

2015

PHIL-330-52 Seminar: Ethics & Theory of Value

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Philosophy 330
Love, Agency, and the Self
Spring, 2015
Thursdays, 3:10 – 6:10 (RH 308)

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OFFICE HOURS: Friday, 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. I will be happy to make an appointment with you if you cannot meet during my regular office hours.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The people and things we each care about help to shape our *standpoints* on the world: points of view from within which certain things (the fate of a person I love, for instance) loom large, while others seem less important. This point of view is in tension with a more detached view of the world and its claims on us. When William Godwin (1756 – 1836) asked, “what magic is there in the pronoun ‘my,’ to overturn the decisions of everlasting truth?” he expressed the widely held belief that truth, including ethical truth, must issue from a point of view that is *impartial*. According to this compelling thought, the fact that I have a particular point of view, or that someone is my lover, my friend, or my child, can have no bearing on the question what is right for me to do. We will examine the tension between these two points of view – especially, but not only, in ethics. We will take seriously, and do our best to make sense of, the common-sense idea that my standpoint, and in particular whom or what I love, can *change* what I have reason to do, and maybe even what it is morally right for me to do. In the course of considering how this could be so, we will ask: how should we understand the connection between what or whom I love, and who I am? Do we have, or need, *reasons* to love something? Is it necessary, as the clichés have it, to love something or someone in order to lead a life one finds *meaningful*? If so, *why*? And, lying in the background behind all these questions: *what is it* to love or care about something?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Regular and faithful attendance, and thoughtful participation.** Participation is imperative because, simply, the only way to learn philosophy is to articulate philosophical concepts and theses and construct and defend arguments for them. (You’ll find, as I *still* find continually, that it’s amazing what you can *think* you’ve understood until you try to explain it to someone else.) Attendance is imperative because class discussions will suffer, and everyone will be affected, if some people have missed parts of the on-going conversation of the seminar. For these reasons, I take this very seriously. I will take attendance, and unexcused absences *will* lower your final grade. I will close the door at the start of class. If you come after the door is closed, you may enter, but *you will be marked absent for that day*. If you need to miss class, be sure to notify me *in advance* in order to avoid penalty. If you are sick, have a family emergency, or for some other reason are genuinely unable to attend a class, please let me know in advance that you will miss the class. (For this purpose, e-mail is fine.) Class participation will count for 15% of your final grade.

A note on note-taking: Please turn off your laptops, iPads, smartphones, etc. when you enter the class. There will always be some who are tempted by the lure of Facebook, IM, e-mail, etc., and their activity distracts others... and me. For what it's worth, several recent studies have shown that students who take notes *by hand* process and recall the information at *far* higher levels than students who take the same notes on a keyboard. Apparently, writing by hand stimulates parts of the brain tied to recall that are not similarly involved by typing. I recognize that there are special reasons for some to use laptops; if you have such a reason, speak to me, and I will make an exception to the policy accordingly.

- **Moodle Posts.** This class will have its own Moodle site. I will create a discussion thread for each class meeting. The prompt, for each assignment, will be the following:

Pick an argument in one of the readings. (It can be contained in single paragraph, or it might span the length of an article.) Present the argument as clearly as you can, in your own words, and raise at least one objection to it. Next, consider how the author could answer the objection you raise.

Before each class, go to the relevant discussion thread and write 1-2 pages in answer to the prompt. You will all be able to view one another's posts, and are encouraged to respond to one another, in addition to answering the question posed yourself. Contributions must be posted by 12:00, noon on the day of the class to which they relevant, so that I will have time to read them before class. (You are, of course, welcome to add *more* to a thread later on, to continue a previous discussion.) I will not grade these individually, but at the end of the semester, I will re-read all of your discussion-thread answers, and give you a grade based upon them, which will contribute 25% to your final course grade. Students may skip contributing to the discussion thread on up to three occasions over the course of the semester without penalty to their grade.

The purpose of this requirement is three-fold:

- i) It is intended to help you to think about the assignment before class, so that it will be easier for you to ask questions and contribute to discussions in class.
 - ii) It is intended to help me to see, before class, what questions a reading has raised for you, how you're interpreting it, what difficulties you're having with it, etc.
 - iii) **MOST IMPORTANT:** it is intended to help foster discussions between you, which you can continue off-line, out of class. If you do this, you will learn *far more* philosophy from one another than you will learn from me.
- **Presentation.** Once during the semester, you will give a 20-minute presentation introducing one of the readings and opening up discussion. This will make up 15% of your final course grade.
 - **Bibliography, due March 12th.** Your final essay will be, in part, a *research* piece. That means that, in writing it, you must read *beyond* the readings that appear on the syllabus or in the anthology we will use as a course book. In preparation for this, you must submit, in class on Thursday, April 2nd, a bibliography of at least *twenty* readings relevant to a topic on which you are considering writing (none of which may be among the readings assigned for class). The bibliography should be *annotated* with approx. one sentence describing each entry and its relevance to the topic. Your bibliography must include at least *three* items from *each* of the following sources: (i) references contained in assigned readings (or in readings referred to in assigned readings...); (ii) a relevant entry in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*; (iii) the structured bibliography on www.philpapers.org. These will be graded Distinction/Pass/Fail, and may help to pull your final grade up or down.

- **Abstracts, due on April 2nd.** You must submit two abstracts, that is, short digests of *at most* one page each, that record your initial take on what's to be found in two of the items on your bibliography. These will be graded Distinction/Pass/Fail, and may help to pull your final grade up or down.
- **Final Essay. Due at 5:00PM on Friday, May 8th.** Your final essay should be 15-20 pages long, and on a topic of your choosing. As mentioned above, this essay is a research piece. That means that, even if you write primarily about a reading or readings that were assigned, you should engage with some readings *beyond* those that appear on the syllabus. Start early, and plan to speak with me as you begin to develop your ideas; give yourself time to think; write and ruminant and rewrite.

The other thing you should do right away, even before you begin to think about writing your essay, is read this excellent guide to writing a philosophical essay:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

It's worth reading at the beginning of the course, as it can help you to figure out how to engage with the texts we'll be reading. And it's worth reading even though you have written many philosophy essays before, as different instructors look for different things in philosophy essays; this will give you a good idea of what I am looking for.

IMPORTANT: I take essay deadlines very seriously. Unless you have specific permission from me, *in advance*, to hand in an essay late, late essays will be subject to a penalty of one grade increment per day late. I.e., one day late takes you from an A to an A-, two days to a B+, three days to a B, four days to a B-... On the other hand, if asked sufficiently in advance, I will grant reasonable requests for extensions. I do not accept essays by e-mail, except in special circumstances.

ASSESSMENT

There will be no final exam. Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Class participation:	15%
Presentation:	15%
Moodle posts:	25%
Final Essay:	45%

The grades on the bibliography and abstracts may raise or lower the grade calculated on this basis. Poor attendance may lower your final grade.

TEXTS

There are two required texts: Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); and R. Jay Wallace, *The View from Here* (Oxford: OUP, 2014). Other readings will be made available on Moodle.

RESOURCES

Two *very* useful web-resources, which you should spend some time getting to know, are:

- *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*: <http://plato.stanford.edu>
- *The Philosopher's Index*: <http://search.proquest.com/philosophersindex/>

There are links to both of these on the course Moodle site.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS (tentative and subject to revision)

- 1. Jan. 29th Framing the problem: integrating subjective and objective points of view**
 - Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, pp. 1 -109
- 2. Feb. 5th Nagel, again**
 - Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, pp. 110 - 231
- 3. Feb. 12th A case against the subjective view in ethics**
 - Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, chapter 6
 - Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, chapter 9 and pp. 233-234
 - Paul Bloom, *Just Babies*, pp. 101-119
 - Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle*, chapter 4 and 6
- 4. Feb. 19th Is impartiality incompatible with the demands of love?**
 - Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character, and Morality”
 - Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality”
- 5. Feb. 26th A case for partiality**
 - Samuel Scheffler, “Families, Nations, Strangers”
 - Samuel Scheffler, “Morality and Reasonable Partiality”
- 6. March 5th The connection between love and a meaningful life**
 - Watch the movie, *The Philadelphia Story* (1940)
 - Susan Wolf, Romanel Lectures
- 7. March 12th Are there reasons for love?**
 - Niko Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship”
 - Kieren Setiya, “Love and the Value of a Life”

****Bibliography Due in Class****

[Spring Break]

- 8. April 2nd Valuing and the self (1)**
 - Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”
 - Harry Frankfurt, “Identification and Externality”
 - Harry Frankfurt, “The Necessity of Ideals”

****Abstracts Due in Class****

- 9. April 9th Valuing and the self (2)**
- Gary Watson, “Free Agency”
 - Michael Bratman, “Valuing and the Will,”
 - Michael Bratman, “Three Theories of Self-Governance,”
 - Michael Bratman, “A Desire of one’s own”
- 10. April 16th Caring as valuing**
- Agnieszka Jaworska, “Caring and Internality”
 - Some guy named Jeff Seidman, “Valuing and Caring”
- 11. April 23rd Points of view, again (1)**
- R. Jay Wallace, *The View from Here*, chaps 1 + 2
- 12. April 30th Points of view, again (2)**
- R. Jay Wallace, *The View from Here*, chaps 3 + 4
- 13 May 7th Points of view, again (3)**
- R. Jay Wallace, *The View from Here*, chaps 5 + 6

****Friday., May 8th: Final essay due at 5:00PM in RH 209.****

For students with disabilities: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.