

PHIL. 6100: Seminar in Ethics

Fall, 2008

Class Meets: TR 3:30 - 4:45, Hellems 177

Professors' Email:

Michael Huemer, ikd3lob02@sneakemail.com

Chris Heathwood, heathwood@colorado.edu

Web page: <http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/>

Phone:

Huemer: 303-417-9803

Heathwood: 303-449-0509

Office Hours:

Huemer: TR 1:50 - 3:25, Hlms 266

Heathwood: M 10:00 - 1:00, Hlms 192

What Is This Course About?

This course will examine a variety of puzzles about the good. Topics addressed will include what things are intrinsically good, what benefits a person, the repugnant conclusion, the non-identity problem, objections to the transitivity of better-than, the value of equality, infinite value, and theories of incommensurable values.

Text

A collection of articles and book excerpts will be distributed on the first day of class.

Other Guidelines

1. To contact us: send email to the address(es) listed above, and we will probably respond the same day. Or call between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m., and leave a message.
2. Come to our offices to talk about philosophy or to play chess with Huemer. (We will answer any questions you have, but you needn't have a specific question to come.
3. During class, do not hesitate to comment on or ask about anything we discuss. Please feel free to say whatever you think (that has to do with philosophy). Don't be afraid to contradict something that's been said, and don't be afraid of asking a stupid question. It is from debate and asking "stupid" questions that you learn most. 7
4. The course web page <<http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/>> includes information about the class, including this syllabus and some lecture notes. There is also some philosophical entertainment.

Course Requirements

Presentations:

Everyone will have to make an in-class presentation.

Dates: See schedule below.

Length: About 15-20 minutes, followed by 15 min. question-and-answer period. @

Topic: The basic idea of the paper you are working on. The other students will ask questions and raise objections. This will help you prepare the final version of your paper.

Papers:

You'll have to write two short papers and a final paper for the course. The final paper may be an expanded version of one of the first two papers.

< *Length:* Short papers: about 7-10 pages. Final paper: 15-25 pages.

< *Topic:* Anything about goodness or what has it. But pick a topic that is circumscribed, so you can

discuss it thoroughly, rather than giving a shallow discussion of a large topic. We suggest discussing your idea with us to verify that it is worth writing about.

- < *Due Dates*: See schedule below. You're responsible for keeping track of due dates!
- < *Content*: Your papers, particularly the final paper, should be written like professional journal articles. Accordingly, they should have these elements:
 - 1 *Thesis*: Your thesis should be non-trivial, and it should be stated clearly and explicitly, early on.
 - 2 *Argument*: Your argument for the thesis should start from premises that would seem plausible to the great majority of people, including most people who have not already accepted your thesis. The argument should be valid. It should be original. And it should be non-trivial.
 - 3 *Replies to objections*: Consider how someone doubting your thesis might object to your argument, and say why these objections ultimately do not persuade you.
- < *Things not to do*: Do not spend more than a quarter of the paper talking about or quoting other people, or setting up the issue. Do not go off on multi-page digressions. Your paper should not contain multiple style errors (i.e., errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, word usage, formatting, and the like). If you don't know how to format a footnote or reference list, see Huemer's writing guide. In fact, you should read the writing guide regardless.
- < *Huemer's Writing Guide* <<http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/writing.htm>>. If you commit any of the errors listed there, you will be first downgraded, then ridiculed. (Most of you will in fact do this, so expect to be ridiculed.)

Schedule

This shows what you should read for the class discussion on each day. Also note the **due dates**. All readings are indicated by the author's last name. Some days have *more than one* assigned reading.

T, Aug 26	Introduction, meaning of "good"	
R, Aug 28	What's Good	Ross, "The Meaning of 'Good'" Ross, "What Things Are Good"
T, Sept 2	Welfare	Parfit, "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best"
R, Sept 4		Nozick, "The Experience Machine" Jason Kawall, "The Experience Machine..." Rivera-Lopez, "Are Mental State Welfarism ..."
T, Sept 9		Heathwood, "Subjective Desire Satisfactionism"
R, Sept 11	Non-Identity Problem	Parfit, Non-Identity Problem
T, Sept 16		Boonin, "How to Solve the Non-Identity Problem"
R, Sept 18		Rachels, "Is It Good to Make Happy People?"
T, Sept 23	Transitivity	Rachels, "Counterexamples to the Transitivity..."
R, Sept 25		Quinn, "Puzzle of the Self-Torturer"

T, Sept 30		Persson, "Why There Cannot Be Transitivity..."
R, Oct 2		Norcross, "Intransitivity..." Temkin, "Intransitivity ..."
T, Oct 7	Repugnant Conclusion	Narveson, "Utilitarianism & New Generations"
R, Oct 9		Parfit, Repugnant Conclusion
T, Oct 14		Huemer, "In Defence of Repugnance" (start)
R, Oct 16	Due: First Paper	Finish repugnance.
T, Oct 21	Incommensurability	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> Nozick, "Moral Constraints and Moral Goals"
R, Oct 23		Chang, "Introduction ...", pp. 1-27.
T, Oct 28		Norcross, "Comparing Harms ..."
R, Oct 30		Huemer, "Absolutism, Incommensurability..."
T, Nov 4	Equality	Parfit, "Equality and Priority"
R, Nov 6		Temkin, "Equality, Priority, Or What?"
T, Nov 11		Huemer, "Non-Egalitarianism"
R, Nov 13	Due: Second Paper	Huemer, "Against Priority..."
T, Nov 18	Infinity	Kagan/Vallentyne, "Infinite Value..."
R, Nov 20	Student-suggested topic	—
T, Nov 25	<i>No Class - Fall Break</i>	
R, Nov 27	<i>No Class - Fall Break</i>	
T, Dec 2	Student Presentations	—
R, Dec 4	Student Presentations	—
T, Dec 9	Student Presentations	—
R, Dec 11	Ethics, Morality, & drinks	—
T, Dec 16 1:30 p.m.	Due: Final Paper. Bye. M	

