

Philosophy 268y: Normative and Meta-Normative Questions [revised 3/20/15]
Harvard University, Spring 2015

Instructors:

Prof. Selim Berker
Email: sberker@fas.harvard.edu
Office location: Emerson 208
Office hours: Thu., 2–4pm, or by appointment

Prof. Derek Parfit (All Souls College, Oxford)
Email: derek.parfit@all-souls.ox.ac.uk
Office location: Emerson 309
Office hours: By appointment

Course Description:

We shall discuss some conflicting views about what matters, normative reasons, how it would be best for things to go, and the wrongness of acts. We shall also discuss some conflicting meta-ethical views about these views.

Time and Place: Tuesdays and Fridays, 2–4pm, in Emerson 310

Because Prof. Parfit will only be in town during the second half of the semester, the course will not start having regular meetings until Mar. 10.

Course URL: <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k104165>

All handouts and announcements, as well as all of the readings not found in the two required texts, will be available through the course website. You must login using your Harvard PIN or using an XID (if you are an auditor without a Harvard PIN) to see all of the site's content. (If it says "Login" in the upper right-hand corner of the screen, then you are not logged in.) To obtain an XID, visit <<https://xid.harvard.edu/xid-apps/>>.

Course Admission Policy:

This is a graduate-level course; undergraduates and students in a graduate program other than philosophy will only be allowed to take the course for credit if they have the proper background.

We foresee auditors being welcome to attend the seminar. However, if enrollment is very high, we may need to impose some restrictions.

Requirements:

The breakdown of grades will be as follows:

30% *Seminar attendance and participation.*

Evaluation will be based on attendance, preparation, and contributions to discussion. For those of you who don't feel comfortable talking during class, discussing material from the course during office hours or over email may count toward your contributions to discussion.

70% *Final paper.*

A final paper of approximately 20 to 25 double-spaced pages will be officially due by 11:59pm on Wed., May 13. Students are highly encouraged to meet with the instructors during the course of the semester to discuss their final paper topic, and are also encouraged to send the instructors an outline and then a draft of their paper for comments before the final due date.

Readings:

There are two required texts:

Parfit, Derek. *On What Matters*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Parfit, Derek. *On What Matters*. Vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

A number of additional readings—including a manuscript version of *On What Matters*, Vol. 3—will be available for copying in Robbins Library (second floor, Emerson Hall) and for downloading on the course website.

Prof. Parfit would be very grateful for any comments, big or small, on any portion of his manuscript of *On What Matters*, Vol. 3 (including the portions we are not reading for the class). You may send your comments directly to him at <derek.parfit@all-souls.ox.ac.uk>.

Laptop Use:

You are allowed to use laptops for note taking during seminar meetings, *but only if your internet connection is turned off*. If we discover evidence that people are utilizing the internet during class, we will ban all laptop use (except for those students who need to use them for medical reasons).

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. If you have any doubts about what counts as plagiarism, or about how to properly reference a source, please consult the course instructors.

Meeting and Reading Schedule [some of this may change]:

Tue., Jan. 27: No Class (Snow Emergency)

Tue., Feb. 3: Introductory Meeting

Tue., Mar. 10: Normative Reasons

- Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 1 (“How Things Might Matter”)
On What Matters, Vol. 1, Ch. 1 (“Normative Concepts”)
On What Matters, Vol. 1, Ch. 2, Sec. 3
On What Matters, Vol. 3, Ch. 11 (“Purely Normative Truths”)
On What Matters, Vol. 2, Ch. 30 (“Normative Truths”)
- Optional: *On What Matters*, Vol. 1, Ch. 3 (“Subjective Theories”)
On What Matters, Vol. 2, Ch. 24 (“Analytical Naturalism and Subjectivism”)

Fri., Mar. 13: Non-Realist Cognitivism

- Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 2 (“Normative Truths”), pp. 12–14
- Optional: *On What Matters*, Vol. 2, Ch. 31 (“Metaphysics”)
On What Matters, Vol. 2, Appendix J (“On What There Is”)

Tue., Mar. 17: No Class (Spring Break)

Fri., Mar. 20: No Class (Spring Break)

Tue., Mar. 24: Naturalism, Pt. 1

- Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 2 (“Normative Truths”), pp. 15–28
On What Matters, Vol. 3, Ch. 3 (“Gibbard’s Offer to Non-Naturalists”)
On What Matters, Vol. 3, Ch. 4 (“The Triviality Objection”)

Fri., Mar. 27: Naturalism, Pt. 2

- Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 5 (“Railton’s Resolution of Our Disagreements”)
- Optional: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 6 (“Schroeder’s Conservative Reductive Thesis”)
On What Matters, Vol. 3, Ch. 7 (“Jackson’s Non-Empirical Normative Truths”)

Tue., Mar. 31: Grounding and the Naturalism/Non-Naturalism Divide

- Required: Rosen, “Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction”
Berker, “The Unity of Grounding,” Sec. 1–4

Fri., Apr. 3: Grounding and the Meta-Ethics/Normative Ethics Divide

- Required: Fine, “Guide to Ground,” Sec. 1
Berker, “The Unity of Grounding,” Sec. 5–8
- Optional: Wilson, “No Work for a Theory of Grounding”

Tue., Apr. 7: Quasi-Realist Expressivism

- Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 9 (“Quasi-Realist Expressivism”)
On What Matters, Vol. 3, Ch. 10 (“Gibbard’s Resolution of Our Differences”)
- Optional: *On What Matters*, Vol. 2, Ch. 28 (“Non-Cognitivism and Quasi-Realism”)
On What Matters, Vol. 2, Ch. 29 (“Normativity and Truth”)

Fri., Apr. 10: Rationality and Conflicting Reasons

Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 1, Ch. 2, Sec. 4–5
On What Matters, Vol. 1, Ch. 5 (“Rationality”)
On What Matters, Vol. 1, Appendix A (“State-Given Reasons”)
 Ernst, “Parfit on Epistemic Rationality”

Tue., Apr. 14: Evolutionary Debunking Arguments

Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 12 (“Meta-Ethical Constructivism and Skepticism”)
 Berker, “Does Evolutionary Psychology Show That Normativity Is Mind-Dependent?”

Optional: *On What Matters*, Vol. 2, Ch. 32 (“Epistemology”)
On What Matters, Vol. 2, Ch. 33 (“Rationalism”)

Fri., Apr. 17: No Class**Tue., Apr. 21: Reasons and Morality**

Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 15 (“What Matters and Universal Reasons”)
On What Matters, Vol. 3, Ch. 16 (“Act Consequentialism, Reasons, and Morality”)
 De Lazari-Radek & Singer, “Parfit on Objectivity and ‘The Profoundest Problem in Ethics’”

Optional: *On What Matters*, Vol. 1, Ch. 6 (“Morality”)

Fri., Apr. 24: Common-Sense Morality and Constraints

Required: *On What Matters*, Vol. 3, Ch. 17 (“The Right and the Good”)
On What Matters, Vol. 3, Ch. 18 (“Deontological Prohibitions and What We Together Do”)
 Berker, “Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions,” Sec. 2

Optional: Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Ch. 2 (“What Makes Right Acts Right?”)

Tue., Apr. 28; Fri., May 1:

Readings will be given later. Subjects discussed will include: the ethics of population, whether we can avoid the Repugnant Conclusion, intrinsic and comparative goodness, imprecision, indeterminacy, and lexical superiority.

Final paper officially due by 11:59pm on Wed., May 13.