

ETH401H1Y: Seminar in Ethics 2023/2024

Instructor: Dr. Larisa Svirsky (she/they)
Email: larisa.svirsky@utoronto.ca
Office: Larkin Building, 2nd floor, room 205
Office Hours: Mondays 11-1 and by appointment

Location: Larkin 200
Time: Wednesdays 11:10-12:00
Ethics@Noon talk: 12:00-2:00
Individual meetings: by appointment

Land acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Course description

This seminar will expose advanced undergraduates to cutting edge research in ethics. It meets once every two weeks for the entire academic year. Students will attend the Ethics@Noon research presentations at the Centre for Ethics and prepare for each presentation by reading a small selection of related academic papers or other materials. They will also meet individually with the course instructor to plan an independent research project. In the winter term, students will present their research, discuss it with other students in the seminar, and provide written feedback on one peer's research presentation. (Note that this is an "HIY course" – a half credit course taught throughout both Fall and Winter Terms.)

Course objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- ☐ Discuss a variety of topics in ethics from different ethical frameworks and across different areas of philosophy
- ☐ Reconstruct and evaluate arguments
- ☐ Develop an individual research project from nascent idea to polished presentation
- ☐ Construct a philosophical argument, present and defend it orally, receive and incorporate peer feedback
- ☐ Provide constructive feedback on others' arguments, ideas, and presentation skills

Communication

All readings, course materials, and announcements will be posted on Quercus. If you need to contact me, please email me rather than using the Quercus Inbox system. I'll do my best to reply within 48 hours but will take time off from emails during weekends, holidays, and past office hours.

Expectations

This seminar will be a venue for you to develop your research abilities and to actively participate in a research community. Philosophy is hard! You'll probably need to read the assigned materials more than once. To get the most out of the text and to be prepared for the discussions in seminar,

read the assigned materials actively: That means looking for the author's main thesis and the arguments they provide to support it. Ask yourself whether you agree with this thesis, and whether you think their main argument to support it is strong. Do the author's arguments depend on any problematic premises? If so, why?

If you have any questions about specific philosophical terms or concepts, please do not hesitate to ask, either in the classroom (chances are that others may have similar questions, and regardless might benefit from additional clarification too) or via email. Listen and read carefully and do your best to be charitable in your interpretations. If there are ideas you disagree with, try to keep an open mind, and understand the context in which those ideas were developed. Always try to express your disagreement and criticism in ways that are constructive, respectful, and kind.

Evaluation

Participation (10%)

We will meet bi-weekly and have a class session (11:10 to 12:00) before the Ethics @Noon presentation (12:00-2:00pm). During the class session we will discuss the assigned readings, which will be selected in consultation with the speaker, and prepare comments and clarification and discussion questions for the Q&A period after the speaker's presentation.

Short writing assignments (2 x 15%)

1. You will be required to write one short critical reflection piece (about 1,000 words) focused on the preparatory readings or on the speaker's presentation for one of the Ethics@Noon talks. In this assignment, you should provide a reconstruction and evaluation of the author's thesis. **This assignment is due by November 15.**
2. The second writing assignment is focused on your individual project. You will be required to provide an abstract (about 1,000 words) and preliminary bibliography (at least 5 sources) for the final paper you intend to complete by the end of the year. It is okay if your project changes substantially as you continue to work on it (and this will not impact your grade on either assignment), but it will be helpful for you to be able to map out your argument and discuss the sources that you intend to use. **This assignment is due by December 20.**

Final paper (60% - see breakdown below)

You are required to write a final essay (up to 6,000 words). You should be in touch with me to discuss the topic of your essay and preliminary bibliography ahead of time.

In the winter term, you will present the outline of your final paper by giving a 15-minute presentation to the classroom (10%), followed by a Q&A period (**on March 13 and March 27**). In the spirit of collegiality, each of you will share your paper outline with one of your peers (**by March 11**) and provide written feedback on one of your peers' paper outlines (10%) (**due by March 27**). Guidelines about the peer feedback will be provided. You will have then a chance to incorporate the feedback received in your final paper (40%), which is due by **April 24**.

Except for the oral presentation and participation component, all assignments will be submitted electronically through Quercus.

Important dates:

November 15: Last day to submit the first writing assignment

December 20: Last day to submit the second writing assignment

March 11: Last day to share your paper outline with a peer

March 13: Student presentations

March 27: Student presentations & last day to submit feedback on your peer's outline

April 24: Last day to submit the final paper

Late Work Policy

I will provide a 24-hour extension, no questions asked, if you contact me before a paper deadline and send me what you have written so far. Otherwise, late work will be graded down a third of a letter grade for each full day that it is late. In other words, if a paper were due on Monday, and you didn't contact me, handing in the paper on Tuesday would bring an A paper down to an A-, etc. If you fall behind on work for this class for whatever reason, please come talk to me so that we can figure out a plan to help you get back on track.

The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights, and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

Academic Integrity

Please be aware that it is your responsibility to know about and respect academic integrity principles. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other institutional resources (for example, [the University of Toronto website on Academic Integrity](#)).

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the [Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation website](#).

Accessibility, Accommodations, and Support

Please let me know how we can work together and set the class up to enable you to participate fully, access all materials, and succeed. I am happy to meet individually to talk about how I can best support your learning and engagement.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the [Accessibility Services office](#) ([UTM Campus](#), [UTSC campus](#)).

The University provides academic accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This occurs through a collaborative process that acknowledges a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the University's courses and programs.

The University provides reasonable accommodation of the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory holidays. Students have a responsibility to alert members of the teaching staff in a timely fashion to upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences and instructors will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities at these times. Please reach out to me as early as possible to communicate any anticipated absences related to religious observances, and to discuss any possible related implications for course work.

The University strives to provide a family-friendly environment. You may wish to inform me if you are a student with family responsibilities. If you are a student parent or have family responsibilities, you also may wish to visit the [Family Care Office website](#).

Writing Resources

1. For general information about writing resources at UofT, students can start here: <https://writing.utoronto.ca>. Arts & Science Writing Centres will offer a mix of in-person and online appointments in 2023-24, with an asynchronous option at some centres. Students can find information about the offerings of specific college writing centres at <http://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science>. You should visit each individual centre's site for information on how to make an appointment.

2. More than 60 advice files on all aspects of academic writing are available from <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca>. Printable PDF versions are listed at <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/student-pdfs>. Pages offering advice on how to format documents and integrate sources are listed at <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources>.

3. For optional group instruction on writing and study skills, please refer to the Writing Plus workshop series at <http://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-plus>. In 2023-24, these workshops will be conducted in person and through Zoom. Students may join these virtual workshops at the Quercus Writing Plus site: <https://uoft.me/writingplus>.

4. Information about the English Language Learning program (ELL)'s fall offerings is available at [English Language Learning | Faculty of Arts & Science \(utoronto.ca\)](#). For more information, please contact the ELL coordinator Leora Freedman at ell.newcollege@utoronto.ca.

The University offers a range of support and encourages students to talk to others if they need help, such as peers, instructors and teaching assistants, department heads, health and wellness staff and counsellors, and registrarial staff. The University also provides a wide range of student support services, including: [Health and Wellness/Counselling Centres at St. George](#), at [Scarborough](#), and at [Mississauga](#); [the Family Care Office](#); [the Academic Success Centre](#); [the Centre for International Experience](#); and [Writing Centres](#). If your well-being is impacted, please visit [U of T's Mental Health website](#) to see the range of supports available to you as a student. Or for immediate support, use the [U of T Telus Health Student Support](#) (with free counselling available in over 140 languages, 24 hours a day). Please reach out if you need help or are struggling – there are lots of supports available.

Schedule and readings (subject to change):

Joel Anderson – 9/20

"Assistive Technologies for Self-Control in the Context of Structural Attributional Injustice"

Readings:

1. Heath, Joseph, and Joel Anderson. "Procrastination and the Extended Will." *The Thief of Time: Philosophical Essays on Procrastination* (2010): 233–53.
2. Anderson, Joel. "Vulnerability, Autonomy Gaps and Social Exclusion." In *Vulnerability, Autonomy, and Applied Ethics*, edited by Christine Straehle, 49–68. New York: Routledge, 2017.
3. Anderson, Joel. "Scaffolding and Autonomy." In *The Routledge Handbook of Autonomy*, edited by Ben Colburn, 158–66. London: Routledge, 2022.
4. Fricker, Miranda. "Précis of Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing." (2008)

Larisa Svirsky – 10/4

"The Second-Personal Significance of Trauma"

Readings:

1. Kyla Ebels-Duggan "Dealing with the Past,"
2. P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment,"
3. Susan Wolf – "Blame, Italian Style"

Martina Favaretto – 10/18

"A Kantian Account of Aesthetically Sublime Rage"

Readings:

1. Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger";
2. Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage*, Chapter 1;
3. the passage of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement* I will be discussing is at 5:272, though I recommend reading 5:271-3 (pp. 153-55 of the Cambridge Edition).

Optional: Sukaina Hirji's "Outrage and the Bounds of Empathy"

Sandra Shapshay's "Schopenhauer's Transformation of the Kantian Sublime", which has a section on Kant's account of the sublime that might convey a general idea of it (pp. 479–488).

David Benatar – 11/1

“A preponderance of injustice”

Readings:

1. Michael Shermer – The Moral Arc
2. Steven Pinker – Frequently Asked Questions about the Better Angels of Our Nature
3. David Benatar – Does the moral universe have an arc that bends towards justice?

Shannon Hoff – 11/15

“A Phenomenological Account of the Conditions of Transnational Feminism”

Readings:

1. “The Subject of Freedom” (pp. 1-17, 32-39), in Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
2. “Toward a Decolonial Feminist Universalism” (pp. 21-49), in Serene J. Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
3. “Exposure” (pp. 61-100), in John Russon, *Sites of Exposure: Art, Politics, and the Nature of Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

Anthony Sangiuliano – 11/29

"Discrimination and Psychological Harm"

Readings:

1. Anthony Sangiuliano – “Harmless Discrimination, Wrongs, and Rules,” (Law & Philosophy)
2. Anthony Sangiuliano and Mark Friedman – “Words that Wound and Laws that Silence: Legal Limits on Discriminatory Expression in Canada” (R&R at the McGill Law Journal, please do not circulate or cite without permission)

Miko Zeldes-Roth – 1/10

“Escape from Politics: Personal Responsibility and White Citizenship in American Society”

Readings:

1. Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” in *Responsibility and Judgement* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003)
2. Olson, Joel. “Whiteness and the Participation-Inclusion Dilemma.” *Political Theory* 30, no. 3 (2002): 384-409.

Caitlin Hamblin-Yule – 1/24

"Kant's Aesthetics of Race"

Readings:

1. § 17 'On the ideal of beauty' from Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*
2. John Hoffman's 'Kant's Aesthetic Categories'

Yukiko Lui – 2/7

“Feminist and queer legal theory toward family abolition”

Readings:

1. Nancy D. Polikoff, *Why Lesbians and Gay Men Should Read Martha Fineman*, 8 American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy and the Law 167 (2000).
2. Katherine Franke, *Wedlocked: The Perils of Marriage Equality: How African Americans and Gays Mistakenly Thought the Right to Marry Would Set Them Free* (2015), chapter 6 and appendix only (pp. 207-236).

Yang-Yang Chen – 2/28

"Reading with Compassion: A Theory of Democratic Readership."

Readings:

1. Garrett, H. J. 2019. "Why Does Fake News Work?" In *Unpacking Fake News: An Educator's Guide to Navigating the Media with Students*, edited by W. Journall, 15-29. New York: Teacher's College Press.
2. King, Sallie B. 2005. *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. Introduction (p. 1 - 11).
3. Thích Nhất Hạnh. 1987. *Being Peace*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax. Chapter 6 (p. 85 - 106).

William Paris – 3/13

“Racial Injustice and the Domination of Time”

Readings:

1. E.P. Thompson's “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism”
2. Introduction to Mark H. Smith's book *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South*

Faisal Bhabha – 3/27

“The Fiduciary Structure of Parental and Parent-like Authority: A Kantian Account”

Readings:

1. §22-§23, §28-§29 (about 2.5 pages) of Kant, Immanuel. *The Doctrine of Right*. Part I of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by Lara Denis, translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
2. Altman, Scott. “Parental Control Rights.” In *Philosophical Foundations of Children's and Family Law*, edited by Elizabeth Brake and Lucinda Ferguson, 209-226. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.