

PHI 860: Seminar in Ethics: Alienation

Syracuse University

Fall 2020

Instructor: Keshav Singh

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Class Meetings: Th 3:30PM - 6:15PM

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This seminar investigates the concept of *alienation* and its relevance to ethics. Alienation is often characterized as a kind of problematic separation between a self and other that belong together, which gives rise to a distinctive harm or disvalue. The concept of alienation has played a diagnostic role in criticizing a variety of theories and systems, including consequentialism, objectivism about well-being, and capitalism. In this seminar, we will consider several such critiques, with a few questions in mind: Are these critiques successful? Can they be unified, in the sense that there is a single, general problem of alienation present in most or all of them? What does this tell us about the nature of alienation and its ethical significance? In the process of investigating these questions, we will engage with a diverse set of works, from contemporary analytic moral philosophy to historical sources such as Marx, with the hope of drawing novel connections between them.

Course Requirements and Grading

- Participation (20%)
 - Attend seminar consistently and make constructive contributions to seminar discussions on a regular basis.
- Presentations (20%)
 - Select two readings on which to present (they don't have to be from the same week). Presenting will entail introducing the reading and facilitating discussion of it.
- Abstract (10%)
 - Write an abstract of 500-1000 words, which you'll present for discussion during our last seminar meeting, and which will serve as a proposal for your term paper. You'll also meet with me privately to discuss how to turn it into a paper.
- Term paper (50%)
 - Write a term paper of 5000-8000 words. Depending on what you want out of the seminar, this can take one of two forms:
 1. Original research related to material from the course, with the goal of writing a paper that could be submitted for publication at a reputable journal.
 2. A literature review of a substantial subset of material from the course, with the goal of writing a paper that synthesizes that material in novel and interesting ways.

Course Policies

- All seminar meetings will be conducted over Zoom. In general, I will expect students to have their video on and be present on screen throughout the class meeting. Please let me know if this will be an issue for you, and I will do my best to accommodate that.
- If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course, please contact me and/or the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to discuss accommodations.
- I am committed to making the (virtual) classroom a safe space for all students. I expect respectful dialogue, and personal attacks or discriminatory treatment of others will not be tolerated under any circumstances.
- All work in this course is subject to Syracuse University’s Academic Integrity Policy and all of the policies outlined therein.

Reading List

Week	Reading
Week 1 (August 27) Introduction	Jaeggi, <i>Alienation</i> (chapters 1, 3-4)
Week 2 (September 3) Freedom and the Self	Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” and “Identification and Externality”
Week 3 (September 10) Freedom and the Self	Jaeggi, <i>Alienation</i> (chapter 7) Arpaly and Schroeder, “Alienation and Externality”
Week 4 (September 17) Well-being	Rosati, “Internalism and the Good of a Person” Yelle, “Alienation, Deprivation, and the Well-Being of Persons”
Week 5 (September 24) Well-being	<i>Guest presentation by Teresa Bruno-Niño</i> Bruno-Niño, “Don’t Stop Believin’: Cognitive Resonance and Well-being” and “Objectivism without Alienation.”
Week 6 (October 1) Morality	Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” (selections) Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories”
Week 7 (October 8) Morality	Williams, “Persons, Character, and Morality” Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment”
Week 8 (October 15) Morality	Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality” Piper, “Moral Theory and Moral Alienation”
Week 9 (October 22) Morality	<i>Guest presentation by Jack Samuel</i> Samuel, “An Individual Reality, Separate from Oneself” and “Alienation and the Metaphysics of Normativity”

Week 10 (October 29) Labor and Self-Realization	Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" Elster, "Self-Realization in Work and Politics"
Week 11 (November 5) Labor and Self-Realization	Kandiyali, "The Importance of Others" Brewer, "On Alienated Emotions"
Week 12 (November 12) Identity and Oppression	Sartre, "Being and Nothingness" (part 4, chapter 1, section II-D) de Beauvoir, "The Second Sex" (introduction) Fanon, "Black Skin, White Masks" (chapters 7-8)
Week 13 (November 19) Abstract Presentations	No reading