

Contemporary Analytic Philosophy

PHIL/MAPH 31414

University of Chicago
Autumn 2015
MW 1:30–2:50
Cobb 311

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Course Description

This course is designed to provide MAPH students—especially those interested in pursuing a PhD in philosophy—with an introduction to some recent debates between philosophers working in the analytic tradition. The course is neither a history of analytic philosophy nor an overview of the discipline as it currently stands. Instead, we will focus on three different debates, spending about three weeks on each. Each of these debates, as well as the individual contributions to them that we will be reading, have been chosen primarily because they constitute an important point of reference for philosophers presently working in the relevant sub-field.

In our first unit, then, we will read selected papers on freedom and responsibility, taken from a debate—or, more precisely, a couple of closely related debates—begun by Harry Frankfurt. We will address the connection between freedom of the will and moral responsibility, and between responsibility and the ability to do otherwise, as well as the role of caring—and of love—in human life and action.

In our second unit, we will turn to a debate concerning the sources of ethical requirements. The view we will be examining—“ethical constitutivism”—is one on which these requirements can be derived from the nature of agency itself, i.e., of what it is to be capable of acting at all. We will primarily read work by prominent defenders of constitutivism—though we will devote most of our time to the work of Christine Korsgaard—but we will conclude by considering a notable critique of the view.

In our final unit, we will consider the recent rise of “virtue epistemology.” We will read this approach to epistemology as developing in response to the difficulties faced by the traditional “act-centric” approach to epistemology, which we will thus consider first. Our turn to virtue epistemology will hinge on some work of Linda Zagzebski’s, who motivates her virtue epistemology with an objection to the act-centric approach. We will conclude, finally, by considering a qualified defense of the act-centric approach, as developed by Andrea Kern.

Requirements

Texts

The only required text is Christine Korsgaard's *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, which will be available for purchase at the Seminary Co-op. All other readings will be made available on Chalk.

Participation

Class discussion will be a central component of our work together this quarter. Good discussions are the fruit of careful reading: if you put in the work to read and digest the material (which might require re-reading), our discussions will be rewarding. If you fail to do such work, our discussions will be much less rewarding. So everyone should come to class ready with questions, concerns, objections, and new ideas. The harder we all work on our own outside of class, the more we'll all learn together in class. Because participation in class is so important, attendance at all classes is required, and will be a factor in determining your final grade.

Chalk Posts

Before each class, you will write a short Chalk post, and read the posts of the other members of the class. The form of the post is up to you, but it should in some way point to some bit of the text that you'd like to talk about in class. The point of the exercise is to give us all a sense of what everyone in the class found interesting or confusing or problematic about the day's reading. Chalk posts need to be submitted by **10:00am** each day we meet, so that everyone has time to read others' posts before class at 1:30pm.

Weekly Response Papers

Each week (with the exception of weeks in which longer papers are due), you will write one short (1–2 page, double-spaced) response paper, in which you may discuss either an issue in one of the readings or an issue raised in class. Response papers will be due by email by **11:59pm each Thursday**, and will be returned in class the following Monday.

Papers

Finally, you will write two longer papers, both on topics of your choice. The first, of 1500–2000 words (about 6–8 pages), will be due on **Thursday, October 29, at 11:59pm**. The second, of 2500–3000 words (about 10–12 pages), will be due on **Thursday, December 10, at 11:59pm**. Topics must be approved by the instructor at least one week in advance of the due date.

Assessment Policies

Weekly response papers will be assessed on a check-minus, check, check-plus system: a check indicates that your response meets expectations, a check-minus that it falls short, and a check-plus that it exceeds them. Your two longer papers will be assessed according to the criteria laid out at the end of this syllabus.

The overall breakdown of your course grade will be as follows:

Mid-Term Paper: 30
Final Paper: 45
Weekly Response Papers: 10
Participation: 15

A note on Weekly Response Papers: Exceeding expectations (receiving check-pluses) can potentially raise your final grade, e.g., from a B+ to an A- if you have a high B+. Failing to meet expectations (receiving check-minuses), on the other hand, will simply lower your score on the WRP component of your grade, specifically by one point for each check-minus.

Letter grades will be determined as follows: 97–100 is an A+, 93–96 is an A, 90–92 is an A-, 87–89 is a B+, and so on.

Accommodations

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services. Please contact the office at 773-834-4469/TTY 773-795-1186 or gmoorehead@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located in Room 233 in the Administration Building located at 5801 S. Ellis Avenue.

If you require any accommodations for this course, please—as soon as possible—provide me with a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) so that we can discuss how to implement your accommodations.

Schedule

With the exception of Christine Korsgaard's *Self-Constitution*, all readings will be made available on the course Chalk site.

Introduction

September 28 What is analytic philosophy?

Freedom and Responsibility

September 30 Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"

October 5 Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"

October 7 Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"

October 12 Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil"

October 14 Harry Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About"

October 19 Susan Wolf, "The True, the Good, and the Lovable: Frankfurt's Avoidance of Objectivity"

Ethical Constitutivism

October 21 Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, sections 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, and 2.1 (or chapters 1–3)

October 26 Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, sections 4.3–4.5, 5.1, 6.1, 6.2, and 6.4 (or chapters 4–6)

October 28 Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, sections 7.1, 7.2, 8.1, 8.2, and 8.5 (or chapters 7 and 8)

November 2 Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, chapter 9 and section 10.2 (or chapters 9 and 10)

November 4 David Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason"

November 9 Connie Rosati, "Agency and the Open Question Argument"

November 11 David Enoch, "Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What Is Constitutive of Action"

Virtue Epistemology

- November 16** Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
Alvin Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing"
- November 18** Fred Dretske, "Conclusive Reasons"
- November 23** Linda Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems"
- November 25** Linda Zagzebski, "What is Knowledge?"
- November 30** John Greco, "Virtue and Luck, Epistemic and Otherwise"
- December 2** Andrea Kern, "Knowledge as a Fallible Capacity"

Assessment Criteria

100–90

Papers in this range not only demonstrate an excellent grasp of the texts, arguments, and positions they discuss; they also add to or develop ideas and arguments found in course texts or covered in class. Importantly, they do not merely summarize texts, lectures, or class discussions, but do at least one of the following things: (i) present an original criticism of a text or argument, (ii) develop a thought or argument in a way that goes beyond the text, lecture, or class discussion in an interesting way, or (iii) give an interpretation of a text that advances our understanding of it in some philosophically significant respect. They are also clearly and elegantly written, and possess a definite and explicitly marked structure that guides the reader through the argument, discussion, or interpretation.

89–83

Papers in this range demonstrate a solid grasp of the texts, arguments, and positions they discuss. They summarize the texts or present the arguments or positions with clarity and ease. They also go beyond mere summary by engaging in one of the tasks undertaken by papers in the range above, though they do not show the kind of originality on display in papers in that range. They are relatively clearly and elegantly written, with a discernible structure that is usually explicitly marked.

82–77

Papers in this range either (i) fail to demonstrate a solid understanding of the texts, arguments, or positions they discuss; (ii) involve significant moments of unclarity in writing, argument, or interpretation; (iii) fail to have either a clear thesis or a readily discernible argumentative structure; or (iv) do no more than summarize the text, lecture, or class discussion.

76–70

Papers in this range either (i) exhibit significant deficits in comprehension of the texts, arguments, and positions under discussion, or (ii) are both unclearly written and lacking in readily discernible argumentative structure.

Below 70

Papers in this range (i) exhibit significant deficits in comprehension of the texts, arguments, and positions under discussion, (ii) are unclearly written, and (iii) lack readily discernible argumentative structure.