

## Reasons

Many contemporary philosophers appeal to *reasons* to illuminate and explain ethical and epistemological notions and theses. In this course, we will carefully examine how several prominent philosophers think about reasons and what kind of work reasons can do. (*Our investigation will be nowhere near exhaustive; this literature is voluminous.*) In the first two-thirds of the course we will, among other things, (i) identify the motivation for believing in a certain sort of reason (normative, contributory or *pro tanto* reasons), (ii) distinguish these reasons from other sorts of reasons (motivating and exclusionary reasons), (iii) examine the relations between reasons, rationality, and oughts, (iv) examine how best to understand the nature of the *weight* of reasons, (v) and consider whether reasons should be reduced or taken as primitive. In the final part of the class, we will examine doubts about reasons.

**Alternative 1:** Spend the first half of the course on normative reasons and the second half on motivating reasons (reading, e.g., parts of Smith’s *The Moral Problem*, Dancy’s *Practical Reality* and some of the literature on the epistemic basing relation.)

**Alternative 2:** Pick two or three of these authors and look more closely at their work and critical discussions from the literature. (Good for non-seminar style courses.)

**Alternative 3:** For lower level courses, do a more comprehensive survey (covering topics like moral reasons, moral motivation, constructivism, error theory, and expressivism, giving more time to the latter four topics) using Shafer-Landau & Cuneo’s *Foundations of Ethics*.

### **Requirements:**

Biweekly Reading Summaries	25%
3 Short papers	45%
Development Paper	30%

### **Reading Summaries**

The class will be divided in half. Every other week, you will prepare a 1 page critical summary in which you identify an argument from the week’s readings, reconstruct it so it’s logically valid, and then critically assess it. (E.g., present a compelling reason for thinking one of its premises is false or raise important questions about the argument.) These summaries must be emailed to me and the entire class 24 hours prior to class. Every participant is expected to carefully read the summaries, coming to class prepared to discuss them. Authors must be prepared to discuss their summaries in class—though, we will not have time to discuss all summaries.

### **Short Papers**

You will write three 5-6 page papers during the term. These papers must focus on a central argument in one of the readings done in the period prior to the deadline. These papers will be held to very high standards. The papers are short because I want you to focus sharply, to be concise, to emphasize precision and direct your attention to what is essential to your chosen topic. The papers must reconstruct a central argument from our reading, and provide a critical assessment of its plausibility. (Reading summaries can provide the basis for short papers.)

### **Development Paper**

Develop one of your short papers into a 10-12 page term paper, making sure to incorporate my comments from the original paper. You should briefly situate your argument within the relevant dialectic and then make your argument (in more detail, if appropriate) and discuss objections.

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1: A Story about the Development of Reasons**

Dancy, *Ethics without Principles*, Ch. 1

**Week 2: Some Classics**

Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Ch. 2

Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"

Optional: Finlay, "The Obscurity of Internal Reasons"

**Week 3: Smith: Motivating vs. Normative Reasons**

Smith, *The Moral Problem*, selections from Chs. 4 & 5

**Week 4: Scanlon: Non-Reductive Reasons-First**

Scanlon, *On What We Owe to Each Other*, Ch. 1

**Week 5: Raz: Exclusionary Reasons**

Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, Ch. 1 & Postscript

Whiting, "Against Second-Order Reasons"

**Week 6: Broome: On Oughts**

Broome, "Normative Requirements"

Broome, "Reasons"

**Week 7: Dancy: Contributory Reasons, Holism & Particularism**

Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, Chs. 2-3, 5

**Week 8-9: Schroeder: Reductive Reasons-First, Weight, & Epistemic Reasons**

Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*, Ch. 1, 4, 7

Schroeder, "Knowledge is Belief for Sufficient (Objective and Subjective) Reason"

**Week 10-11: Parfit: Lots of Stuff!**

Parfit, *On What Matters*, Part One: Reasons

**Week 12: Thomson: Doubts about Reasons-First**

Thomson, *Normativity*, Chs. 8-9

**Week 13-15: Challenges to Objective Reasons**

Vayrynyn, "A Wrong Turn to Reasons?"

Olson, "In Defense of Moral Error Theory"

Gibbard, "The Reasons of a Living Beings"

Goodman, "The New Riddle of Induction"

Titelbaum, "Not Enough There There: Evidence, Reasons, and Language Dependence"