

Morality in the Face of Moral Ignorance

Graduate Seminar
Fall 2014
Elizabeth Harman
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Tuesdays, 12noon to 2:50pm
Marx 201
Princeton University

One guiding question for the course:

- What should we think about cases in which someone lacks moral knowledge, or lacks certainty about moral questions?
 - Sometimes people have *false* moral beliefs.
 - Can someone be praiseworthy if she does the right thing while reasonably thinking she's doing the wrong thing?
 - Can someone be blameworthy if she does the wrong thing while reasonably thinking she's doing the right thing?
 - Sometimes people are unsure what the moral truth is.
 - How is praiseworthiness and blameworthiness affected by moral uncertainty?
 - How should someone act in light of her recognition that she is uncertain about the moral facts?
 - If someone is overwhelmingly confident of a certain moral claim, should she take it to be true in deciding how to act?
 - If someone gives *some credence* to the possibility that a particular action is wrong, and she is certain that refraining from performing the action is permissible, should she refrain?

Another guiding question for the course:

- What kinds of factors make blame inappropriate?
(This is a *huge* topic. We will focus on one line of thought within this topic.)
 - Does ignorance exculpate?
 - Does factual ignorance exculpate? If so, when?
 - Does blameless factual ignorance exculpate?
 - Does culpable factual ignorance exculpate?
 - Does purely moral ignorance exculpate?
 - Does ignorance about the overridingness of morality exculpate?

Guest Professors:

We will have six guest professors during the semester. Each guest professor is an author we are reading:

Gideon Rosen, Princeton University: September 30
Nomy Arpaly, Brown University: October 14
Dana Nelkin, University of California at San Diego: November 4
Alexander Guerrero, University of Pennsylvania: November 11
Andrew Sepielli, University of Toronto: November 18
Brian Weatherston, University of Michigan: December 2

There will be small dinners with the guest professors on the days of their visits.

Thanks to the Department of Philosophy and the Center for Human Values for providing funding for these guest professors.

Course Schedule:

This schedule is tentative. It will be revised during the semester.

Week One: Tuesday, September 16

- Holly Smith, "Culpable Ignorance" *The Philosophical Review* 1983
- Gideon Rosen, "Kleinbart the Oblivious and Other Tales of Ignorance and Responsibility" *Journal of Philosophy* 2008

Week Two: Tuesday, September 23

- Gideon Rosen, "Culpability and Ignorance" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, CIII: Part 1, 2003.
- Michelle Moody-Adams, "Culture, responsibility, and affected ignorance" *Ethics* 1994

Week Three: Tuesday, September 30

Gideon Rosen (Princeton) will be a guest professor for this session.

- Gideon Rosen "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility" *Philosophical Perspectives* 2004
- William FitzPatrick, "Moral Responsibility and Normative Ignorance" *Ethics* 2008

Week Four: Tuesday, October 7

- Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Human Agency* 2003
- Nomy Arpaly, "Moral Worth and Normative Ethics," *forthcoming in Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*

Week Five: Tuesday, October 14

Nomy Arpaly (Brown) will be a guest professor for this session.

- Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Human Agency* 2003 continued
- Nomy Arpaly, “Huckleberry Finn Revisited: Inverse Akrasia and Moral Ignorance”

Week Six: Tuesday, October 21

- Elizabeth Harman, “Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?” *Ratio* 2011
- Elizabeth Harman, “Ethics is Hard! What Follows?” (manuscript)

October 27-31: Spring Break

Week Seven: Tuesday, November 4

Dana Nelkin (UCSD) will be a guest professor for this session

- “Difficulty and Degrees of Moral Praiseworthiness and Blameworthiness,” *Nous* (forthcoming)
- “Psychopaths, Incurable Racists, and the Faces of Responsibility,” *Ethics* (forthcoming)

Week Eight: Tuesday, November 11

Alexander Guerrero (Penn) will be a guest professor for this session

- Alexander Guerrero, “Don’t Know, Don’t Kill: Moral Ignorance, Culpability, and Caution” *Philosophical Studies* 2007
- Dan Moller, “Abortion and Moral Risk” *Philosophy* 2011
- Jacob Ross, “Rejecting Ethical Deflationism” *Ethics* 2006
- Ted Lockhart, *Moral Uncertainty and Its Consequences* Oxford University Press 2000

Week Nine: Tuesday, November 18

Andrew Sepielli (Toronto) will be a guest professor for this session

- Andrew Sepielli, “What to do when you don’t know what to do” *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 2009
- Andrew Sepielli, “What to do when you don’t know what to do when you don’t know what to do” *Nous* 2013

Week Ten: Tuesday, November 25

- Elizabeth Harman, “The Irrelevance of Moral Uncertainty,” *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* (forthcoming)
- Brian Weatherson, *Normative Externalism* (book manuscript)

Week Eleven: Tuesday, December 2

Brian Weatherson (Michigan) will be a guest professor for this session

- “Running Risks Morally” *Philosophical Studies* 2014
- Brian Weatherson, *Normative Externalism* (book manuscript) continued

Week Twelve: Tuesday, December 9

- Peter Graham, “Actualism and Possiblism” (manuscript)
- Elizabeth Harman, “A Possibilist View that Rejects Uncertaintyism”

Getting Credit for the Course:

Graduate students in the philosophy department can take the course for credit to earn a unit in either of the following ways:

1. Do one class presentation, write one 5-6 page paper due in week six, and write one 15-20 page paper due during reading period (the week after classes end). (The longer paper can be an expansion of the shorter paper.)
2. Do one class presentation and take a written exam on the course material during reading period. (The exam can have an oral component if that is requested.)

Graduate students in other departments and undergraduate students can take the course for credit and get a grade by taking option 1 above.

Any student auditing the course can give a class presentation.