

PHIL 3280 21st Century Philosophy, Fall 2015

TTH 2:30-3:50, MINS 106

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OVERVIEW

This course will cover three celebrated philosophical works published in the past fifteen years. All three are works of “practical philosophy” which is the broad subset of philosophy that treats reasoning concerning how we ought to act (moral philosophy is a subset of this area). These works take up the questions regarding the content and source of reasons for action from three starkly different perspectives. Parfit’s *On What Matters* takes a position that is consequentialist and realist. That is, roughly, there are reasons pertinent to how we ought to act that are genuine reasons regardless of whether we recognize them or not, and they are reasons that direct us produce the best possible outcomes (with some restrictions). Korsgaard’s *Self-Constitution* is constructivist and Kantian. She thinks that we create reasons through the activity of reasoning itself, and that these reasons direct us most importantly to respect the autonomy of agents. Foot’s *Natural Goodness* is Aristotelian and naturalistic. She holds that there are reasons that we must recognize if we are to exhibit traits of character (virtues) that we must possess in order to be good members of our kind. This course should stimulate you to reflect deeply on the nature of practical reasoning and what it is to act well.

TEXTS

The following texts are available at the bookstore. They are also on reserve through the library.

Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*

Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*

Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*

EVALUATION

Critical Reading Responses (30%)

Each week, you will submit a one or two page response to one of the readings to the Courselink dropbox. These are due no later than class time on Tuesday or Thursday. The paper must do the following:

1. Pick a sentence or two of particular philosophical importance in the reading for that class meeting.* Quote the material at the beginning of your paper. Be sure to note the page number.
2. Explain what it says.
3. Explain why it is of particular importance. In this context, “important” means that it makes a claim that is philosophically important – e.g., an argument, a philosophical distinction, or a statement of methodology.

*Note that you cannot submit a paper on a reading for a previous class meeting. If you are submitting on Thursday, it should concern the reading for that day’s class rather than the reading for the preceding Tuesday.

I will automatically drop three of these grades (or as you may choose to regard it: you only have to do nine out of a possible twelve). I will grade them out of ten points, based on the extent to which they (a) pick out something of genuine philosophical importance, (b) cogently defend that importance, and (c) demonstrate a good faith effort to explain the meaning of the passage.

These will be graded on a 10-point scale as follows:

- 9-10 Excellent: an important passage was selected and fully and accurately explained.
- 7-8 Good: some inaccurate or gap of explanation
- 5-6 Satisfactory: some significant inaccuracy or gap of explanation
- Below 5 Unsatisfactory: serious inaccuracy or gaps, incompleteness

Take Home Mid-Term (30%)

This will consist of a series of essay questions that you will complete at home. There will be four questions that can be completed in approximately 6-8 pages of typed print. The writing in your essay questions will be evaluated according to the rubric printed below.

Take Home Final or Research Paper (40%)

For the final project, you may choose either a take-home final, much like the mid-term but with 6 questions answerable in 10-12 pages of typed print, or, alternatively, a research paper of 10-12 pages in length. In the research paper, you should find and read at least 3 papers published in peer-reviewed journals that discuss one of our texts. Your paper should discuss and critically assess the views in the papers you found.

Here are the criteria that I will employ in assessing your essay questions and papers (rubric from SUNY-Buffalo Department of Philosophy):

	Fails Completely	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Competent	Exemplary
Thesis –10%	No identifiable thesis or thesis shows lack of effort or comprehension of assignment.	Difficult to identify, inconsistently maintained, or provides little around which to structure paper.	Unclear, buried, poorly articulated, lacking in insight and originality.	Promising, but may be unclear or lacking insight or originality.	Easily identifiable, interesting, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, clear.
Structure and style – 25%	No evident structure or organization.	Unclear, unfocused, disorganized,	Generally unclear, unfocused,	Generally clear and appropriate,	Evident, understandable, appropriate for

	No transitions between major points.	lacking in unity, transitions abrupt or confusing, context unclear.	often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions. Does not provide sufficient information, explanation, and context for readers.	though may wander occasionally. May have some unclear transitions or lack of coherence. Does not fully appreciate reader's need for information, explanation, and context.	thesis. Essay is focused and unified. Words chosen effectively. Excellent transitions between points. Anticipates reader's need for information, explanation, and context.
Use of sources (when applicable): 15%	No attempt made to incorporate information from primary and secondary sources.	Very little information from sources. Poor handling of sources.	Moderate amount of source information incorporated. Some key points supported by sources. Quotations may be poorly integrated into paragraphs. Some possible problems with source citations.	Draws upon sources to support most points. Some evidence may not support thesis or may appear where inappropriate. Quotations integrated well into paragraphs. Sources cited correctly.	Draws upon primary and secondary source information in useful and illuminating ways to support key points. Excellent integration of quoted material into paragraphs. Sources cited correctly.
Logic and argumentation -40 - 55%	No effort made to construct a logical argument. Failure to support thesis.	Little attempt to offer support for key claims or to relate evidence to thesis. Reasons offered may be irrelevant. Little to no effort to	Arguments of poor quality. Weak, undeveloped reasons offered in support of key claims. Counter-arguments mentioned without	Argument is clear and usually flows logically and makes sense. Some counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed fully.	Arguments are identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Clear reasons are offered in support of key claims. Author anticipates and successfully grapples with counter-

		address alternative views.	rebuttal.		arguments.
Mechanics 10%	Difficult to understand because of significant problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	Several problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	Some problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	Sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling strong despite occasional lapses.	Correct sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION & LATE POLICY

All assignments should be submitted to me through the Courselink dropbox. Please submit a file in Word or Rich Text Format (no .pdf files please).

All late assignments will be assessed a 10% penalty for every 24 hours late, except in cases of illness or family emergency.

PARTICIPATION & CLASSROOM COMPORMENT

Please note that this is a seminar style course, and so your participation in discussion is expected every class.

Out of consideration for your fellow students, please observe the following rules:

1. No cell phone use, including text messaging.
2. No personal conversations.
3. No laptop use, except for presentations.

I reserve the right to remove you from the classroom if your behaviour is distracting to me or other students.

E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the graduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration see [here](#).

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is November 6. Refer to the Undergraduate Calendar for the schedule of dates: [here](#)

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar [here](#)

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Resources

The Undergraduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs [here](#).

READING SCHEDULE**OWM = PARFIT, *ON WHAT MATTERS*****SC= KORSGAARD, *SELF-CONSTITUTION*****NG = FOOT, *NATURAL GOODNESS***

Date	Topic	Readings/Assignments
Sept 10	Course overview	
Sept 15	Normative Concepts	OWM, 31-42
Sept 17	Objective Theories of Reasons	OWM, 43-57 Reading Response 1
Sept 22	Subjective Theories of Reasons	OWM, 58-82
Sept 24	Subjective Theories of Reasons	OWM, 83-110 Reading Response 2
Sept 29	Rationality	OWM, 110-129
Oct 1	Morality	OWM, 130-149 Reading Response 3
Oct 6	Moral Concepts	OWM 150-174 Reading Response 4
Oct 8	Review and Distribute Mid-Term	

Oct 15	Mid-Term Due by 5:00PM No class meeting	
Oct 20	Agency and Identity	SC 1-26
Oct 22	The Metaphysics of Normativity	SC 27-44 Reading Response 5
Oct 27	Principles of Reason	SC 45-58
Oct 29	The Unity of the Will	SC 59-80 Reading Response 6
Nov 3	Autonomy	SC 81-108
Nov 5	Humanity	SC 109-132 Reading Response 7
Nov 10	The Constitution Model	SC 133-158 Reading Response 8
Nov 12	Review Korsgaard	No Reading
Nov 17	A Fresh Start	NG 1-24
Nov 19	Natural Norms	NG 25-37 Reading Response 9
Nov 24	Human Beings	NG 38-51
Nov 26	Practical Rationality	NG 52-65 Reading Response 10
Dec. 1	Human Goodness	NG 66-80 Reading Response 11
Dec. 3	Review and Distribute Final	

Take Home Final or Paper Due Date: TBA (approximately one week after the end of classes)