

# VALUE THEORY: PRACTICAL REASONING & THE GOOD

Baylor University  
PHI 5310, Spring 2020  
W 2:30-5:15 pm, Morrison 102

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**Office Hours:** M 12:45-2:30 pm & by appt.

## Course Description

Most accounts of human nature distinguish us from the other animals by virtue of our ability to *reason* and act according to reason. Aristotle famously claims that a good life is one characterized by reasoning in accordance with virtue. What, then, does reasoning look like when done in accordance with virtue? What are practical reasons and what is their relation to human goodness or value?

In this seminar, we will consider a variety of accounts of goodness, reasons, and the relationship between them. For instance, is the good what is good *for us*, or good for an individual given what she desires, or is goodness a property that things have independently of what we want? Is practical reasoning paradigmatically about how to promote the good? Or are facts about goodness reducible to what we have practical reason to do or value? Must reasons be related to our existing motivations? What does it look like to act for a reason, and does it make sense to think of the conclusion of practical reasoning as an action? If the fully virtuous human acts from habit, what role would remain for practical reason to play in the moral life?

## Course Objectives

The course is designed to facilitate your own reflection and philosophical discussion with one another on these important matters. I have chosen readings that cover a lot of ground with the assumption that you will dig deep into some debates and theories and simply familiarize yourself with others.

By the end of the course you should be able to contribute meaningfully in a conversation about any of the covered topics and to understand how they relate to your narrower research interests. Working through the carefully curated readings will assist you in this endeavor.

Excellent performance in this course consists in meeting 5 course objectives. You will be assigned a grade based on how many of the objectives you meet in your written work and interaction in seminar.

First, I expect you to do the following in your written work:

- (1) articulate accurate and charitable interpretations of an author's views
- (2) correctly restate an author's central arguments for those views

Whatever the topic, we should aim to engage others' writing charitably, represent their views accurately. By achieving objectives (1) and (2) you will hone portable philosophical skills.

Two additional objectives consist in working up your own original, insightful responses that advance discussions and working out your own well-reasoned answers to questions in metaethics specifically:

- (3) engage critically with an author, raising original objections or offering suggestions for how to better advance an idea or argument
- (4) intervene in extant debates to communicate your own original metaethical view or argument for an existing view in clear, persuasive, and articulate prose

The final objective reflects the fact that this class is a place for you to develop intellectual friendships with one another:

- (5) communicate clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully with others in conversation

My hope is that participation in this seminar will further the extent to which you are a part of the Baylor philosophy community, committed to reasoning together in pursuit of the truth and the ethical life.

## Required Texts

We will read articles and portions of books made available through the Baylor library and on Canvas. If you have trouble getting an assigned text from the library, you should

email me at least three days before the class in which we are discussing that text so I can help you obtain a copy.

## Assessment

Your performance in the course will be assessed by how well you achieve the course objectives in written work and participation in weekly seminar meetings.

I will keep track of which objectives you have achieved and calculate your final grade as follows:

- A achieves all 5 objectives
- B achieves 4 objectives
- C achieves 3 objectives
- D achieves 2 objectives
- F achieves fewer than 2 objectives

## Assignments

*Readings.* The assigned readings are listed on the schedule; optional readings are in parentheses and also uploaded to Canvas. I have listed readings in the order I would read them if I were you.

*Book Review.* You must complete a 1000-1500 word book review no later than April 1. The review should be of a text we are not reading together (e.g. *Practical Shape*) but which is relevant to one of the course topics. I suggest choosing a book you need to read for your final paper. You may meet objective 1, 2, and 3 by writing an excellent review.

To meet objective 1, the review must accurately and succinctly summarize each part of the book, raise one live interpretive question about an author's view or argument, and then provide adequate evidence for your answer to that interpretive question.

To meet objective 2, the review must accurately restate the author's argument; if the argument is invalid you should show why that is so and suggest an amendment to make it valid.

To meet objective 3, the review must raise a novel objection and convincingly demonstrate significant implications for the author's view or argument.

*Seminar discussion.* I will assess your ability to communicate clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully with others – objective 5 – based on your sustained patterns of conduct in seminar discussions. Being present and using technology appropriately are obvious prerequisites, but so are conscientiousness about how often you contribute relative to your fellow classmates and your uptake of their contributions. (Read: lots of talking doesn't equal good participation!)

*Seminar paper.* The seminar paper will provide you with the opportunity to demonstrate that you can intervene on a debate, articulate your own ideas, and support them with arguments – objectives 3 and 4. Ideally, the paper will also engage with one of the readings in a way that meets objectives 1 and 2.

Your paper should be suitable length for submission in a journal, ideally fewer than 8,000 words. Papers will be completed in two stages: draft and final. Drafts are due to your peer and on Canvas at 2:30 pm 4/29. Hard copy of the final version with revisions is to be turned in to my box and electronically on Canvas no later 11:59 pm 5/6.

*Peer review.* I will assign you a peer whose seminar paper draft you will be responsible to review by 5/1. You may meet objective 3 by submitting an excellent peer review.

Your peer review will be completed in the format of a typical journal referee report (but without the final accept/reject recommendation). Completing these reports is a standard way to serve the profession and good, available reviewers can be tough for editors to find. This should be a useful exercise.

The beginning should briefly summarize the author's view and argument for the view as charitably as possible. Note major strength and weakness of the paper here. The body should be a list of comments by page number, at least some of which substantively engage the arguments. (You might show, for instance that the author has mischaracterized an author in the debate they are discussing, or that the author's argument is ambiguous, invalid, or has an unexplored implication.)

## Course Policies

*Academic Integrity.* You are responsible for knowing and abiding by the University's regulations regarding academic honesty. Here is a good rule of thumb: If it's a direct quotation, cite it. If it's a paraphrase of someone else's idea, cite it. If it's an idea you got from a discussion or reading, cite it. If in doubt, cite it. The only ideas not cited are those you come up with independently or that belong to general knowledge.\* Plagiarism on any assignment may result in an automatic failure of the course.

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\* I am grateful to Mark Murphy for this suggestion.

*Attendance.* I expect weekly attendance, but am happy to grant you one absence that won't affect your achievement of objective 5. If you are observing a religious holiday that falls on a class day or have a life circumstance that is going to inevitably keep you from class, please let me know in advance so I can work with you to avoid reduction of your grade. Unexcused absences, showing up late, leaving early, or working on something besides this class will be reflected in the assessment of whether you have achieved objective 5.

*Discussion.* As an overarching goal in our course is to form intellectual friendships of the sort that contribute to the philosophical community at Baylor, I expect you to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with others in class. Engaging **thoughtfully** involves giving me and others your undivided attention, preparing for class with careful reading (not relying on the instructor or others to gloss it for you), being mindful of how often and long you speak relative to others, and communicating your thoughts clearly by choosing your words carefully and if needed, writing them down in advance.

Engaging **respectfully** means taking a posture of readiness to learn from me and others, listening closely to others' comments and questions, giving due recognition to your peers for their insights and ideas, and responding directly or incorporating the comments of your peers in your own comments and questions.

*Late work and extensions.* Extensions on the seminar paper or book review are available *only if* you make arrangements with me in advance of the deadline. If an extenuating life circumstance impedes you from *completing* the draft you have by a deadline, please notify me immediately.

If there is a special circumstance that could affect your performance in the course, please let me know as soon as it arises, or let the dean know and ask the dean to communicate with me. Anything you share will be kept in strict confidence. I am happy to work with you and your dean to make arrangements that will allow you to keep up with the coursework.

*Electronics.* Cell phones are not permitted in the classroom. The use of tablets and laptops is restricted to note-taking and reading class materials.

## **Reading Schedule** *(subject to revision—check course website for updates)*

- 1/15    **Moorean intrinsic goodness**  
          Olson, "Doubts about Intrinsic Value"  
          Zimmerman, *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*, ch. 3

(Moore, *Principia Ethica*)

1/22 **Sentimentalism**

D'Arms and Jacobson, "Sentiment and Value"

Sobel, *From Valuing to Value*, pp. 1-10 and ch. 7

(Murphy, "Simple Desire-Fulfillment Theory"; Dorsey, "Subjectivism without Desire")

1/29 **Eudaimonist goodness**

Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 3

Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, introduction, chs. 1-2

(Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality*, ch. 2)

2/5 **Relative vs. absolute goodness**

Geach, "Good and Evil"

Smith, "Neutral and Relative Goodness After Moore"

(Zimmerman, *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*, ch. 2; Swanton, "Developmental Virtue Ethics")

2/12 **The buck-passing account**

Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, ch. 2

Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, ch. 5

(Rowland, *The Normative and the Evaluative: The Buck-Passing Account of Value*, ch. 4;

Johnson-King, "You Can Have Your Buck and Pass It Too"; Orsi, "What's Wrong with Moorean Buck-Passing?")

2/19 **Existence internalism about reasons**

Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"

Schroeder, *Explaining the Reasons We Share*, ch. 3

(Paakkunainen, "Internalism and Externalism about Reasons"; Sobel, *From Valuing to Value*, ch. 14; Schroeder, *Explaining the Reasons We Share*, ch. 2)

2/26 **Existence externalism about reasons**

McDowell, "Might There Be External Reasons?"

Asarnow, "Internal Reasons and the Boy Who Cried Wolf"

3/4 **Thick ethical concepts in practical reasoning**

Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 8

- Wiland, "Williams on Thick Concepts and Reasons"
- 3/11 NO CLASS- Spring break
- 3/18 **Practical reasoning to action**  
Paul, "The Conclusion of Practical Reasoning"  
Fernandez, "Practical Reasoning: Where the Action Is"  
Dancy, *Practical Shape*, chs. 1-2
- 3/25 **Acting for reasons**  
Arpaly and Schroeder, "A Causal Theory of Acting for Reasons"  
Alvarez, "Reasons for Action, Acting for Reasons, and Rationality"
- 4/1 **Practical reasoning**  
BOOK REVIEW DUE  
Dancy, *Practical Shape*, chs. 3-4  
Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*, ch. 6
- 4/8 **Moral and practical reasoning; Dancy visit**  
Dancy, *Practical Shape*, chs. 5-6
- 4/15 **Motivating and normative reasons**  
Arpaly, "Moral Worth"  
Howard, "Goals of Moral Worth"
- 4/22 **Practical reasoning together**  
Wiland, "(En)joining Others"  
Brewer, "Virtues We Can Share"
- 4/29 Last day of class- SEMINAR PAPER DRAFT DUE
- 5/1 PEER REVIEW DUE
- 5/6 SEMINAR PAPER FINAL DUE