

PHIL 422/822: WHY BE MORAL?

COURSE CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

Advanced Course in Ethics. Consideration of the foundations of ethics with consideration of major historical and contemporary views about the source of ethical obligation, practical normativity and morality.

PREREQUISITES:

Nine credit hours in philosophy (typically via three prior courses in the philosophy department).

MEETING TIMES:

Class: M 3:30-6:05, LPH 312.

Office Hours: Monday from 1-3 pm or by appointment, LPH 315R or via zoom.

In the event that we need to temporarily adjust our class meeting method (i.e., shift to zoom) that will be announced via a Canvas announcement.

INSTRUCTOR:

Quinn White, qwhite@unl.edu, LPH 315R

If you need to get in touch with me, use my email itself, not the canvas messaging system.

COURSE READINGS:

The following book is required for the course:

- Setiya and Paakkunainen, *Internal Reasons: Contemporary Readings*, Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2011.
- Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003.
- Setiya, *Reasons without Rationalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

All other readings will be available on the course website.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT FOR UNDERGRADUATES (422)

- Attendance, participation (20% of final grade).
 - Attendance at all class sessions is required (either in person or remotely).
- Presentation (10%)
 - All students will give one presentation in which they will introduce the day's readings and open discussion.
- Papers: (must be submitted via canvas)
 - Each paper will have the same format: first to reconstruct some argument we have considered in class; then to *evaluate* that argument by considering an objection to it and a possible response one could offer in defense of the argument. Each assignment will have a prompt directing students to particular arguments to reconstruct and evaluate.
 - Paper 1: 1250. Due by March 10, 5pm (30% of final grade)
 - Paper 2: 1750-2000 words. Due by April 30, 5 pm (40% of final grade)

- Late Policy
 - Unexcused late work beyond the first three days will lose ⅓ grade per day (e.g., a B paper will receive a B-). Extensions beyond the three late days can be granted with *prior* approval from Prof. White.
- The grading scale is standard: 100–97% A+, 96–93% A, 92–90% A-, 89–87% B+, etc.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT FOR GRADUATES (822)

- Attendance, Participation (20%)
 - Attendance at all class sessions is required (either in person or remotely)
- Presentation (10%)
 - All students will give one presentation in which they will introduce the day's readings and open discussion.
- Term Paper: 3500-4000 words (70%)
 - Graduate students must meet individually with Prof. White to discuss a topic for the paper. Topics must be finalized by April 1.
 - Graduate students' papers should engage with some aspect of the literature covered in the syllabus. It may also be appropriate to consider a few additional sources if appropriate to the paper topic at the direction of Prof. White. Papers should aim to make a sharp criticism of extant arguments or views, advance a positive proposal of their own, or both.
- Late Policy
 - Unexcused late work will lose ⅓ grade per day (e.g., a B paper will receive a B-). Extensions can be granted with *prior* approval from Prof. White.
- The grading scale is standard: 100–97% A+, 96–93% A, 92–90% A-, 89–87% B+, etc.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- Students should expect to disagree with things we read, your peers, and me. These disagreements may be vigorous but must always be reasoned and respectful.
- A note on gadgets: laptops, iPads, and so forth are not permitted in lecture unless you speak to me to request their use and explain why you need it or you have an accommodation (see below under “Services for Students with Disabilities”). If you are found using gadgets for impermissible activities (checking email, etc.), your privileges will be revoked; if you have an accommodation, we will have a meeting with Services for Students with Disabilities to determine an appropriate resolution.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Additional, up-to-date university policies on Academic Honesty, Services for Students with Disabilities, Mental Health and Well-Being Resources, Diversity and Inclusiveness, and Title IX can be found at: <https://go.unl.edu/coursepolicies>.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

(Any reading marked as (IR) can be found in *Internal Reasons: A Contemporary Reader*)

Jan 24: Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"

Jan 31: Williams, "Internal And External Reasons" (IR)

Feb 7: Williams, "Internal and External Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame" and "Some Further Thoughts on Internal and External Reasons"

Feb 14: McDowell, "Might There Be External Reasons?" (IR); Williams "Response to McDowell" (IR)

Feb 7: Drier, "Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality" (IR)

Feb 21: Railton, "On the Hypothetical and Non-Hypothetical in Reasoning about Belief and Action"

Feb 28: Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason" (IR)

Mar 7: Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason" (IR)

Mar 14: HOLIDAY

Mar 21: Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason" (IR)

Mar 28: (Warren) Quinn, "Putting Rationality in Its Place" (IR)

Apr 4: Parfit, "Reasons and Motivation" (IR)

Apr 11: Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Ch. 1 and 4

Apr 18: Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Ch. 2, 3, and 5

Apr 25: Setiya, *Reasons without Rationalism*, Part I

May 2: Setiya, *Reasons without Rationalism*, Part II