

PHILOSOPHY 600: SEMINAR ON MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Professor J. Angelo Corlett, Ph.D.
Spring, 2016

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Note: From time to time, the California Faculty Association threatens to go on strike for various excuses that it deems sufficiently worthy to disrupt student academic success. Professor Corlett assures his students that he will not honor any CFA strike action and that he will continue to hold classes and fulfill each of his professional duties in terms of research, teaching and service as he always has throughout his career. He firmly believes that the academic success of his students outweighs whatever salary or benefit increases that a work strike might bring to him. It is his honor and privilege to serve students and the taxpayers of the great State of California as excellently as he has done so for nearly 20 years.

“So we must, it appears, inquire into the qualities of something the nature of which we do not yet know.”—Socrates (*Meno* 86e).

“What is true is never refuted”—Socrates (*Gorgias* 473b).

“...no student should be lame in his love of hard work.”—Socrates (Plato, *Republic* 535d)

“...weariness and sleep are enemies of learning.” (Plato, *Republic* 537b)

Seminar Day, Time, and Location: Tuesdays, 7pm in AL 422.

Telephone Number: (619) 594-6251.

Office: AL 432.

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:00pm-6:30pm.

Seminar Description: A philosophical analysis of the concept of moral responsibility. Expected outcome: that students become philosophically proficient in the contents of a particular corpus of some of the most current (pre-published!) writings on moral responsibility theory, with special focus on the moral responsibility theory of the most highly regarded philosopher in the field: **Distinguished Professor John Martin Fischer.**

Seminar Readings: To be provided for students in electronic format from *The Journal of Ethics: An International Philosophical Review*. **These articles are the legal property of Springer, the Publisher of *The Journal of Ethics*. Students are in no way (in hard copy or electronic format) to disseminate the contents of these articles as to do so violates U.S. copyright law. These articles are only to be used for seminar purposes. Violators of this copyright law will be dropped from the seminar with a grade of “F” and reported to Springer! Authors of said articles are gracious enough to grant Professor Corlett permission to use them for purposes of this seminar. So let us not abuse their kindness.**

As soon as possible, students need to acquire a copy of J.M. Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). It is suggested that this book be acquired in the quickest and most cost effective manner, legally speaking.

Seminar Requirements (outcomes assessment): This is a graduate-level research seminar. It is expected of participants to strive to produce the very highest-level work they can possibly produce in attempting to make a constructive and philosophically significant contribution to moral responsibility theory. It is expected that each student will *attend each* seminar session and be prepared to *discuss* critically the arguments and analyses in the assigned readings and lectures. *Each student absence will result in a reduction of 5 points* (regardless of the reason). The aim of this penalty schema is to ensure respect for speakers who have spent significant time and effort in preparation for their presentations. Reading assignments from the seminar readings will be announced each week in light of the following week’s presentation topic.

Weekly written assignments: Each student will study each of the assigned articles each week and submit a carefully composed and proofread summary and philosophical criticism of each one due at the beginning of the seminar session immediately following the day it was assigned. Each summary of each article

assigned will consist of 2-3 pages of carefully proofread material and will be worth between 0-3 points each. Use Times New Roman 14 point font with 1" margins, double-spaced. There will be at least 15 assigned articles throughout the term.

Once the student presentation section of the seminar begins, there will be a 30-minute session prior to each student presentation wherein the assigned readings for that evening from Professor John Martin Fischer will be discussed. Students, including presenters, are expected to come well-prepared for such discussions, as students participation will be judged for quality and quantity from 0-15 points over the duration of that section of the seminar. Student presentations will begin immediately after such discussions of Professor Fischer's work.

Oral Presentation and Term paper: Each student will *read their own 50-60 minute paper* (no lectures!) on a particular work of or problem in moral responsibility theory that is based directly on one of the assigned readings (20 points possible), and this presentation is to serve as the basis for the student's original 30-40 page term paper, the details of which will be outlined in class (See "Requirements for Term Papers"). This term paper will be due in class on the last day of seminar. The term paper is worth up to 20 points of the student's seminar score. Since the student knows at the outset when their own presentation and paper is due and has plenty of time in which to complete the projects, no late presentations or papers will be accepted for any reason whatsoever and shall be awarded a score of "0." These requirements are meant to develop the student's analytical writing skills, along with their ability to speak articulately to a public audience. Each of these skills is essential to becoming a good philosopher. A very well-written and thoroughly proofread draft of the student's oral presentation is due no later than 50 hours prior to their presentation. Students shall be penalized 1 point for every hour that this draft is submitted late, the point to be subtracted from the student's overall presentation score. No excuses for late work! **Due date: 2 May 2016.**

Very Special Guest Lecture:

Distinguished Professor John Martin Fischer has graciously agreed to visit our seminar to give a lecture on moral responsibility theory (his theory). Students are required to attend his lecture and to participate in the discussion. Because Professor Fischer's lecture has yet to be finalized as to which date he will present his lecture, either 3 or 10 May 2016, we shall leave open our schedule on those dates. Whichever date Professor is able to visit the seminar, Professor Corlett shall present his research project on moral responsibility

theory on the other date. In both cases, it is “all about Fischer.....” as Professor Corlett’s research on this topic revolves around Professor Fischer’s work.

Summary of Seminar Assignments:

(At least 15) Weekly reading and critical summaries (0-3 points each)

(5-6) Discussions of Fischer, *Responsibility and Control* (0-15 points total)

Student Presentation (0-20 points)

Term Paper (0-20 points)

Attendance: -5 points for each absence.

One can see, then, that depending on the total number of articles assigned (there might be greater than 15 assigned), and depending on how many sessions are in part devoted to Fischer’s book, students have an opportunity to earn more than 100 points for the seminar. But students will of course have an opportunity to earn at least 100 points for the seminar.

Regarding all of the assignments in this seminar, students will be graded, *not* on a curve, but according to their combined scores on the basis of the following grading scale:

A: 93-100.

A-: 90-92.

B+: 88-89.

B: 83-87.

B-: 80-82.

F: 0-79.

Requirements for Student Presentations:

No later than by the beginning of the second session, students are to sign up for a presentation topic based on one dialogue or a set of dialogues. They will then set about the task of preparing a 50-60 minute paper reading (no lectures!) on that topic. The student is to formally *read* the paper 25-30 pages in length to the seminar group. A copy of this paper must be presented (by email as a WORD.doc attachment) to Professor Corlett no later than 50 hours prior to the student’s presentation. Failure to do so will result in 1 point being deducted from the score the student receives for her presentation for each hour that the paper is turned in late. 60 minutes will be set aside to discuss each seminar presentation. This is an

assignment that should represent original thought on the part of the student presenter. Whatever bibliographical sources used must be pre-approved by Professor Corlett. Failure to do so will result in a loss of a minimum of 10 points on the assignment. Failure to present on the student's selected time slot will result in a score of "0" for the assignment, and there will be no make-up presentation assignments. Tardiness to one's own presentation will result in 1 point docked for each minute the student is late to her own presentation which will be presumed to begin at 4pm. Students shall be graded on the style and philosophical content of their presentations, including the professionalism and articulateness in which they present (read) their work. The student's excellence of articulation shall be a significant consideration in the awarding of points for each category of the presentation.

Some Advice for Presentation Preparation:

1. Those who present first and second will have fewer weeks to prepare, but more weeks to revise for the term paper. Those who have more weeks to prepare have fewer weeks to revise the term paper.
2. Read the assigned readings carefully and decide what problem (e.g., argument or analysis) seems most interesting to you philosophically. Begin to do this NOW!
3. Once you have decided on a particular and well-focused problem based on an argument in the assigned readings, approach Professor Corlett right away about how to proceed.
4. Devote at least 30 minutes of your presentation to your own critical ideas regarding the topic, and your defense against possible objections to your position.
5. Practice presenting your paper, even if this means reading it aloud to yourself. Try to exchange favors with a fellow student wherein each of you listens to the other present their projects 1 or 2 days before the presentation. Helpful feedback can result from such exchanges.

Some Helpful Advice for Presenters During Their Presentation:

1. Try not to be nervous. This is a learning experience, though you should prepare your presentation better than you have ever prepared before.
2. Avoid becoming defensive. Become and remain open-minded and learn how to take criticism gracefully and respond graciously.

3. Avoid getting off point. Best to read the paper in a lively manner. Do not read it lifelessly. Practice reading your paper several times before you present it to the group.
4. Avoid “uh.” “Uh” is not a word of English! You will lose style points if you use this utterance. The same goes for locutions such as “It’s like... an argument....oh my god!” “Dude, that’s sooo totally awesome what Fischer wrote in this passage!” or “Did you like, see what Lehrer...DID! Oh my god!” or “Whoa, dude! Totally! Mele sooo rocks. He’s like waaay sick!” etc.
5. Speak clearly and fluidly. What appears to be eccentricity and rambling will be construed as incompetence.
6. Style points are NOT awarded for being pretentious, boring and beside the point.
7. Take careful notes during the discussion of your presentation, not only to learn how to better present philosophy, but also to learn how to revise your project into your term paper.
8. Include in a footnote in your final draft of your term paper a note of thanks to each of those whose comments assisted you significantly.

It is expected that all students who are not presenting listen carefully to presentations and provide incisive comments/questions on them. This exercise is intended to introduce students to how philosophers function at professional meetings and conferences both as presenters and attendees at presentations. It implies, among other things, that students have assigned readings every week based on the following week’s scheduled presentation topic(s). You are expected to read the assigned readings before seminar each week.

Requirements for Term Papers:

Students must write their term papers on the same topic as their seminar presentation. This provides students with the experience of a professional philosopher who presents lectures and revises them substantially in light of comments made during discussion in pursuit of publication of her ideas. It is expected that students revise their presentations substantially in converting it into a term paper. In so doing, they must be sure that their term papers conform to the “Requirements for Term Papers.” Papers must include substantial scholarship, both in terms of the seminar assigned readings and in terms of secondary sources used for the project. Again, all bibliographical sources for the term paper must be pre-approved by the Professor, and *term papers are due in class on the final day of regular classes-no exceptions, no excuses*. Late papers will be penalized 1 point for every hour they are late.

Both in the seminar presentation and in the term paper, clarity is essential. As Socrates says to Gorgias of the nature of philosophical discussion: “It’s not you I’m after, it’s our discussion, to have it proceed in such a way as to make the thing we’re talking about most clear to us.” (Plato, *Gorgias* 453c).

Tentative Seminar Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to Seminar: Moral Responsibility Theory.

Week 2: Discussion of articles from *The Journal of Ethics*.

Week 3: Discussion of articles from *The Journal of Ethics*.

Week 4: Discussion of articles from *The Journal of Ethics*.

Week 5: Discussion of articles from *The Journal of Ethics*.

Week 6: Discussion of articles from *The Journal of Ethics*.

Week 7: Discussion of articles from *The Journal of Ethics*.

Week 8: Discussion of articles from *The Journal of Ethics*.

Week 9: _____ (Student presenter)

Preparatory Reading for Fischer lecture: Fischer, *Responsibility and Control*, Chs. 1-2. 30-minute discussion of reading assignment prior to student presentation.

Week 10: _____ (Student presenter)

Preparatory Reading for Fischer lecture: Fischer, *Responsibility and Control*, Chs. 3-4. 30-minute discussion of reading assignment prior to student presentation.

Week 11: _____ (Student presenter)

Preparatory Reading for Fischer lecture: Fischer, *Responsibility and Control*, Chs. 5-6. 30-minute discussion of reading assignment prior to student presentation.

Week 12: _____ (Student presenter)

Preparatory Reading for Fischer lecture: Fischer, *Responsibility and Control*, Chs. 7-8. 30-minute discussion of reading assignment prior to student presentation.

Week 13: _____ (Student presenter)

Preparatory Reading for Fischer lecture: Fischer, *Responsibility and Control*, Ch. 9. 30-minute discussion of reading assignment prior to student presentation.

Week 14: _____ (Student presenter)

Preparatory Reading for Fischer lecture: Fischer, *Responsibility and Control*. 30-minute discussion of reading assignment prior to student presentation.

Week 15: Term papers due in class. **Special Lecture** _____.

Final Examination Week: _____ **Special Lecture** _____.

Other Seminar Notes:

Students with special documented medical needs should avail themselves of Disabled Student Services, SS 1661, and should immediately discuss such needs with the Professor so that such needs might be accommodated.

If this is an evening seminar that ends in a late hour, students are encouraged contact campus escort services at the end of class sessions or after office hour visits (594-1199).

Students who fulfill their responsibilities for this seminar will find that it is a demanding, but rewarding, one. During the weeks of student presentations, each student is expected to read the assigned readings from **Professor John Martin Fischer** as background reading for his special lecture tentatively scheduled for the end of the term. On a scale of 1-10 for required time for this seminar, this seminar is rated a 10. So is its rating for enjoyment and philosophical enrichment! Welcome to *graduate* studies in philosophy! If you want to know what is expected in an introductory Ph.D.-level seminar in philosophy at a well-ranked PhD program, this is a keen opportunity to find out.