

Philosophy 380 N: Current Controversies
Normativity and Community
Dr. Erica L. Neely
Spring 2008

Place and Time: 217 Gregory Hall, TR 2:30-3:50
Email address: elneely@uiuc.edu
Office Location and Hours: 105 I Gregory Hall; TR 12-1 p.m. and by appointment
See note about office at end of syllabus
Office Phone: 333-4677
Text: Philosophy 380 Course Packet (available at Notes and Quotes)

Note: I am DRES and ESL friendly. If you need accommodation or are having trouble keeping up in class because of language-issues, please drop me an email or come to see me. I'm happy to help.

Aims and Objectives

This course looks at communities from a value-theoretic standpoint, drawing on readings by both classical and contemporary philosophers. We will begin by asking what it takes to be a member of a community in general and, in particular, to be a member of our moral community. Do we extend membership (and thus ethical consideration) to people in our nation? To all humans? To all animals? We explore the boundaries of our community through readings about nationalism, race theory, animal rights, and personhood. We then consider two ways in which questions of normativity arise in conjunction with being a member of a community.

In the second section we address first whether communities are necessary – is the human condition such that we cannot avoid forming some kind of communal bonds? We then ask whether communities have intrinsic value; is there value simply in being a member of a community? Furthermore, what happens if an individual's needs conflict with those of the community – which takes precedence? Are there some rights that a society cannot take away from an individual? We also examine how extensive a society's right to regulate individual behavior is, particularly with regard to the question of drug addiction; is this a personal choice or something which a society legitimately can regulate?

In the third section we address a different kind of relation between community and value, namely, to what extent communities are responsible for creating value. This breaks into two subsections. First, we consider the question of relativism: is normativity simply a matter of community agreement? Second, we consider how a community's value commitments are reflected in its practices – and whether they sometimes are reflected in places we don't expect. In particular, we discuss whether community values sneak into practices we often take to be responsible mainly to objective notions of truth, such as scientific inquiry.

Assignments and Grading

Short Paper – This is a 3-4 page paper on an assigned topic, the purpose of which is to demonstrate your writing style and ability to construct an argument; I will provide you with detailed feedback on how to polish your writing and construct a rigorous argument. Your performance on this paper does not greatly affect your grade in the course, but it is not possible to pass the class without completing this assignment.

Midterm and Final Papers 40% each – These papers are 10-15 pages each on a topic of your choice. I must approve the topic in advance, but you are welcome to explore whatever readings most interest you; you are also encouraged to seek out additional readings on the topic if you so choose. Your papers must demonstrate an ability for philosophical thought – I am not interested in a book report; I want to read your criticisms, arguments, and ideas. I am willing to read outlines or rough drafts; students whose grades on the midterm paper are lower than a B may be required to show me an outline and/or draft of the final paper in advance.

Papers are due in class; if you know that you will be absent on a day something is due, please make arrangements to have a classmate hand it in or leave it in my mailbox. Unless something extraordinary prevents you from turning your assignments in on time, late papers will be dropped one step for each day that they are late. (Hence an A- paper that is one day late will be a B+ paper; if it is two days late it will be a B, etc.)

Participation 20% – This course will involve a fair amount of discussion; while attendance is not required, you need to read the material before class and come prepared with questions and ideas. Participation will be a factor in your final grade; if you are shy about speaking in class, you may share your thoughts with me through email, on the course website, or after class.

Important Notes

- My office is under construction and I am currently in a temporary office (105 I). It is somewhat complicated to reach, since you need to enter either through the Philosophy Department main office (105) or through the Departmental lounge (107) and wend your way through the chaos to find me. **Unfortunately, the main office closes for lunch from 12-1 (when my office hours are), which means if you are trying to access my office or my mailbox, you must enter through 107.**
- I am happy to make appointments to see people. However, if you have to miss an appointment, please let me know in advance if possible. (Even if you call my office at the last minute, it is better than nothing.) In general, however, you are best off trying to reach me by email rather than by phone.
- The web site for this course is at <https://compass.uiuc.edu/webct/logon/250177939131> – you can participate online through the discussion boards here, as well as keep up with any announcements.
- **Please bring your course packet to class, as you may wish to reference the articles we have covered.**

Day-by-Day Reading and Homework Assignments

January

T 1/15 Introduction

Section One: Communities and Community Membership: Who and What Are We?

R 1/17 1. "Ethics in Community" (Ernest W. Ranly)
2. "What We Say" (Oswald Hanfling)

T 1/22 **No Class**

R 1/24 3. "Nasty, brutish, and short" (Angus Taylor)
4. "All Animals are Equal" (Peter Singer)

T 1/29 5. "The Moral Status of Animals" (Roger Scruton)
6. "The Land Ethic" (Aldo Leopold)

R 1/31 **No Class**

February

T 2/5 **No Class**

R 2/7 7. "Biomedical Ethics" (K. Danner Clouser)
8. "The Personhood Argument in Favor of Abortion" (Mary Anne Warren)

Short Paper Due

T 2/12 9. "In Defense of Nationality" (David Miller)

R 2/14 10. "Philosophical and Social Implications of Race" (Naomi Zack)
11. "The Racial Contract" (Charles W. Mills)

Section Two: Communities – Necessity and Value; Conflict Between Individual and Community

T 2/19 12. Excerpts from *A Treatise of Human Nature* (David Hume)
13. Excerpts from *The Social Contract* (Jean-Jacques Rousseau)

R 2/21 14. "Individual and Community" (James Hudson)

T 2/26 More on Hudson
15. Excerpts from *On Ethics and Living Well* (Robert C. Solomon)

R 2/28 16. "The Value of Community" (John E. Smith)
17. Excerpts from "The Virtues of Common Pursuit" (Nancy Sherman)

March

T 3/4 18. "Liberalism and the Value of Community" (Andrew Mason)

R 3/6 19. "Proletarians and Communists" (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels)
20. "Of the Limits to the Authority of Society over the Individual" (John Stuart Mill)

T 3/11 More on Mill
21. Excerpts from *The Gay Science* (Friedrich Nietzsche)

R 3/13 22. Excerpts from *The Will to Power* (Friedrich Nietzsche)
Midterm Paper Due

- T 3/18 **No Class – Spring Break**
 R 3/20 **No Class – Spring Break**
 T 3/25 23. “Does Privacy Undermine Community?” (Mark Tunick)
 R 3/27 24. “Paternalism” (Gerald Dworkin)
 25. “The Ethics of Addiction” (Thomas Szasz)

April

- T 4/1 26. “Is There a Duty to Die?” (John Hardwig)

Section Three: How Communities Create Value – Relativism, Social Practices, and Science

- R 4/3 27. Excerpts from *The Nature of Morality* (Gilbert Harman)
 T 4/8 28. “Objectivity, Values, and History” (Eric Matthews)
 29. “Solidarity or Objectivity?” (Richard Rorty)
 R 4/10 30. “Objective Knowledge and Objective Value” (Errol E. Harris)
 T 4/15 31. Excerpts from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Thomas Kuhn)
 R 4/17 More on Kuhn
 T 4/22 32. Excerpts from *Science as Social Knowledge* (Helen E. Longino)
 R 4/24 33. Excerpts from *Reflections on Gender and Science* (Evelyn Fox Keller)
 T 4/29 34. “Alternative Epistemologies” (Charles W. Mills)

- R 5/8 Final Paper Due, 4.30 p.m.**

Important Dates

- T 1/22 **No Class**
 R 1/31 **No Class**
 T 2/5 **No Class**

 R 2/7 **Short Paper Due**

 R 3/13 **Midterm Paper Due**

 T 3/18 **No Class – Spring Break**
 R 3/20 **No Class – Spring Break**

 R 5/8 **Final Paper Due, 4.30 p.m.**