

PHIL 742: TESTIMONY, AUTHORITY AND WELL-BEING
Spring 2018

Instructor:

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Office Hours: Wed, 2-3pm or by appt

COURSE OVERVIEW

Are individuals experts regarding what is good for them? If someone tells us what is good for her, should we trust her? A number of issues related to this topic have come up in recent philosophical literature, with implications for moral philosophy, political philosophy, and epistemology.

For example, a new influential book by Laurie Paul (UNC) argues that it is irrational to trust the word of others when deciding whether to undergo major life decisions (such as the decision to have a child). Another new book, by Elizabeth Barnes (UVA), argues that disability does not detract from people's quality of life; instead, it is neutral. A cornerstone of Barnes' argument is the point that disabled people often report that they prefer to be disabled; Barnes argues that this testimony should be taken at face value. A related debate in moral epistemology concerns the question of whether we should defer to "moral experts" – or whether, as some argue, we need to figure out moral truths for ourselves. At the heart of these issues are moral questions regarding personal autonomy and respect for others' experiences; on-the-ground questions about what makes for a good life; and epistemological questions regarding the kinds of information we may legitimately get from others without having certain experiences for ourselves.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

- * One paper, due at the end of the semester, around 20-25p.
- * Present 2 papers (talk us through the paper and lead discussion).

Your seminar grade = your paper grade, provided that you do your presentations.

This seminar will count for an epistemology credit, for distribution purposes. If you want to write on an ethics topic to receive ethics distribution credit instead, come talk to me.

SCHEDULE

Week 1 Jan 22

Go over syllabus, sign up for presentations

Week 2 Jan 29 Well-being

Tiberius, V. (2006), Well-Being: Psychological Research for Philosophers. *Philosophy Compass*, 1: 493–505. doi:10.1111/j.1747-9991.2006.00038.x

Haybron, D. “Do We Know How Happy We Are? On Some Limits of Affective Introspection and Recall”

(Might replace with: a chapter from Anna Alexandrova’s book, *A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being*)

Week 3 Feb 5 Authority and knowing about others

Alcoff, L. “The Problem of Speaking for Others”

Fay, B. “Do You Have to Be One to Know One?”

Week 4 Feb 12 Self-knowledge

Moran, R. ch. 2 of *Authority and Estrangement*

Week 5 No class

Week 6 Feb 26 Self-knowledge

Velleman, D. “The Self as Narrator” ch. 9 of *Self to Self*

Week 7 March 5 Testimony and transformative choice

Paul, L. A. *Transformative Experience*. Ch. 3 (excerpts)

Week 8 March 19 Testimony and disability

Barnes, E. “Taking their word for it”

Barnes, E. “Disability and Adaptive Preference”

Week 9 March 26 Detour: adaptive preference

Nussbaum, M. “Adaptive Preference and Women’s Options”

Bruckner, D. “In Defense of Adaptive Preferences”

Week 10 April 2 Is “I’ll be glad” a good reason?

Harman, E. “‘I’ll be glad I did it’ reasoning and the significance of future desires”

Howard, D. S. "Transforming others and the limits of 'you'll be glad I did it' reasoning"

Week 11 April 9 The problem of moral testimony

McGrath, S. "Skepticism about Moral Expertise as a Puzzle for Moral Realism"

Week 12 April 17 [Class on Tues] The problem of moral testimony again

Hills, A. "Moral Testimony"

Week 13 April 23 The non-problem of moral testimony

Sliwa, P. "In Defense of Moral Testimony."

McShane, P. J. "The non-remedial value of dependence on moral testimony"

Week 14 April 30

Student paper presentations