Freshman Writing Seminar Syllabus

Phil 1111 – 102: Relativism (15767)  
MW 7:30–8:45pm, GSH 160  
Instructor: Theodore Korzukhin  
email: tk283@cornell.edu  
Office Hours: TBA  
Office: 217 Goldwin Smith hall

Course description. The course will explore what it means to be a moral relativist, and the reasons one might have for being one. We shall cover some major arguments PRO and CONTRA. While we work on our writing skills, the intellectual goal will be to develop one’s own view and one’s own position on this hotly debated topic.

Learning outcomes. Apart from the purely intellectual goal of developing one’s own take on the relativism debate, we shall work on achieving two broad goals with regard to writing. One is to learn to write clearly. The other is to learn to engage critically with difficult texts.

Texts: Most reading assignments will be found in the course packet. The rest are posted to the Blackboard site.

Requirements and policies:

1) Attendance. You will be allowed 3 unexcused absences. Further unexcused absences will lower your grade for the course at the rate of half a grade point for each missed class.

2) Paper submission. Papers are due in printed form at the beginning of class on the date assigned. A few things to keep in mind: papers should have your name and date at the top of the first page, have page numbers, be printed in a readable 12 point font, be double-spaced, and be stapled. If your printer broke, send me an email with the paper; but submit it in printed form the next class. Late papers will be graded down at the rate of one grade point per day (the difference between an A and an A– is one grade point).

3) Plagiarism.
   i) Plagiarizing will result in an automatic F for the course.
   ii) Read, absorb, and take the quiz at http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm.
       (report the results to me by email: tk283@cornell.edu)
   iii) If you hesitate whether something constitutes plagiarism, consult me. Avoiding plagiarism is your responsibility: ’I did not know that was plagiarism’ is not an excuse.
   iv) In completing your assignments, you may not use any sources other than the ones assigned or suggested.

4) Graded work.
   i) Class participation. 5%
   ii) Short writing assignments. We shall have numerous opportunities to do short writing assignments, both in–class and take–home. Take–home assignments are will be due by email at 12pm of the day of the class. Assignments for the next class
will be posted on the Blackboard site (under 'Assignments') on the day of the preceding class. It is your responsibility to check the Blackboard site. All of these will be pass/fail. No late short assignments will be accepted. Combined, these will count for 20% of the grade.

iii) 6 papers + 4 re-writes (these will start short, and get longer toward the end of the semester, weighed proportionally). 75%.

5) Conferences. Each student will schedule two conferences with the instructor, to discuss progress and written work. (this is not optional).

6) Public domain. All written work produced for this class will be in the public domain: you should expect that, on occasion, other students in the class will read and comment on your work.

7) The instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired student; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.

8) In compliance with the Cornell University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester, except in unusual circumstances, so that arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

Schedule:

Week 1
01/24   Introduction
01/26   Paper 1 due

Week 2
01/31   Benedict, Anthropology and the Abnormal
02/02   Sumner, Folkways.

Week 3
02/07   Harman, Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity, Ch. 1
02/09   Rachels, The Challenge of Cultural Relativism

Week 4
Phil 1111–105: Relativism

02/14  Enoch, How is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Moral Realism
         Draft of Paper 2 due
02/16  Enoch, How is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Moral Realism

Week 5
02/21  Moody–Adams The Empirical Underdetermination of Descriptive Cultural Relativism
         Paper 2 due
02/23  Fraser&Hauser, The Argument from Disagreement and the Role of Cross–Cultural Empirical Data.

Week 6
02/28  Turnbull, The Mountain People
03/02  Lyons, Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence.
         Draft of Paper 3 due

Week 7
03/07  Peer Review Session
03/09  Bergmann, et al., The Logic Book, Ch. 4

Week 8
03/14  Harman, Nature of Morality, Ch. 1
         Paper 3 due
03/16  Thomson, Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity, Ch. 6

SPRING BREAK

Week 9
03/28  Sturgeon, Moral Disagreement and Moral Relativism
03/30  Boghossian, What is Relativism?
         Draft of Paper 4 due

Week 10
04/04  Boghossian, What is Relativism?
Phil 1111–105: Relativism
04/06 Singer, All Animals are Equal.

Week 11
04/11 Cohen, A critique of the alleged basis of Vegetarianism
       Scruton, The Conscientious Carnivore
       Paper 4 due
04/13 Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration

Week 12
04/18 Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration
       Draft of paper 5 due
04/20 Proast, The Argument of the Letter concerning Toleration Briefly Consider’d and Answered

Week 13
04/25 Wolfson, Toleration and Relativism, the Locke–Proast Exchange
04/27 Wolfson, Toleration and Relativism, the Locke–Proast Exchange
       Paper 5 due

Week 14
05/02 Williams, “toleration: an impossible virtue?”
05/04 Gordon Graham, Tolerance, Pluralism, and Relativism

FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 18th (drop it off at the department)
Phil 1111–105: Relativism

Week 10

04/04  Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration
        Paper 4 due

04/06  Proast, The Argument of the Letter concerning Toleration Briefly Consider’d and Answered

Week 11

04/11  Locke, Proast
04/13  Locke, Proast

Week 12

04/18  Wolfson, Toleration and Relativism, the Locke–Proast Exchange
        Draft of paper 5 due

04/20  Wolfson, Toleration and Relativism, the Locke–Proast Exchange

Week 13

04/25  Williams, “toleration: an impossible virtue?”
        Paper 5 due

04/27  Gordon Graham, Tolerance, Pluralism, and Relativism

Week 14

05/02
05/04

Final Paper Due Date: TBA
THE MONOLOGUE FROM JULIETTE?
joyce the myth of morality
FIND, Williams, "toleration: an impossible virtue?"
Also take a look at his Morality: an introduction to ethics.
Wolfson, Toleration and Relativism, the Locke-Proast Exchange
Adam Wolfson, "Two Theories of Toleration:
Locke versus Mill,"
Perspectives
on Political
Science
(Fall, 1996).

Sandel, Liberalism and its critics
take a look at Geoffrey Harrison, Relativism and Tolerance (Ethics). the claim here is that relativism
does not entail tolerance.
Wong 1984 argues that relativism entails tolerance (excerpt from the book, this might be the only PRO
argument)
Studies 96: 269-301.

Locke-Proast Exchange.

1 Nicholas L. Sturgeon, “Moral Disagreement and Moral Relativism,” Social Philosophy and

Showing that moral disagreement is not widespread (and attributatble to disagreement
over matters of fact):
Harvard University Press.
and
Rachels, James. 1999. The elements of moral philosophy (pp. 20-30)
Essay topic: find a case where moral disagreement is not reducible to matters of fact.
see also Wong 1984 117-120
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>08/25</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>08/30</td>
<td>Paper #1 due.</td>
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<td>09/1</td>
<td>Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity, pp. 3–20</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>09/06</td>
<td>Labor Day -- no class</td>
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<td>09/08</td>
<td>Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity, pp. 20–65</td>
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<td>09/13</td>
<td>Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity, pp. 65–95</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>09/20</td>
<td>Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity, pp. 157–188</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>09/27</td>
<td>Peer Review Session</td>
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<td>09/29</td>
<td>Lyons, Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence. (in the anthology) Paper #2 due.</td>
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<td>Appiah, Relativism and Cross–Cultural Understanding. (in the anthology)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10/04</td>
<td>Lyons, Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence. (in the anthology)</td>
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<td>10/06</td>
<td>Wong, Pluralism and Ambivalence. (in the anthology)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>Fall Break -- no class</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>10/18</td>
<td>Boghossian, What is Relativism? (on Blackboard, in Course Documents)</td>
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<td>10/20</td>
<td>Boghossian, What is Relativism? (on Blackboard, in Course Documents)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>10/25</td>
<td>Egan, De Gustibus. (on Blackboard, in Course Documents)</td>
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<td>10/27</td>
<td>Egan, De Gustibus. (on Blackboard, in Course Documents) Paper #4 due</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>11/01</td>
<td>Egan, De Gustibus. (on Blackboard, in Course Documents)</td>
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<td>11/03</td>
<td>Epistemic Modals.</td>
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### Week 12
- **11/08**: Fear of Knowledge, Ch. 1-2
- **11/10**: Fear of Knowledge, Ch. 3
  Paper #5 draft due

### Week 13
- **11/15**: Peer Review
- **11/17**: Fear of Knowledge, Ch. 4
  Siegel, Targets of Anti-Relativist Arguments (in the anthology)

### Week 14
- **11/22**: Fear of Knowledge, Ch. 5
  Paper #5 due
- **11/24**: Fear of Knowledge, Ch. 6

### Week 15
- **11/29**: Fear of Knowledge, Ch. 7
- **12/01**: Fear of Knowledge, Ch. 8–9

- **12/16**: Final Paper (#6) due.
Argument from disagreement

Expressivism and Relativism

Nature of morality -- argument from non-observability

Science and Relativism?

Relativism of taste -- rhubarb.

Epistemic relativism -- 'might', eavesdropper, etc.

Where does Boghossian fit into this?

iii) I will recognize small-scale and large-scale plagiarism. Quoting a source and forgetting to add quotation marks is small-scale, and will lower your grade for the assignment. Intentional large-scale plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the course. (small-scale: it is possible that understanding the plagiarism rules, you just made a mistake; large-scale: if you understand plagiarism rules, you wouldn't make such a mistake)

iv) In particular: plagiarism is unavoidable if you read a lot, and do not come up with your own ideas. But what is 'your own ideas'? If you have read enough, you will see pretty much every possible idea out there, and what you think will be something that you have read (originality is causal: what matters is not whether someone has said the same thing, but how you came up with it). This is a conundrum. The solution is to read as little as possible. In fact, every source you consult in the writing of an assignment has to be mentioned in the bibliography, whether you think you have used the source or not.