

## Morality in the Face of Moral Ignorance

Graduate Seminar

Spring 2009

Professor Elizabeth Harman

eharman@princeton.edu

NEW TIME OF FIRST MEETING: Wednesday, February 4, 12noon-1:20pm, Marx 201

NEW REGULAR MEETING TIME: Wednesdays, 12noon-2:50pm, Room TBA

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 just take up a few lines of thought within this topic.)
  - Does inability to act otherwise exculpate?  
(Also a huge topic, of which we will cover a small area.)
    - Are addicts unable to act otherwise? Are addicts morally responsible?
  - 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 four guest professors during the semester. Each guest professor is an author we are reading:

Gideon Rosen, Princeton University: February 25

Holly Smith, Rutgers University: March 11

Bennett Foddy, Princeton University Center for Human Values: March 25

Peter Graham, University of Massachusetts, Amherst: April 8

## Course Schedule:

Week One: Wednesday, February 4

- Holly Smith, "Culpable Ignorance" *The Philosophical Review* 1983

Week Two: Wednesday, February 11

- Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Human Agency* 2003
- Michelle Moody-Adams, "Culture, responsibility, and affected ignorance" *Ethics* 1994

Week Three: Wednesday, February 18

- Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Human Agency* 2003 continued
- Gideon Rosen, "Culpability and Ignorance" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, CIII: Part 1, 2003.

Week Four: Wednesday, February 25

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

- Gideon Rosen "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility" *Philosophical Perspectives* 2004
- Gideon Rosen, "Kleinbart the Oblivious and Other Tales of Ignorance and Responsibility" *Journal of Philosophy* 2008

Week Five: Wednesday, March 4

- Elizabeth Harman, "Does blameless moral ignorance exculpate?" *unpublished*
- Michael Zimmerman *Living with Uncertainty: The Moral Significance of Ignorance* Cambridge University Press 2008

Week Six: Wednesday, March 11

Holly Smith (Rutgers) will be a guest professor for this session.

- Holly Smith, "Subjective Rightness" *unpublished*
- Niko Kolodny and John MacFarlane, "Ifs and Oughts" *unpublished*
- Niko Kolodny and John MacFarlane, "Ought: Between Objective and Subjective" *unpublished*

March 14-22: Spring Break

Week Seven: Wednesday, March 25

Bennett Foddy (Princeton Center for Human Values) will be a guest professor for this session

- Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the will and the concept of a person” *Journal of Philosophy* 1971
- Bennett Foddy, “A Liberal Account of Addiction” *forthcoming*

Week Eight: Wednesday, April 1

- William FitzPatrick, “Moral Responsibility and Normative Ignorance” *Ethics* 2008

Week Nine: Wednesday, April 8

Peter Graham (UMass—Amherst) will be a guest professor for this session

- Peter Graham, “Ignorance and Blameworthiness” *unpublished*

Week Ten: Wednesday, April 15

- Jacob Ross, *Acceptance and Practical Reason* (dissertation)
- Jacob Ross, “Rejecting Ethical Deflationism” *Ethics* 2006
- Ted Lockhart, *Moral Uncertainty and Its Consequences* Oxford University Press 2000

Week Eleven: Wednesday, April 22

- Andrew Sepielli, “What to do when you don’t know what to do” *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 2009
- “Knowledge and Action” John Hawthorne and Jason Stanley *Journal of Philosophy* 2008

Week Twelve: Wednesday, April 29

- Alexander Guerrero, “Don’t Know, Don’t Kill: Moral Ignorance, Culpability, and Caution” *Philosophical Studies* 2007
- Dan Moller, “Abortion and Moral Risk” *unpublished*

#### Getting Credit for the Course:

Graduate students in the philosophy department can earn a unit in either of the following ways:

1. Take this course for credit: 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).
2. Take a written exam on the course material during reading period.

Graduate students in the politics department can take this course for credit and get a grade by taking option 1 above.

Any student auditing the course can give a class presentation.