



Lecture
Thursday, April 24, 2025
11:00am

Steven Fesmire, “Moral Fundamentalism, Stupid Decisions, and the Ends-Means Continuum”

Moral fundamentalists habitually act as if they have access to: (1) the exclusively right way to diagnose moral or political problems and (2) the single approvable practical solution to any particular problem. Building on the pragmatist tradition, I will argue that moral fundamentalism underwrites stupid decisions. In part, this is because it obstructs communication and constricts deliberation about what’s possible. But its implied methodology is even more worrisome, as it asks people to trust ends which are asserted autocratically. Instead of asking people to cooperatively trace varied consequences of the means being proposed, ends like liberty and justice are framed and understood as self-justifying finalities to be won at any price.

Steven Fesmire is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of Philosophy & Religious Studies at Radford University. He is the author Beyond Moral Fundamentalism: Toward a Pragmatic Pluralism (Oxford University Press, 2024). He edited The Oxford Handbook of Dewey (Oxford University Press, 2023), and his books John Dewey and Moral Imagination (Indiana University Press, 2003) and Dewey (Routledge Press, 2015) won Choice “Outstanding Academic Title” awards. A 2009 Fulbright Scholar in Japan, Fesmire’s public philosophy work has appeared in places like Salon, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, and The Humanist.

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