had any real power, while the inspectors in the localities were empowered by Liu Xiu to watch over or impeach officials in the prefectures and counties and the lords of the fiefdoms by circumventing the chancellors and approaching the court directly. He also made use of the current Taoist practice of making prophecies, which was very popular among politicians, to add mystical color to his regime.”
“Liu Xiu was very magnanimous and good at employing talents. During a lesson from Wang Mang, he limited the power of the relatives of his mother or wife in interfering in state affairs, and prevented the heroes who made contributions to the country from taking control of the armed forces. The three chancellors---the Chancellor of Civil Administration, the Chancellor of Military Affairs and the Great Censor---no longer had any real power, which was instead in the hand of the Cabinet Minister. Locally, Liu Xiu dismantled and annexed more than 400 counties, impaired the local military strength so that the emperor was more powerful. Besides, he abolished Wang Mang’s severe decrees and issued nine orders which prohibited the mistreat [sic] or cruel slaughter of servants and freed the slaves. And he ordered the tithe into one thirtieth so that the society became more stable.”

(Zhang and Wei)
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<td>The group of people or concerns with which/whom the majority of information in a text is concerned.</td>
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“The Yellow Turbans were defeated during February 185. But the court did not profit from its victory for long. Within two months, new rebellions, spawned by the Yellow Turban movement though not necessarily with its religious basis, broke out time and again. Some had fanciful names (Black Mountain, White Wave), some called themselves plainly Yellow Turban. In the end this wave of rebellions proved too much for the court, and the Black Mountain rebels were given the status of local officials, with permission to send in candidates for appointment. When it turned out that this was not enough, the court sent a private army under a warlord against them, as the court’s own army was apparently powerless.”

(Twitchett and Lowe)
“Called the army of the Red Eyebrows because their brows were painted red as a mark of identification, this group, too, is well-known in Chinese history. Meanwhile, scores of big and small insurgent groups rose on the great plain in present-day Hebei and Shandong provinces north of the Huanghe River. At Yuan (modern Nanyang City, Henan Province), 7,000-8,000 peasants led by Liu Xiu and his older brother Liu Yan hoisted the banner of reconstructing the Han empire.”

(Zhang and Wei)
Focus: Level of Analysis

Individuals? Companies? Economies? Regions?

Choice implies belief of importance
“Eastern Han developed certain [sic] relationship with the minorities in the bordering areas. In the early stages of Eastern Han, Xiongnu grew strong, posed a threat to Han again and once even intruded Fufeng, Shandang, Tianshui and other counties. But soon after, Xiongnu was divided into two parts---south and north. Southern Xiongnu King Rizhu followed his grandfather Huhanchanyu’s tittle [sic], leeched on to [sic] Han. On the other hand, Northern Xiongnu controlled Western Regions [sic] and often invaded the south. Eastern Han Dynasty, taking advantage of Northern Xiongnu’s suffering of converging attack and its dispersed forces, sent troops to attack it so as to protect the four counties west of the Yellow River and sought chances to recover transportation with Western Regions. Under the attack of Han Dynasty time and again, Xiongnu was forced to move further towards the west.”

(Zhang and Wei)
“If we look along the northern frontier in a westward direction, the situation between the Chinese and the foreign peoples living there becomes more complex. In A.D. 50, the first emperor of Later Han had permitted a branch of the Hsiung-nu to settle inside the Great Wall.50 In effect, this meant that he had ceded the territory to them, although in Chinese eyes the area remained a part of the empire. During the reign of Ling-ti the arrangement caused no trouble, and in fact it was cavalry of these Hsiungnu that fought on the emperor’s side against the Hsien-pi and the Wuhuan in 177. Toward the very end of the reign, however, succession troubles arose within the leadership of the Hsiung-nu, and one of their leaders who lost this struggle appealed in vain for the emperor’s help. Disillusioned, he joined local Chinese rebels, and was with them when the emperor died.”

(Twitchett and Lowe)
Focus: Omission

The group or groups of people or concerns with which/whom the majority of information in a text is NOT concerned: Generally the conquered, colonized, and oppressed

- Peasants
- Ethnic minorities
- Foreigners
- Women
After the reign of Yuan Di, the difference between rich and poor in terms of property became even more glaring than before. Appropriation of land by influential officials and nobles meant misery for the peasants who, moreover, had to shoulder many other burdens. In the first years of the rule of Emperor Yuan Di, 11 prefectures and fiefdoms suffered floods in which the common people faced starvation. But the feudal nobles, the wealthy landlords and merchants, and corrupt officials continued to lead a life of luxury and debauchery. Class contradictions intensified in the time of Emperor Cheng Di which witnessed a number of uprisings by peasants in different regions and by prisoners doing hard labor. The social crisis grew even more serious during the reign of Emperor Ai Di. Feudal oppression threatened the personal freedom and even the lives of the common people, relegating the difference between rich and poor to a secondary place. Country-wide peasant uprisings could break out at any moment.”
“Wang Mang attempted to ‘Change the Old System in the Nature of Old Traditions’ so as to solve complicated social problems. He decreed that farm land by called ‘royal field’ and maidservants be called ‘private dependents’. [sic] Selling and buying farm land [sic] and servants were forbidden. And he issued imperial edict [sic] to carry out Wujun... He also reformed currency system [sic] and forbade private money-making for [sic] several times. Meanwhile, he constantly changed the local and central official systems and titles, the names of the prefectures and counties as well as the division of administrative areas. He also launched wars against the Xiongnu twice on large scales and forced the heads of the surrounding tribes to hand in the royal seal of Han Dynasty and accept the debased titles conferred by the emperor of Xin Dynasty. The tyranny executed by Wang Mang aroused widespread dissatisfaction, caused social and economic chaos and finally led to the downfall of Wang Mang’s reign.”

(Zhang and Wei)
Take-Home Messages

• It is impossible to present information without bias.

• Texts demonstrate bias in a number of subtle ways, including tone, focus, and attribution of agency.

• By recognizing bias in others’ texts, you can mitigate it in your own.

Never forget that your text has a history, too!
Response Paper: Recognizing Bias

- Outline format: Thesis + three differences you see between the bias of two sources at a time
- As such an exercise in reading as writing
- Use at least 5 vocabulary words from lists so far
- Will be graded on uniqueness, subtlety, and persuasiveness
- Turn into mihrae.assignments@gmail.com
The following five qualities of the Fertile Crescent are enough to satisfactorily explain the earlier emergence of agriculture among people in this region than in other societies across the globe.

- Mediterranean climate
- High climatic variation
- High altitude variation
- High variety of native domesticatable animals (goat, sheep, pig, cow)
- Poor prospects for hunter-gatherers