

## PHIL 765 (Advanced Studies in Value Theory): Practical Reasons and Rationality

UNC Chapel Hill, Fall 2017

Syllabus

**Instructor:** Alex Worsnip

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**Class Meetings:** Thurs, 4-6:30pm, Caldwell Hall (CW) 213

**Office Hours:** Tues 3-4pm and Wed 10-11am (or by appointment), Caldwell Hall (CW) 202A

### Course Description

A survey class on practical reasons and rationality, designed to bring students up to speed with the main contemporary debates in this thriving subfield. Topics will include: internalism vs. externalism (and Humeanism vs. anti-Humeanism) about reasons; analyses of reasons (e.g., reasons as explanations vs reasons as evidence); the “wrong kind of reasons” problem; the relationship between reasons and rational requirements; narrow-scoping vs wide-scoping about rational requirements; and the normativity of rationality. Authors we will read include (among others) Broome, Chang, Darwall, Greenspan, Hieronymi, Kolodny, Manne, Markovits, McDowell, Schroeder, Parfit, and Williams.

### Enrollment/Prerequisites

This is a class for graduate students. Undergraduate enrollment will be granted only in exceptional cases, and by permission of the instructor. Graduate student auditors are welcome, but are expected to keep up with the readings.

### Requirements/Assessment

- **Participation.** Including attendance of all classes (having done adequate preparation) and participation in discussions. *10% of grade*
- **In-class presentation.** Beginning in the second week of class, students will take turns giving 15-minute presentations. I want to try something specific with these presentations. I don't want you to exhaustively summarize or recap the whole paper. Rather, you should *either* (i) strip the argument of the paper as a whole down to its bare essentials, and present only those, *or* (ii) pick a single part of the paper that interested you, and present only that. Then, you should offer one to three critical remarks and/or discussion questions to spur group discussion. As a guide: your presentation of the paper should, ideally, contain exactly as much background/recap of the paper itself as is necessary to clearly set up your critical remarks/discussion questions – no less, and no more. You are welcome to meet with me to discuss the material ahead of your presentation. We will figure out the schedule for presentations in or shortly after our first meeting. *10% of grade*
  - **Note:** Please use a handout for your presentation. Please email me the file by 12 noon on the day of class, and also bring copies of the handout with you.
- **Reading responses.** You will take turns writing short reading responses (500-750 words each) on that day's reading. Each student will write three reading responses over the course of the semester. The reading responses should highlight and explain an aspect of that day's reading that

you found interesting, and critically respond to it. Soon after the start of the semester, I will distribute a schedule for the responses. Reading responses are due at 8pm on the day before class.  
*10% of grade per response*

- **Term paper.** You will write one extended term paper for the class. This paper will be on a topic of your choice. Since this is an extended piece of work, we'll follow a multi-step process for writing it:
  - Initial meeting to discuss ideas. *To be completed by **Thurs, 11/9** at the latest.* I will meet with each of you one-on-one to discuss your ideas for a possible topic for your term paper. Please come to the meeting having thought carefully about what you might like to write about. (Though this initial meeting is the only required meeting in the process, you are welcome to meet with me again at any point later in the process.)
    - NB: if you want to write on a topic that we're covering at the end of the semester but haven't reached yet by 11/9, that is possible. If there's a forthcoming topic that catches your eye, have a look at the readings for it before our meeting.
  - One paragraph paper proposal. *Due **Fri, 11/10, 8pm**.* You will write up a proposal for the topic of your paper, explaining the issue(s) you plan to discuss and (if you know) what you (tentatively) plan to argue. The proposal should be clear, should propose a well-defined, manageable and tractable topic, and should be clearly related to the themes of the class. I will write back to you either approving the proposal as it is or asking you to make modifications.
  - Full draft. *Due **Tues, 11/21, 8pm**.* You will write a full, complete draft of the paper. I will send you detailed comments on your draft by Sat, 12/2 (this is the main set of comments you will receive from me on your paper).
  - Final submission. *Due **Mon, 12/11, 8pm**.* Finally, you will have an opportunity to revise the paper in light of my comments (and your own further reading/thinking etc), before submitting the final version. I will send you your grade with some briefer comments by the end of that week.

*50% of grade.* Note: provided that you complete the first three steps of the paper-writing process in full and by the due dates specified above, your grade for your paper will be determined solely by the fourth step, i.e. by the final submission. Thus, the other stages of the process represent a risk-free way to try out your ideas and to get feedback on them before making the final submission.

### **Honor Code**

As should go without saying in a graduate class, UNC's honor code, available at [honor.unc.edu](http://honor.unc.edu), applies to all class assignments.

### **Commitments & Accessibility**

- I am very happy to meet with you at any time to discuss assignments or simply to talk more about the topics of the class. Please come to my office hours, or if those times don't work, email me to set up an appointment.

- I am committed to making class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. If I can do anything to help make the class more accessible to you, please do let me know, or (if you would prefer) have the Accessibility Office contact me on your behalf.
- I am also committed to making the class a safe learning environment for everyone irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion, or other individual or group identity. As should go without saying, personal attacks or discriminatory treatment of others on any of these bases will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

### Course Materials

There is one required book for this class, Julia Markovits' *Moral Reason*. Copies of the paperback are available on Amazon for \$25; alternatively, a full version of the e-book is available through the UNC Library for free [here](#). All other readings will be posted on Sakai.

### Schedule of Readings (tentative; subject to change)

#### 8/24 Humeanism vs anti-Humeanism: conceptual considerations (reasons internalism)

Bernard Williams, "Internal and external reasons"

John McDowell, "Might there be external reasons?"

Kate Manne, "Internalism about reasons: sad but true?"

#### 8/31 Humeanism vs anti-Humeanism: extensional considerations

Mark Schroeder, "The Humean theory of reasons"

Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, selections from ch. 2-4 (§3, 8-13 up to p. 96)

#### 9/7 Kantian internalism

Julia Markovits, *Moral Reason*, chs. 3 & 5

Recommended background reading: Julia Markovits, *Moral Reason*, chs. 1-2

#### 9/14 Hybrid theories

Ruth Chang, "Grounding practical normativity: going hybrid"

Jeff Behrens, "Normative source and extensional adequacy"

#### 9/21 Right vs. wrong kinds of reasons; object vs. state-given reasons

Pamela Hieronymi, "The wrong kind of reason"

Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, ch. 2 §5 & Appendix A

Mark Schroeder, "The ubiquity of state-given reasons"

#### 9/28 Analyses of reasons

John Broome, *Rationality Through Reasoning*, ch. 4

Stephen Kearns & Daniel Star, "Reasons: explanations or evidence?"

Recommended: Alex Gregory, "Normative reasons as good bases"

**10/2, 12:15-2:45pm** [rescheduled from 10/5]

**Rational requirements as distinguished from reasons; wide-scoping introduced**

Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, selections (pp. 13-17, 25-28, 43-50, 62-77)

John Broome, "Normative requirements"

Recommended: Thomas Scanlon, "Structural irrationality"

**10/12 Rational requirements/rationality analyzed in terms of reasons**

Mark Schroeder, "Means-ends-coherence, stringency, and subjective reasons"

Errol Lord, "The coherent and the rational"

Recommended: Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, ch. 5

[10/19 *No class – Fall break*]

**10/26 Narrow-scoping vs wide-scoping about rational requirements: round 1**

Patricia Greenspan, "Conditional oughts and hypothetical imperatives"

Mark Schroeder, "The scope of instrumental reason"

John Brunero, "Instrumental rationality, symmetry and scope"

**11/2 Narrow-scoping vs wide-scoping about rational requirements: round 2**

Errol Lord, "The real symmetry problem(s) for wide-scope accounts of rationality"

Alex Worsnip, "Narrow-scoping for wide-scopers"

**11/9 Skepticism about the normativity (or existence?) of rational requirements**

Niko Kolodny, "Why be rational?"

Niko Kolodny, "How does coherence matter?"

**11/16 Defenses of the normativity of rational requirements**

Nadeem Hussain, "The requirements of rationality"

Nicholas Southwood, "Vindicating the normativity of rationality"

Recommended: Jacob Ross, "Rationality, normativity, and commitment"

Recommended: Michael Bratman, "Intention, practical rationality, and self-governance"

[11/23 *No class – Thanksgiving break*]

**11/30 Structural rationality/coherence as distinguished from reasons: new considerations; new ways of making the distinction**

Alex Worsnip, "What is (in)coherence?"

Daniel Fogal, "Rational requirements and the primacy of pressure"

Recommended: Alex Worsnip, "The conflict of evidence and coherence"