

PHIL 172: THE MANY AND THE FEW

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course explores the tensions between our moral obligations to the many and the place of the few who have some special place in a life well lived—friends, family, fellow students, etc. We will consider the nature and justification of partiality; the challenges of squaring partiality with the impartial demands of morality; objections to moral theory based on its inability to accommodate partiality; whether, when and how aggregation is appropriate; and the place of love in ethics.

PERMISSION TO ENROLL:

This is an intermediate level class, and no prior coursework in philosophy is formally required. Some prior work in philosophy will be very helpful, however! If you are unsure whether the class is a good fit, feel free to reach out.

MEETING TIMES:

Course: M/W 3-4:15 (No section)

INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF:

P. Quinn White, pqwhite@fas.harvard.edu, Emerson 208

Office Hours: Fridays 3–5 PM. There is no need to let me know you are coming—just drop by! If you cannot make that time or it is very inconvenient, appointments by email. The weeks of 2/23, 3/1, and 4/5 I will be unavailable in the regular slot, and all office hours will be by appointment.

Teaching Fellow: Britta Clark, brittaclark@g.harvard.edu

Zoom Office Hours: Tuesday 12:20-1:20 (sign up [HERE](#) before 5pm Monday)

In-Person Office Hours: Thursdays: 10:30-11:30 Emerson 209b

If you want one-on-one time, please sign up for ‘Online Office Hours’ for a dedicated 20 minute slot. If these slots fill up, I usually will be able to open up more. If you are open to a group conversation, come to ‘In Person Office Hours’. For In-person office hours, you can show up anytime and stay for just a few minutes or the whole time.

COURSE READINGS:

All readings are posted online and **must be completed prior to the course session** in which they are discussed.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

- Attendance, Participation (20%)
 - Attendance at all class sessions and section is required. I will excuse absences for good reason—just let me know!
 - All students must actively contribute to section discussions *each* week. Full credit for attendance and participation requires contributing a minimum of once per week. (That once per week requirement can be met in office hours.)
- Papers
 - Paper 1: 1500 Words. (20%), Due Feb 23
 - Paper 2: 1750 Words. (25%), Due Apr 5
 - Paper 3: 1750 Words. (35%), Due [Registrar-Allocated Final Date]

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CHAT GPT USE

I expect that all work students submit for this course will be their own. As a default, I specifically forbid the use of ChatGPT or any other generative artificial intelligence tools at all stages of the work process, including preliminary ones. That said, if you have a use for generative text AI (including writing an essay that engages with LLMs' functionality), I welcome your reaching out to get permission for its use *in advance*. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. (Different classes at Harvard could implement different AI policies, and it is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course.)

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

No laptops are permitted in lecture. If, however, you have some special need—whether that is for an accommodation or because you *really* prefer to take seminar notes on your laptop—send me an email and we can work it out. If you are found using gadgets for impermissible activities (checking email, etc.), your privileges will be revoked or (if applicable) we will meet with Disability Resources.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

UNIT 1: THE PROBLEM

Jan 22: No class

Still Read: Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

Jan 24: The problem of the many

Unger, *Living High and Letting Die*, Ch. 2

Jan 29: A threat to integrity

Williams, “Persons, Character and Morality”

Graduate Students: Stocker, “Values and Purposes: The Limits of Teleology and the Ends of Friendship”

Graduate Students: start reading Thompson, *Life and Action*, Part I, Ch. 1

Jan 31: Is impartiality tenable?

Cottingham, “Ethics and Impartiality”

Graduate Students: Thompson, Ch. 2

UNIT II: CLASSICAL APPROACHES

Feb 5: Love's Ladder

Plato, *The Symposium*

Graduate Students: Thompson, Ch. 3

Feb 7: Virtue and Friendship

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.1-8.8, 9.3, 9.5, 9.9–9.12

Graduate Students: Thompson, Ch. 4

Optional for Graduate Students: Nehamas, *On Friendship*

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Feb 12: Virtue Ethics

Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Ch. 1-3

Feb 14: Virtuous Partiality

Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Ch. 4-5

Feb 19: Holiday

UNIT III: CONSEQUENTIALISM

Feb 21: Self-Effacing Theories?

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Ch. 1

FEB 23, 11:59 PM: PAPER 1 DUE

Feb 26: Alienation and Consequentialism

Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"

Feb: 28: Whose wellbeing can we best promote?

Jackson, "Decision Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection"

Mar 4: A new kind of consequentialism?

Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, Ch. 1-2

Mar 6: Agent Centered Prerogatives

Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, Ch. 3

Mar 11 and 13: Spring Break

Mar 18: Love and Value

Maguire, "Love in the time of consequentialism"

Mar 20: Effective Altruism

Pummer, "Whether and Where to Give"

UNIT IV: KANTIAN APPROACHES

Mar 20: Friendship and the Demands of Morality

Baron, "Impartiality and Friendship"

Graduate Students: Start reading *all* of Herman's *The Moral Habitat*.

Optional for Graduate Students: Thompson, *Life and Action*, Part III.

Mar 25: Kantian Impartiality

Herman, "Integrity and Impartiality"

Mar 27: The Kingdom of Two

Korsgaard, "Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Reciprocity and Responsibility in Personal Relations"

Apr 1: Imperfect Duties

Herman, *The Moral Habitat*, Ch. 7

Graduate Students: read the whole book!

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Apr 3: Imperfect Duties, cont.

Herman, *The Moral Habitat*, Ch. 9-10

*** APR 5, 11:59 PM, PAPER 2 DUE ***

UNIT V: DUTIES, REASONS, AND PARTIALITY

Apr 8: The Prima Facie

Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Ch. 2

Apr 10: Projects

Keller, *Partiality*, Ch 1-2

Apr 15: Relationships

Keller, *Partiality*, Ch. 3

Apr 17: Individuals

Setiya, "Love and the Value of a Life"

Graduate Students: *Partiality*, Ch. 4-5

UNIT VI: AGGREGATION

Apr 22: Do the Numbers Count?

Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?"

Apr 24: Multidimensionality

Muñoz, "The Many and the Few"

*** [REGISTRAR-ALLOCATED FINAL DATE], 11:59 PM, PAPER 3 DUE ***