

**The Self and Normativity**  
PHL 2115, Fall 2023  
Wednesdays 9am-12pm, JHB 418

**Instructors**

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We are both happy to meet with you to discuss anything on your mind. Just shoot us an email!

**Course website**

<https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/312612>  
All readings will be posted under Modules.

**Course description**

This is a seminar on topics in ethics and epistemology related to the self. A punchy version of our overarching question is how *who we are* affects *who we ought to be*. Less punchily but more accurately: how does the attitudes one already has, and how one relates to those attitudes, affect what attitudes one ought to have, or actions one ought to do? In epistemology: how does what you already believe affect what you ought to believe? In ethics: how does what you value or intend affect what you ought to value, intend, or do? We will also be interested in the relation one must bear to one's attitudes to count as 'owning' them as one's own.

We will alternate between considering the versions of these questions that arise in ethics and epistemology, with Brendan focusing on ethics and David on epistemology. These literatures largely don't talk to each other, so it will be interesting to look for parallels between them.

The course is broken into three sections. In Part I, we'll look at what we call *ownership*: what is the relation I bear to my beliefs, desires, and actions that makes them *mine*? Part II will cover two topics. We will explore the idea that we 'see through' our attitudes to the world: to believe that p just is to think that p is the case, to desire something just is to regard it as good. Then we will ask how the attitudes we have *in fact* affect the attitudes we *ought* to have. Part III will look at how these issues arise across time: how should I think about the fact that what I believe and value in the future will be different than what I believe and value right now?

**Grade breakdown**

Attendance/participation: 20%  
Prospectus (graded complete/incomplete): 10%  
Final paper: 70%

## **Final papers**

*Due date:* Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>. If you want a short extension (up to end of December), just ask us. If you want a longer extension (into 2024), talk to Amy – it's fine with us, but you have to submit a form.

*Prospectus:* So we can give you feedback as you develop your paper, we'll ask you to submit a brief prospectus to us by November 1<sup>st</sup>, and then set up a meeting with at least one of us to discuss it. This prospectus is not a big deal and is not given a letter grade; instead, its purpose is to help us help you. It should be roughly one to three pages, and can be in outline or prose format.

*Length:* anywhere between roughly 4000 and 10,000 words is fine. The right length depends both on the project and on what you want to do with the paper. A 4000-word paper is best for submitting to conferences; journal articles are often in the 8000-10,000 word range.

*Topic:* Your final paper can be on any topic covered in the course or related to the course's topics. Whether your paper leans more strongly towards ethics or epistemology will determine what breadth requirement the course will cover. If you write in ethics, the course will count under 'Values'; if you write in epistemology, it will fall under 'MES' (metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science).

We encourage you to move past the standard undergraduate paper format (reconstruct argument from readings, object, reply, rinse and repeat) and towards the kind of research paper that appears in journals. You can critically engage with other authors, of course, but we would like to see you go beyond that and articulate your own account – or, if your paper is more negative, to provide an objection that applies to a broad class of views rather than picking on the idiosyncrasies of a single author's account.

Finally: don't feel limited to picking a topic from the first half of class! If something later in the course piques your interest, then look at the readings early. You don't need to wait for us to have a class discussion of a topic in order to start working on it yourself.

## **Well-being**

Grad school can be stressful and difficult as well as wonderful and exciting. We know: we were grad students not too long ago. So please feel free to talk with us not just about philosophy, but also about any personal struggles you might be facing, or any questions you may have about how to approach grad student life in general. We're always happy to listen, and we may be able to help.

University of Toronto also offers professional support for a wide range of challenges you might encounter, including (but not limited to) mental health, financial distress, housing crises, and sexual violence. **If you need help, please ask for it.** There are people whose job it is to give you help. For a guide to these resources, visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/feeling-distressed>

## Course Schedule

*A note on 'background' readings: there is no expectation that you read any of these. We offer them as a place to start if you want to dive deeper into a literature, for instance if you decide to write your paper on the topic.*

### Part I: Ownership

#### 9/13: Rational subjects (Barnett)

David Barnett, book manuscript, Ch. 1, 'The Elusive Subject of Thought'  
Brian Hedden, 'Rationality and Synchronic Identity'

#### *Background:*

E. T. Olson, 'What Are We?'  
Elizabeth Schechter, 'The Subject in Neuropsychology: Individuating Minds in the Split Brain Case'  
Tim Bayne, *The Unity of Consciousness*, Ch. 12  
Cristina Borgoni, 'Rationality in Fragmented Belief Systems'

#### 9/20: Ownership (and awareness) of beliefs and experiences (Barnett)

David Barnett, book manuscript, Ch. 2, 'Ownership and Awareness'  
Declan Smithies, 'Access Internalism and the Extended Mind'  
Nicolas Silins, 'The Conscious Theory of Higher-Orderness'

#### *Background:*

Michael Huemer, 'Epistemological Egoism and Agent-Centered Norms'  
David Rosenthal, 'Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness'  
Alex Byrne, 'Some Like it HOT: Consciousness and Higher-Order Thought'  
Andy Clark and David Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind'  
Eric Marcus, *Belief, Inference, and the Self-Conscious Mind*, Chs. 2-6  
William James, *Principles of Psychology*, beginning of Ch. 9 'The Stream of Thought' (pp. 224-229)

#### 9/27: Ownership of values and actions (de Kenessey)

David Velleman, 'What Happens When Someone Acts?'  
Michael Bratman, 'Three Theories of Self-Governance'  
Christine Korsgaard, 'Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant'

#### *Background:*

Harry Frankfurt, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' (locus classicus)  
Harry Frankfurt, 'Identification and Wholeheartedness' (more recent version of his view)  
Gary Watson, 'Free Agency'  
Chandra Sripada, 'Self-Expression: A Deep Self Theory of Moral Responsibility'

#### **10/4: Self-control and weakness of will (de Kenessey)**

Chandra Sripada, "How is Willpower Possible? The Puzzle of Synchronic Self-Control and the Divided Mind"

Tamar Schapiro, *Feeling Like It: A Theory of Inclination and Will*, Ch. 5, 'The High Road' and Ch. 6, 'The Low Road'

#### *Background:*

Chandra Sripada, "Frankfurt's Unwilling and Willing Addicts"

Richard Holton and Kent Berridge, "Addiction Between Compulsion and Choice"

Donald Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" (locus classicus)

### **Part II - Reasons**

#### **10/11: The veil of ideas and transparency (Barnett)**

Nicolas Silins, "Seeing through "The Veil of Perception"", Introduction and Section 1

Alex Byrne, *Introspection and Self-Knowledge*, Sections 1.1-1.2

Michael Tye, 'Representationalism and the Transparency of Experience', Section I

James Pryor, 'The Skeptic and the Dogmatist'

#### *Background:*

Roger White, 'Problems for Dogmatism'

James Pryor, 'There is Immediate Justification'

#### **10/18: The guise of the good and transparency (de Kenessey)**

Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement*, Ch. 2 section 6, pp. 60-64 (end at "...damage or evasion than the other kinds.") and pp. 114-119 (Start at "Hampshire is not endorsing ...; end at "...how the balance of reasons falls out")

Eric Marcus, 'Wanting and Willing'

Sergio Tenenbaum, 'The Guise of the Good'

Alan Hazlett, 'The Guise of the Good and the Problem of Partiality', sections 2-4

#### *Background:*

Michael Smith and Philip Pettit, 'Backgrounding Desire'

Tamar Schapiro, 'Foregrounding Desire'

#### **10/25: How does what I believe and experience affect what I have reason to believe? (Barnett)**

Alex Worsnip, *Fitting Things Together: Coherence and the Demands of Structural Rationality*, Sections 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.6, 3.1, 3.3

David Barnett, book manuscript, Ch. 3, 'Why Ownership Matters'

#### *Background:*

Errol Lord. *The Importance of Being Rational*, Chs. 3 and 7

Jonathan Way, 'Reasons and Rationality'

John Broome, 'Normative Requirements'

Niko Kolodny, 'Why Be Rational?'

**11/1: How does what I desire affect what I have reason to do? (de Kenessey)**

T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Ch. 1 section 9, 'Reasons and Desires: Justification'

Alex Worsnip, 'Eliminating Prudential Reasons', section 2

Ruth Chang, 'Commitments, Reasons, and the Will', sections 2-3 and section 6, pp.103-105 (24-25 in the PDF), ending at "... your agent-relative and agent-neutral given reasons."

Ruth Chang, 'Voluntarist Reasons and the Sources of Normativity', sections 5-6

Sarah Stroud, 'Permissible Partiality, Projects, and Plural Agency'

*Background:*

Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" and *A Critique of Utilitarianism*, sections 3 and 5

**11/15: Reflection and alienation (Barnett)**

Adam Elga, 'Reflection and Disagreement'

David Barnett, 'Reflection Deflated'

*Background:*

Thomas Kelly, 'The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement'

Sophie Horowitz, 'Epistemic Akrasia'

Ray Briggs, 'Distorted Reflection'

Bas van Fraassen, 'Belief and the Will'

### Part III - Time

**11/22: Diachronic rationality (Barnett)**

Brian Hedden, 'Time Slice Rationality'

Sarah Moss, 'Time-Slice Epistemology and Action Under Indeterminacy'

*Background:*

David Christensen, 'Diachronic Coherence Versus Epistemic Partiality'

Derek Parfit, 'The Unimportance of Identity'

Frank Arntzenius, 'Some Problems for Conditionalization and Reflection'

Alvin Goldman, 'Internalism Exposed'

David Barnett, 'Internalism, Memory, and the Problem of Forgotten Evidence'

**11/29: Diachronic agency (de Kenessey)**

Julia Nefsky and Sergio Tenenbaum, 'Extended Agency and the Problem of Diachronic Autonomy'

Barislav Marušić, *Evidence and Agency: Norms of Belief for Promising and Resolving*, Ch. 1, 'Promising and Resolving against the Evidence', up to end of section 1.2, and Ch. 6, 'The Sartrean Response'

*Background:*

Frank Jackson and Robert Pargetter, 'Oughts, Options, and Actualism'

Gregory Kavka, 'The Toxin Puzzle'

Richard Holton, 'Rational Resolve'

**12/6: Changing what one values (de Kenessey)**

Agnes Callard, *Aspiration*, Introduction, section 1, Ch. 2, 'Proleptic Reasons', introduction and section 1, and Ch. 5, 'The Problem of Self-Creation', up to p. 209, 'An Objection: The Value Gambit'

Kieran Setiya, 'Retrospection'

*Background:*

Bernard Williams, 'Moral Luck'

R. Jay Wallace, *The View from Here*, Introduction

Elizabeth Harman, "'I'll Be Glad I Did It" Reasoning and the Significance of Future Desires'

Bernhard Salow, 'Partiality and Retrospective Justification'