

Morality in the Face of Moral Ignorance

Graduate Seminar
Fall 2019
Elizabeth Harman
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Thursdays, 1:30-4:20pm
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 just take up 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 five guest professors during the semester. Each guest professor is an author we are reading:

Gideon Rosen, Princeton University: September 26
Nomy Arpaly, Brown University: October 10
Alexander Guerrero, Rutgers University: October 24
Brian Weatherston, University of Michigan: November 14
Renée Bolinger, Princeton University: December 5

There will be small dinners with the guest professors (except with Gideon Rosen, whose visit falls on the day of the Philosophy fall reception).

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: Thursday, September 12

- 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: Thursday, September 19

- 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: Thursday, September 26

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: Thursday, October 3

- Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Human Agency* 2003, Chapters Two and Three (Optional: Chapter One)

Week Five: Thursday, October 10

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

Professor Arpaly will give a talk titled “Deliberation and Fetish”.

- Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Human Agency* 2003, Chapter Five

Week Six: Thursday, October 17

- Elizabeth Harman, “Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?” *Ratio* 2011
- Elizabeth Harman, “Ethics is Hard! What Follows?” (forthcoming)
- Brian Weatherson, selections from *Normative Externalism* 2019

Week Seven: Thursday, October 24

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

- Alexander Guerrero, “Don’t Know, Don’t Kill: Moral Ignorance, Culpability, and Caution” *Philosophical Studies* 2007
- Alexander Guerrero, “Intellectual Difficulty and Moral Responsibility,” in *Responsibility: The Epistemic Condition* 2017.
- Andrew Sepielli, “What to do when you don’t know what to do” *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 2009
- Optional: Dan Moller, “Abortion and Moral Risk” *Philosophy* 2011
- Optional: Jacob Ross, “Rejecting Ethical Deflationism” *Ethics* 2006

October 26 – November 3: Fall Break

Week Eight: Thursday, November 7

- Brian Weatherson, selections from *Normative Externalism* 2019

Week Nine: Thursday, November 14

- Brian Weatherson (Michigan) will be a guest professor for this session
- Brian Weatherson, selections from *Normative Externalism* 2019

Week Ten: Thursday, November 21

- Elizabeth Harman, “The Irrelevance of Moral Uncertainty,” *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 2015
- Andrew Sepielli, “How Moral Uncertainty Can Be Both True and Interesting,” *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics* 2018.

Week Eleven: Thursday, December 5

- Renée Bolinger (Princeton) will be a guest professor for this session
- Renée Bolinger, “Moral Risk and Communicating Consent,” forthcoming

Week Twelve: Thursday, December 12

- Reading TBA
- Some student paper presentations

Getting Credit for the Course:

Graduate students in the philosophy department can take the course for credit to earn a unit by doing the following things. Graduate students in other departments and undergraduate students can take the course for credit and get a grade by doing the following things.

- Give one class presentation.
- Write one 5-6 page paper, due in week six.
- 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.)

If a philosophy graduate student would like to earn an oral exam unit, then an oral exam can be done on the basis of the long paper.

Any student auditing the course can give a class presentation.