PHIL 3500: Ethics

Tuesday/Thursday 2:00-3:20

Professor: Christen Paradissis

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00-11:00 & by appointment

Class Zoom Link Here:

Meeting ID:

Passcode:

**Course Description[[1]](#footnote-1)**

This is a course about falling down and getting back up again. We’ll start by thinking about some of the ways in which people are social, vulnerable, and fallible, drawing in particular on feminist accounts of what it means to be a person. We’ll go on to explore how we should think and feel about people (including ourselves) who act wrongly – about people who make mistakes and who try to make up for them. Particular topics we will cover are moral responsibility, blame, apology, forgiveness, hope, despair, retribution, and reparation.

My primary goal for our time together this semester is to help you develop and refine your critical voice. I believe that you have important things to say. I want this course to help you say them. Additionally, at the completion of this course, my aim is that you will be able to:

* situate and understand ways in which important feminist theories have understood moral responsibility and moral psychology
* ground those theories in important primary sources;
* critique the reasoning used to support those theories, as well as develop and defend of your own position;
* apply those theories to contemporary social issues, policy decisions, and interpersonal decisions;
* and demonstrate effective oral and written communication of ideas.

# Required Course Materials

There are two assigned books for this course:

*Holding and Letting Go –* Hilde Lindemann

*Repair –* Elizabeth Spelman

All the additional readings for the course will be in .pdf format available on Canvas. The course also utilizes **inclusive access** for the Lindemann text. On Canvas you can access the e-book format under the Bookshelves tab in the lefthand menu. If you so choose you can opt-out of the inclusive access option and instead purchase the text. See the below:

Inclusive Access offers you the right content online on the first day of class, at a great price. If you OPT-OUT during the first two weeks of class your e-book fee will be refunded to you during the 3rd week of classes without penalty. If you decide you’d like to OPT-IN to the Inclusive Access program again you can do so by going to www.campusstore.utah.edu and find the OPT-OUT option under the BOOKS menu. There you can create your own account and OPT back IN.

**Communication**

* I will email the class regularly and will consistently make use of the Announcements feature on Canvas. Please make sure you have your Canvas settings set such that Announcements send an automatic email to your Umail inbox.
* The best way to contact me is by email as opposed to the Canvas Message system. I check my email consistently throughout the weekdays so this is your most guaranteed bet for a prompt response from me.
* You may call me one of two things: Prof. Paradissis or Christen. I am happy for you to use whichever you prefer.
* My pronouns are she/hers. If you think I am unlikely to know the name you would prefer to be called, or the pronouns I ought to use for you, please let me know.

**Course Grade Breakdown**

Your grade for the course will allocated as follows:

Daily Reading Reflections 40%

Short Papers 50%

Participation 10%

Daily Reading Reflections

For nearly every day of content you will submit a short reading reflection on Canvas in advance of class. This reflection will need to engage critically and substantially with the reading assigned for the day. Reflections will be due every Tuesday/Thursday by 10 am. **Timely submission before class is very important**- I will read these before class and will use your responses to inform our lectures and discussions together. You must complete all 25 reading reflections throughout the semester.

Short Papers

5 short papers (4-6 pages in length), each on a selected reading(s) of your choice, will be required. These are to be submitted throughout the semester at your discretion. I encourage you to space out your submissions to balance your workload. An assignment file with more detail will be available on Canvas.

Participation

There at least two discrete ways to actively participate in the class:

1. There will be a **Daily Class Scribe**: One student will sign up for a class slot each day of class. Students will recap the main material discussed in the prior class and make a connection to that day’s new material.
2. **Engagement in class conversation and timeliness**: If you consistently arrive late to class this will decrease your participation grade. Engaging your peers and myself in thoughtful and respectful discussion, both via reflections and during lecture will be critical to your learning in the course. Some more specific ways to be a good participant include:
   * Read the assigned texts before class and be ready to ask or answer questions, raise critiques, or draw connections to other texts or concepts we have studied.
   * Print the texts and bring them with you to class so you can refer to them easily throughout the discussion.
   * Be respectful of each other, of the authors, and of me at all times.
   * If you are able, join class with your camera on; we will have a much better conversation if I can read you visually.
   * Leave your microphone on mute until it’s time for you to speak (to avoid creating interference and audio lag over Zoom).

A letter grade will be determined at the end of the semester according to the following scale:

A 94 – 100%

A - 90 – 93.9%

B+ 87 – 89.9%

B 84 – 86.9%

B- 80 – 83.9%

C+ 77 – 79.9%

C 74 – 76.9%

C- 70 – 73.9%

D+ 67 – 69.9%

D 64 – 66.9%

D- 60 – 63.9%

E (F) 0 – 59.9%

**Office Hours**

I strongly encourage you to come and meet with me during my office hours or by appointment if you are having trouble with the class. I also just simply like talking about philosophy and ethics and getting to know students, so I would be glad to have you stop by even if you feel comfortable with how you are performing in the class. My office hours are Tuesdays from 10-11, and by appointment. The Zoom link for my office hours is the same as our class Zoom link at the top of the syllabus.

# Students with Disabilities

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability and anticipate needing to make use of them, please contact me early in the semester so that we can work together to help you succeed in the course.

**What Does a Philosopher Look Like?**

Like many disciplines in the academy, philosophy has historically been dominated by white men. Stereotype threat is a psychological phenomenon that causes people to underperform in a discipline in the face of a stereotype that says that “people like them” aren’t good at that discipline. As a result, the stereotype becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Luckily, it is also the case that telling students that there are no actual differences in performance in a class can defuse the anxiety that the stereotype creates and subsequently undermines those tendencies to underperform. (For evidence of both, see Stereotype Threat and Women’s Math Performance” by Spencer, Steele, and Quinn, available on Google Classroom.) *The stereotype that says that only white men can be good philosophers is false.* For more on this, visit: <http://looksphilosophical.tumblr.com/>

# On Seeming Smart

Related to that point, regardless of whether you’ve studied philosophy prior to this course, you might often find yourself feeling intimidated by the way philosophers write or talk. This might be because philosophy, like all disciplines, employs its own jargon and concepts that you either might not have encountered before, or that you might have seen used differently. Jargon can be useful, but it can also be used to exclude people and make them feel like they don’t have a place in the conversation. Don’t feel that way and don’t be intimidated! If you don’t know what a term means, ask for a definition (or look it up). If you don’t know how a concept is being used, ask for clarification. For a very helpful essay that speaks to this (among other important things) see “On Being Good at Seeming Smart”:

<http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2010/03/on-being-good-at-seeming-smart.html>

1. This syllabus is significantly adapted from primary material by Dr. Barrett Emerick. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)