

MORAL INNOVATION SEMINAR II

2014-15

Sponsored by Georgetown University's Normative Orders Collaborative

Georgetown's Moral Innovation Seminar will run for the full academic year, 2014-2015. The meetings will be led by a stellar list of leading thinkers from around the world. The schedule of meetings may be found below.

The seminar is the second half of a seminar that has been functioning simultaneously as a full-year graduate seminar with its home in the Philosophy Department and as a faculty seminar drawing participants from Georgetown and from other universities in the Washington area. The continuation of this seminar in spring semester of 2015 is Phil. 681. The instructors leading the seminar are Professors [Terry Pinkard](#) and [Henry S. Richardson](#). With the permission of one of the instructors, students who did not enroll in the first half of the seminar may enroll in the second. (Below, for your information, we list the sessions of the fall semester. A link to the fall readings is available upon request.)

Although the questions being addressed by the seminar are philosophical, these questions demand, and will receive, some attention from other disciplines, including law, political theory, and history. Students and faculty from other departments are welcome. A separate discussion section will be arranged for the graduate students taking the seminar for credit. Faculty interested in attending the seminar should please contact [Professor Richardson](#).

Graduate students taking the course for credit will be required to write a term paper.

In the fall semester, the seminar's principal question was put on the table, namely, whether social and cultural changes can ever generate objective moral innovation, objectively filling out or specifying people's moral rights, duties, privileges, and responsibilities in new, more concrete ways. Moral relativists and historicists will answer "no," for they deny that the content of morality is ever objective: all one ever has is the set of moral views and practices of a specific culture and time. Moral rationalists will also answer "no," for they consider objective morality to be *a priori* and eternal. We have explored affirmative answers to this question that were posed tentatively in Kant and then more fully in Hegel: specific social practices and institutions are necessary to realizing morality's objective demands; in so doing, they refine and work out those demands in concrete detail, arriving via an historical process at a more fully determinate objective morality. If this is possible, then it would allow for objectivity without abstraction and social embeddedness without relativism.

Guided by philosophical hypotheses that build on and extend these ideas, the seminar will explore this question both theoretically and by concretely examining a series of cases. Some of these have been explored in the fall semester. For example, did Nelson Mandela's institution of

a truth and reconciliation commission importantly shift the kind of restitution that might morally be demanded by the victims of apartheid? Did the rise, in the 1980s, of a global consensus on the ethical guidelines applicable to medical research change the moral rights of research subjects or the moral duties of medical researchers, or did it simply establish some conventional regulations? In the spring semester, the seminar will devote three sessions each to two moral issues that are in flux and that pose challenges to the idea of objective moral change: the ethics of climate change and the issue of religious freedom. In the spring semester, these issues will be approached comparatively, drawing on our collaborators in Frankfurt and in Fudan. All of these cases will enable us to ask concretely whether the relevant social and cultural changes have any constitutive impact on people's objective moral rights and duties.

Most fully in the spring semester, the seminar will explore a two-part hypothesis about what it takes for fruitful—let alone objective—moral change to occur. First, it must arise from an initial moral division of responsibilities that, while not yet fully adequate to the problem at hand, calls upon some to exercise moral discretion. Second, for any moral change to establish itself, moral beliefs and practices must become reflectively convergent. These two complementary aspects of moral change will be addressed in the second semester.

Thursdays, 2:00-4:30

New North 204, Georgetown Main Campus

Professors Terry Pinkard & Henry S. Richardson

Schedule of confirmed visitors & sessions

FALL 2014

Segment I: Introduction: On the possibility of objective moral innovation

1. [Aug. 28] Objectivity, relativism, and embeddedness in cultural practices and social institutions

Robert Pippin (University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought)

2. [Sept. 4] Moral change: an historian's perspective on the case of slavery

Adam Rothman (Georgetown, History)

3. [Sept. 11] The possibility of objective moral innovation: an initial sketch

Henry S. Richardson (Georgetown, Philosophy)

4. [Sept. 18] The Genesis of Values

José Casanova (Georgetown, Sociology)

5. [Sept. 25] Motivating case: The establishment of medical research ethics

Jonathan Moreno (Penn, Medical Ethics & Health Policy)

6. [Oct. 2] Moral innovation and individual discretion under the direction of (imperfect) duty

Barbara Herman (UCLA, Philosophy)

Segment II: Historical Interlude

7. [Oct. 9] Kant on Moral Community

Kyla Ebels-Duggan (Northwestern, Philosophy)

8. [Oct. 16] Hegel on embodying morality in social & cultural institutions

Terry Pinkard (Georgetown, Philosophy)

9. [Oct. 23] Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty on inexplicit understandings

William Blattner (Georgetown, Philosophy)

Segment III: Preview of the following semester's trilateral-comparison issues

10. [Oct. 30] Introduction to the issue of religious freedom

Michael Kessler (Georgetown, Government, Law, and Berkley Center)

11. [Nov. 6] Introduction to the ethics of global warming

Madison Powers (Georgetown, Philosophy)

Segment IV: Intertemporal cases: Moral change in progress

12. [Nov. 13] The predicament of illegal immigrants: an anthropologist's perspective

Denise Brennan (Georgetown, Anthropology)

13. [Nov. 20] The brave new world of contemporary privacy: a lawyer's perspective

Anita Allen (U. of Pennsylvania, Law)

14. [Dec. 4] Efforts at urban sustainability: an ecologist's perspective

Ali Whitmer (Georgetown, Biology)

SPRING 2015

Segment V: The articulation of the moral community via practices and institutions

15. [Jan. 8] Rights, moral powers, and directed duties

Henry S. Richardson (Georgetown, Philosophy)

16. [Jan. 15] Embodiment, temporality, and norm-generation

Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance (each Georgetown, Philosophy)

17. [Jan. 22] The critique of cultural practices and social forms

Rahel Jaeggi (Humboldt University, Berlin, Philosophy)

Segment VI: First trilateral comparison: Global warming and the claims of future generations

1. Jan. 29: Ethics and the Farther Future

Dale Jamieson (NYU, Environmental Studies and Philosophy)

2. Feb. 5: A community of Others: How can a Confucian autonomous district affect our ethical responses to global warming?

Zhang Xianglong (Peking University, Philosophy)

3. Feb. 12: The Limits of Intergenerational Justice

Anja Karnein (SUNY Binghamton, Philosophy)

Segment VII: Knitting together a moral community

4. [Feb. 19] Overlapping consensus

Samuel Freeman (University of Pennsylvania, Philosophy)

5. [Feb. 26] Religious freedom in the U.S. (see Segment VIII)

Martha C. Nussbaum (U. of Chicago, Philosophy, Law, and Divinity)

6. [Mar. 5] Socially embodied freedom as a precondition of legitimate social change

Christoph Menke (Goethe University, Frankfurt, Philosophy)

7. [Mar. 19] From the governmental to the deliberative social self-determination of rights

Klaus Günther (Frankfurt, Law)

8. [Mar. 26] Overcoming dualisms: history and truth, moral disagreement and political community

Charles Larmore (Brown University, Philosophy)

Segment VIII: Second trilateral comparison (cont.): Religious freedom

9. [Apr. 9] Religious freedom in the People's Republic of China

Li Tiangang (Fudan, History) and Sun Xiangchen (Fudan, Philosophy)

10. [Apr. 16] Religious freedom in Canada

Charles Taylor (McGill, Philosophy)

Segment IX: Closing session

11. [Apr. 23] A Critical Theory of Normativity

Rainer Forst (Goethe University, Frankfurt, Philosophy)