

## Contemporary Ethics

PHIL 505

Spring 2014

Prof. Lisa Tessman

Office: Library Tower 1215

Office hours: Thur 9:30-11:30 or by appointment

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### Course Description:

This course serves as the first-year ethics seminar for graduate students in the program in Social, Political, Ethical and Legal Philosophy (SPEL). The course surveys some questions that have been addressed in contemporary, mostly analytic, ethics and metaethics. In addition to studying the more standard topics in ethics, we will also consider what impact empirical studies of people's actual moral judgments should have on philosophical ethics.

### Course Objectives:

- To survey contemporary work in philosophical ethics, and provide graduate students with a background for further study in a variety of areas within ethics.
- To have students develop their own original, critical thinking about the covered topics.
- To have students learn and practice philosophical skills as part of their training to become professional philosophers; 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, but still disciplined, ways.
- To advance students in their ability to write papers that will be accepted for philosophical conferences and/or eventual publication. Students in this course will get practice in writing a conference-length paper.

### Texts:

There are five books to buy:

Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Liam Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford University Press, 2007). Make sure to get the second, revised edition.

David Wong, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Readings for the May 1<sup>st</sup> class are available electronically (under "contents" on Blackboard).

### Course Requirements:

**Class preparation and participation:** Students are expected to prepare for, attend and participate thoughtfully in ALL seminar meetings. Please avoid scheduling travel (other than for academic conferences), appointments, etc., to conflict with class time. However, if you are

ill please do not come to class (or to my office). Do email me before class time if you are ill and will be missing class.

Come to class prepared to:

- 1) explain the day's reading; and
- 2) say at least one original, smart thing that is relevant to the day's material.

Each student may have one day on which you come unprepared. Tell me at the beginning of class if it is your unprepared day. You are not allowed to speak in class on your unprepared day, but you may benefit from listening to others. You are expected to speak in class on all other days. Obviously, it is much better to be well prepared for every class meeting, but do take your one day if you need it.

**Presentations:** Each student will do two presentations: one individual presentation and one joint presentation with another student (these two presentations may not both be on the same book). Plan on speaking for about 15-20 minutes for each presentation; the presentation should lead the class into ideas to be discussed, and you will then facilitate this discussion for about 40 minutes. The presentation should not include any summary of the material that we have read; it should consist of the development of an original idea that engages with the material that we have read for that week (but may also tie back to earlier readings). Be creative with your presentations. You may use a powerpoint or other media if you wish, or ask the class to read something brief that you have written, or do some sort of an exercise that requires active participation from the class. Joint presentations should be developed collaboratively; they should *not* be two separate presentations. You are encouraged to speak with me ahead of time about your presentations.

**Writing Exercises:** One class meeting will be spent doing brief writing/revising exercises.

**Seminar paper:** Seminar papers are expected to draw centrally on the course readings. If you would like to also draw on material not assigned in the class, please check with me first; in any case, the primary focus must be on assigned material. The seminar paper has a strict 3,000 word limit—in other words, it is the typical length of a conference paper (i.e. a paper with a 20-minute reading time). The paper is due on the last day of class, and you will be expected to present your paper (or do a presentation based on your paper) to the class on that day. All papers should be sent to me by email—no hard copy needed. I encourage each of you to meet with me several weeks before the paper is due to start discussing your paper topic, and to continue to consult with me throughout the writing process, to whatever extent this is helpful to you. You may base your seminar paper on one of your presentations. If you wish to coauthor your paper with another student in the class, please speak with me ahead of time about this.

### **Grading:**

The grade is based on the quality of the seminar paper, but can be raised or lowered by as much as one full grade, based on the presentations, the writing exercises, and class participation. Do give serious attention to the *quality*—not just the quantity—of your participation in discussions. If you find it difficult to speak in class discussions, please come talk to me about this *during the first week or two of the semester*, and we will devise a plan for practicing this kind of speaking.

NO INCOMPLETES WILL BE GIVEN UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES

## Schedule

### **Thur, Jan. 30**

Introductions.

### **Thur, Feb. 6**

Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Prologue and Lectures 1 and 2.

### **Thur, Feb. 13**

Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Lectures 3 and 4.

### **Thur, Feb. 20**

Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*. (It is okay to skip the last chapter).

### **Thur, Feb 27**

Writing exercises with peer feedback and revision.

Please have both Korsgaard's and Foot's books with you.

I will be away giving a talk, and will email instructions for the writing exercises to class members before class time. Please meet for the usual time, and please email your (revised) writing exercises to me right after class.

### **Thur, March 6**

Liam Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory*, Chapters 1-4.

### **Thur, March 13**

Liam Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory*, Chapters 5-7.

### **Thur, March 20**

Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, Chapters 1-3.

### **Thur, March 27**

Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, Chapter 4, Chapter 10, and Epilogue.

### **Thur, April 3**

David Wong, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism*, Part I (chapters 1-3).

### **Thur, April 10**

David Wong, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism*, Part II (chapters 4-6).

### **Thur, April 17: no class.**

### **Thur, April 24**

David Wong, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism*, Part III (chapters 7-9).

**Thur, May 1**

Full draft (3,000 words) of seminar paper due at the beginning of class.  
Revising workshop for the last hour of class.

Frans de Waal (video – to be watched in class):

[http://www.ted.com/talks/frans\\_de\\_waal\\_do\\_animals\\_have\\_morals.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/frans_de_waal_do_animals_have_morals.html)

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

Jonathan Haidt, 2013. “Moral Psychology for the Twenty-First Century.” *Journal of Moral Education* 42 (3): 281-297.

**Thur, May 8**

Papers due via email before class time.  
Presentations in class.