Phil 172M: 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:
Monday, Wednesday 1:30-2:45 pm, Emerson 305

Sections:
D04, Thurs., 10:30-11:30 am, Emerson 101 (Shelby)
D01, Thurs., 12-1 pm, Sever 205 (Shelby)
D02, Friday, 10:30-11:30 am, Sever 104 (Ayo)
D03, Friday, 9-10 am, Sever 104 (Ayo)

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! Iff you cannot make that time or it is very inconvenient, appointments are available 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 Fellows:
Shelby Hanna, shelbyhanna@g.harvard.edu, Emerson 103
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12–2 pm

Ayomide Ajimoko, ayomideajimoko@g.harvard.edu, Emerson 103
Office Hours: Mondays, 5:30–7:30 pm

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.
- Papers
    - Paper 1: 1500 Words. (20%), Due Feb 27, 11:59 pm
    - Paper 2: 1750 Words. (25%), Due Apr 3, 11:59 pm
    - Paper 3: 1750 Words. (35%), Due on Registrar-Allocated Final Date, 11:59 pm

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

Laptops are not 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 26: Fatal, muddy ponds
Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Jan 28: The problem of the many
Unger, *Living High and Letting Die*, Ch. 2

Feb 2: A threat to integrity
Stoker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories"
Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality," only pp. 210–215

UNIT II: CLASSICAL APPROACHES

Feb 4: Love's Ladder
Plato, *The Symposium*
For repeat readers: Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of Plato's Symposium"
Optional: Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato" (if you read this, read it before Nussbaum's response)

Feb 9: Virtue and Friendship
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 8.1-8.8, 9.3, 9.5, 9.9–9.12

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Feb 11: Virtue Ethics
Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Ch. 1–3

Feb 16: President's Day Holiday

Feb 18: Virtuous Partiality
Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Ch. 4–5

Unit III: Consequentialism

Feb 23: Alienation and Consequentialism
Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"

Feb 25: Whose wellbeing can we best promote?
Jackson, "Decision Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection"

Feb 27, 11:59 pm: Paper 1 Due

Mar 2: Consequential-ish
Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism,* Ch. 1–2

Mar 4: Agent Centered Prerogatives
Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, Ch. 3

Mar 9: Love and Value
Maguire, "Love in the Time of Consequentialism"

Mar 11: Effective Altruism
Pummer, "Whether and Where to Give"

Mar 16 and 18: Spring Break

Unit IV: Kantian Approaches

Mar 23: Friendship and the Demands of Morality
Baron, "Impartiality and Friendship"

Mar 25: Kantian Impartiality
Herman, "Integrity and Impartiality"

Mar 30: Imperfect Duties
Herman, *The Moral Habitat*, Ch. 7

Apr 1: Imperfect Duties, cont. [TF LECTURE OR VIDEO]
Herman, *The Moral Habitat,* Ch. 9–10

Apr 3, 11:59 pm: Paper 2 Due

Unit V: Duties, Reasons, and Partiality

Apr 6: The Prima Facie
Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Ch. 2

Apr 15: Relationships as Reasons
Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship"
For Repeat Readers: Jeske, "Friendship, virtue, and impartiality

Apr 20: Individuals
Setiya, "Love and the Value of a Life"
For Repeat Readers: Choose your own adventure: Me, "Love, Partiality, and History" (if you want more on this debate), Setiya, "Other People " (for more of the Setiyan view, some nice tie-ins to the last reading), or Velleman "Love as a Moral Emotion" (landmark piece, lots of discussion of Kant, not easy)

Unit VI: Aggregation

Apr 22: Do the Numbers Count?
Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?"

Apr 27: The Horror!!
Parfit, Innumerate Ethics

Apr 29: Opaque Suitcases
Hare, Should We Wish Well To All?

*** [Registrar-Allocated Final Date], 11:59 pm, Paper 3 Due ***