

What Morality Demands
PHIL 457D
Fall 2013

Meets Tues/Thur, 10:05-11:30 in Fine Arts 244

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Texts:

All books are available at the bookstore and are on reserve at the library. We will be reading four books. All other readings are on electronic reserves. You must always have a copy of the day's reading with you in class. For readings that are available electronically, either print or bring a laptop so you can refer to the reading in class.

Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*.
Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*.
Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*.
Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor*.

Course Description:

How difficult is moral life? Can there be moral requirements that are impossible to fulfill, thereby making moral failure unavoidable? How demanding can or should moral requirements be? What are the sources of moral requirements? Do moral requirements always override other requirements, such as those arising from the "commands of love"? Are requirements to care for one's dependents *moral* requirements, and how demanding are they? Are human beings capable of meeting an extremely demanding ethics? We will read and discuss recent books and articles in an attempt to think through these and related questions. We will also consider what moral psychology has to offer moral philosophy.

Course Objectives:

- To familiarize students with some recent work in contemporary ethics, particularly on the question of moral demandingness, as well as on what constitutes, and constrains, moral demands.
- To have students develop their own original, critical thinking about each of the covered topics in the field of ethics.
- To have students learn and practice philosophical skills; these skills include understanding difficult texts; analyzing, constructing, and responding critically to arguments; engaging in conceptual thinking; developing, articulating, and defending their own positions both verbally and in writing; thinking in complex and original ways.
- To advance students in their ability to write excellent papers according to the norms of the discipline.

Course Requirements:

Class preparation and participation:

Class preparation and participation is graded according to a point system.

Please avoid scheduling travel, appointments, etc., to conflict with class time. Email me before class time if you are ill and will be missing class. Students who are absent for any reason will receive zero participation points for that day. However, because I will drop the four lowest participation grades for each student, you may be absent four times without this affecting your participation grade. These four permitted absences are intended to cover illnesses and emergencies. More than four absences will result automatically in failure of the course, unless you 1) provide adequate documentation showing that *all* of your absences were due to illness or emergency, and 2) turn in a two page summary of, and original response to, the day's reading, due at the following class meeting (the summary/response will be graded to determine your participation points for that day).

Please do not use an electronic device (phone, laptop, etc) in class for any purpose other than referring to the day's reading or taking notes; do not even have other windows open on your screen. Students who do not abide by this will lose one participation point for that day.

If you are unprepared—namely you did not do the reading, or you did not do the reading carefully enough to understand and explain it—you may still receive one participation point by listening attentively for the full class. Please tell me at the beginning of the class if you have come unprepared, so that I know not to call on you. And, please do not participate in class if you have come unprepared.

If you have done the reading and are prepared to explain it, but you have no well thought out responses to the reading to share with the class, you may receive a total of two participation points—but only if you successfully contribute to an explanation of the reading. Explanations certainly do not need to be perfect in order for a student to receive two points, but they must demonstrate a certain level of reading comprehension, which requires both skill and hard work.

If you have not only done the reading carefully enough to explain it, but you have also spent time mulling over the reading, thinking about how you might either critique it or extend it in interesting ways, and writing your responses down, and you are ready to articulate your ideas to the class, you may earn one additional participation point for a total of three points (but you cannot get this additional point unless you also earned points for contributing to an explanation of the reading, as described above). If you are prepared in this way, please volunteer not only to explain the reading but also to initiate discussion topics and present your own position in a way that creates a dialogue with the author(s) whose work we have read, or with other students in the class. How many points are awarded will depend on the quality of your contribution to the discussion.

There are 17 class meetings for which participation points are available. I will count only your top 13 participation grades. The participation grade is based on the total number of participation points earned in those 13 class meetings:

- A:** 35-39 points (for instance, at least 9 days of 3 points plus 4 days of 2 points)
- B:** 29-34 points (for instance, at least 3 days of 3 points plus 10 days of 2 points)
- C:** 21-28 points (for instance, at least 8 days of 2 points plus 5 days of 1 point)
- D:** 16-20 points (for instance, at least 3 days of 2 points plus 10 days of 1 point)
- F:** 0-15 points (for instance, 2 days of 2 points, plus 11 days of 1 point, or less)

Seminar paper: A 3,000 word (plus or minus 25 words) seminar paper is required. The paper will be due in stages; students will complete two separate 2000-word chunks of writing as part of the process. There will be writing/revising workshops and an opportunity to receive feedback on some of the preliminary writing before completing the final version. More information about the seminar paper will be distributed part way through the semester.

Grading:

40% participation.
10% writing exercises.
50% seminar paper.

Academic Honesty: I follow the Philosophy Department policy on academic honesty (see separate sheet); furthermore, any student who plagiarizes or commits any other form of academic dishonesty will receive an F for the course. Students are responsible for being familiar with, and abiding by, the Student Academic Honesty Code.

Schedule

Participation points are available on dates marked with an asterisk.

Tues, Aug. 27

Introductions

Thur, Aug. 29

In-class exercise: The demands of morality.

Tues, Sept. 10*

Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, chapters 1-3.

Thur, Sept. 12

In-class exercise: Convince a professor to part with 5% of her income (No new reading; preparation for the exercise will be explained on Sept 10).

Tues, Sept. 17*

Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, chapters 4-10.

Thur, Sept. 19*

Peter Unger, "Illusions of Innocence: an Introduction" (chapter 1, pgs. 3-23) in *Living High and Letting Die*.

Tues, Sept. 24*

Garrett Cullity, 2003. "Asking Too Much." *The Monist* 86 (3): pgs. 402-418.

Thur, Sept. 26*

Timothy Chappell, "Impartial Benevolence and Partial Love," in Timothy Chappell, ed., *The Problem of Moral Demandingness*: pgs. 70-85.

Tues, Oct. 1*

Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, chapters 1-2.

Thur, Oct. 3*

Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, chapters 3-4.

Tues, Oct 8*

Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, chapters 5-7.

Thur, Oct 10*

Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, chapters 8-conclusion.

Tues, Oct 15*

Jonathan Haidt, 2001. "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment." *Psychological Review* 108(4): 814-834.

Joshua Greene, 2003. "From Neural 'Is' to Moral 'Ought': What are the Moral Implications of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?" *Neuroscience* 4: 847-850.

Thur, Oct 17

To be watched in class:

Jonathan Haidt (video):

http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind.html

Jonathan Haidt (video): <http://edge.org/conversation/a-new-science-of-morality-part-1>

Tues, Oct 22*

Peter Singer, 2005. "Ethics and Intuitions." *The Journal of Ethics* 9: 331-352.

Thur, Oct 24

Sharon Street, 2008. Read section 5 (pgs 220-223) of "Constructivism about Reasons." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3.

Tues, Oct 29

Writing exercise 1

Thur, Oct 31

Writing exercise 2

Tues, Nov 5*

Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, chapter 1.

Thur, Nov 7*

Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, chapter 2.

Tues, Nov 12*

Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor*, chapter 1.

Thur, Nov 14*

Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor*, chapter 2.

Tues, Nov 19*

Martha Nussbaum. 2000. "The Costs of Tragedy: Some Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis." *Journal of Legal Studies* 29(2): pgs. 1005-1036.

Thur, Nov 21*

Fiery Cushman and Liane Young. 2008. "The Psychology of Dilemmas and the Philosophy of Morality." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12: 9-24.

Tues, Nov 26

To be watched in class:

Frans de Waal (video):

http://www.ted.com/talks/frans_de_waal_do_animals_have_morals.html

Paul Bloom (video): <http://edge.org/conversation/a-new-science-of-morality-part-5>

Tues, Dec 3

First 2,000 word chunk of writing due via turnitin *before* class time (and bring a copy to class).

Writing workshop in class.

Thur, Dec 5

Second 2,000 word chunk of writing due at the beginning of class (bring to class).

Writing workshop in class.

Tues, Dec 10

3,000 word seminar paper due via turnitin *before* class time.

Presentations in class.

Tues, Dec 12

Presentations in class.