

PHI 525. The Project of Moral Theory

What questions must a moral theory settle to be a full moral theory? What are the possible forms that a moral theory can take? Is the project of moral theory misguided?

Meeting time: Wednesdays
1:30-4:20pm

Location: Wooten Hall 201

Professors: Elizabeth Harman
eharman@princeton.edu

Gideon Rosen
grosen@princeton.edu

Part I: The Subject Matter of Moral Theory

September 6

Evidence Relative vs Objective Oughts: Is moral obligation objective or subjective? If subjective, how subjective must it be?

- Peter Graham, “Moral Conscientiousness and the Subjectivism / Objectivism Debate about Moral Wrongness,” *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, 2011
- Michael Zimmerman, *Ignorance and Moral Obligation*, ch. 2

September 13

Actualist vs Possibilist Oughts: Do your obligations now depend how you *would* act later if you did something now, or how you *could* act later?

- Holly Smith (published as Holly S. Goldman), “Dated Rightness and Moral Imperfection,” *The Philosophical Review*, 1976
- Jacob Ross, “Actualism, Possibilism, and Beyond,” *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, 2012

September 20

Rights and Wrongs: What are moral rights and directed duties, and what role do they play in moral theory?

- Gopal Sreenivasan, “Duties and their Direction”, *Ethics*, 2010
- R. Jay Wallace, *The Moral Nexus*, 2019, chs. 2 and 5
- Daniel Muñoz, “From Rights to Prerogatives,” *Phil. and Phen. Research*, 2020

September 27

Moral Status: Which things have moral status? What is moral status?

- Gideon Rosen, “Moral Standing and the Capacity for De Se Thought”, ms.
- Elizabeth Harman, “Creation Ethics: The Moral Status of Early Fetuses and the Ethics of Abortion,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1999
- Elizabeth Harman, “The Ever Conscious View and the Contingency of Moral Status,” in *Rethinking Moral Status*, 2021

October 4

Must and Should: Is anything supererogatory, good to do but not morally required? Is anything suberogatory, bad to do but not morally wrong?

- Elizabeth Harman, “Morality Beyond Requirement,” Chapter One of *When To Be a Hero*, ms.
- Julia Driver, “The Suberogatory,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1992
- Hallie Liberto, “Denying the Suberogatory,” *Philosophia*, 2012

October 11 – **Guest Professor: Richard Yetter Chappell, University of Miami**

Doing without deontology: Does morality tell us what we must do and may do, or simply what is morally better to do?

- Richard Yetter Chappell, “Deontic Pluralism and the Right Amount of Good,” *The Oxford Handbook of Consequentialism*, 2020
- Richard Yetter Chappell, “Permissibility is Overrated,” ms.

Dinner with Richard Yetter Chappell

Fall break is October 16-20.

Part 2: Moral Theories

October 25

Two-stage theories: Is the true moral theory a two-stage theory, like Rule Consequentialism?

- Abelard Podgorski, “Wouldn’t It be Nice? Moral Rules and Distant Worlds”, *Nous*, 2017.
- Caleb Perl, “Solving the Ideal Worlds Problem”, *Ethics*, 2021
- Gideon Rosen, “Might Kantian Contractualism be the Supreme Principle of Morality”, *Ratio*, 2009 (optional)

November 1

Contractualism: Is it true? How could we assess it?

- T. M. Scanlon, “Contractualism and Justification,” in *Reason, Justification, and Contractualism: Themes from Scanlon*, 2021
- Johann Frick, “Contractualism and Social Risk,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2015

November 8

Universalizability and Kantianism: What are the prospects for Kantian moral theory?

- Allen Wood, “Humanity as an End in Itself”, in Parfit, *On What Matters*, Volume 2, 2011
- Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* (selections on Kantian Contractualism), 2011

November 15

Normative Powers: What are normative powers (like the powers of promise and consent), and what role do they play in moral theory?

- Joseph Raz, “Normative Powers”, in Heuer, ed., *The Roots of Normativity*, 2022
- Ruth Chang, “Do We Have Normative Powers”, *Aristotelian Soc. Supp*, 2020

There are no classes on November 22, the day before Thanksgiving.

November 29

Particularist Skepticism about Moral Theory: Are any moral generalizations true? Is the project of moral theory misguided?

- Jonathan Dancy, "Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties," *Mind*, 1983
- Mark Lance and Margaret Little, "Particularism and Antitheory," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, 1979
- Frank Jackson, Michael Smith, and Philip Pettit, "Ethical Particularism and Patterns," in *Moral Particularism*, 2000

December 6

Mini-Conference: Students present their work to the seminar for feedback and discussion.

Getting Credit for the Course:

If you are taking the course for credit (Princeton grad program "unit"; otherwise a grade), please do the following things:

- Write one 5-6 page paper, due in week six. (The short paper is optional for a unit, but required for a grade.)
- Present the argument of your seminar paper at the December 6 Mini-Conference.
- Write one 15-20 page seminar paper, due during reading period (the week after classes end).
(The longer paper can be an expansion of the shorter paper.)

Philosophy graduate student oral units: ask us to schedule an exam in connection with your seminar paper.