

ETHICS: SELECTED TOPICS
CONSTRUCTIVISM IN ETHICS

G83.2285-003

Fall 2004

Thursdays noon to 2 p.m.

Silver Center 503

INSTRUCTOR

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Fall 2004 office hours: Thursdays from 2:30-3:30 p.m. and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar will focus on the writings of John Rawls, T. M. Scanlon, Christine Korsgaard, and selected commentators. Our goal will be to examine and assess these authors' views on the nature of justice, morality, reasons, and normativity. Some of the more specific questions we will ask include: What is constructivism in ethics? How successful is constructivism as an account of specific types of reasons, such as reasons of justice (as in Rawls's view) or reasons of morality (as in Scanlon's view)? What are the prospects for constructivism as an account of the nature of all reasons (as suggested by Korsgaard's view)? What is the relationship between constructivism and relativism? Where does constructivism figure in the realism/anti-realism and cognitivism/non-cognitivism debates in metaethics? Our coverage of Rawls will focus on his more metaethical writings, and, among other topics, on the notion of reflective equilibrium and its significance. We will do a close reading of most of Scanlon's *What We Owe to Each Other*, and we will read Korsgaard's *The Sources of Normativity* and selected other essays.

TEXTS

Required:

Korsgaard, Christine M. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Rawls, John. *Collected Papers*. Edited by Samuel Freeman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

Recommended:

Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

All texts are available for purchase at the NYU Main Bookstore. All additional readings for the course are either available online or will be made available in a folder in the Department copy room.

REQUIREMENTS

Seminar paper. A seminar paper of roughly 20 pages in length will be due on Friday, December 17th. In accordance with Department policy (see <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/programs/standing.html>), a grade of incomplete will not be issued unless a draft of the written work is handed in before the end of the term (let's make the due date for this Friday, December 17th as well). Those taking an incomplete are strongly urged to submit the final version of their paper before the beginning of the spring term (Tuesday, January 18th), and are required to submit it by the first day of fall 2005 classes.

Presentations. From time to time, I may ask those taking the seminar for credit to give short presentations.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

This schedule is subject to adjustments. Readings marked with a '*' will be the focus of our discussion. Readings marked with a '+' are recommended. Readings marked with a '-' are also recommended, but lower priority.

Introduction

Thursday, September 9th

- * Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward *Fin de siècle* Ethics: Some Trends," section on constructivism, pp. 137-144 (available online through JSTOR)
- * Christine M. Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy" (available online at <http://www.pdcnet.org/pdf/8Korsgaard.pdf>)
- + If you're new to metaethics, then the entirety of Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton's article is recommended.
- Sharon Street, "Constructivism About Reasons" and "Constructivism and the Foundations of Our Reasons" (photocopy)

Rawls's Constructivism

Thursday, September 16th

- * John Rawls, "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics" (in *Collected Papers*)
- * Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition, §§1-9, 11, 14-15, 20-26, 29, 40, 87 (give the most attention to §§4, 9, and 87)
- * T. M. Scanlon, "Rawls on Justification" (photocopy)
- + Ronald Dworkin, "The Original Position" (photocopy)

Thursday, September 23rd

- * Rawls, "The Independence of Moral Theory" (in *Collected Papers*)
- * Norman Daniels, "Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics" (available online through JSTOR)
- + Peter Singer, "Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium" (photocopy)

Thursday, September 30th

- * Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory" (in *Collected Papers*)
- Ronald Milo, "Contractarian Constructivism" (available online through JSTOR)

Thursday, October 7th

- * David O. Brink, Chapter 5 and Appendix 4 of *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (photocopy)
- Brink, Chapters 1 and 2 of *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (photocopy)

Thursday, October 14th

- * Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical" (*Collected Papers*)
- * Rawls, Lecture III of *Political Liberalism*, "Political Constructivism" (photocopy)

Scanlon's Constructivism

Thursday, October 21st

- * Scanlon, "Contractualism and Utilitarianism" (photocopy)
- * Scanlon, "The Aims and Authority of Moral Theory" (available online through JSTOR)

Thursday, October 28th

- * Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Chapter 1 and Appendix
- + Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" (photocopy)

Thursday, November 4th

- * Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Chapters 2 and 3

Thursday, November 11th

- * Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Chapters 4 and 5

Korsgaard's Constructivism

Thursday, November 18th

- * Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Lectures 1-4
- + Allan Gibbard, "Morality as Consistency in Living: Korsgaard's Kantian Lectures" (available online through JSTOR – make sure to check "reviews" when doing search)

Thursday, November 25th

Thanksgiving Day.

Thursday, December 2nd

- * Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Lectures 1-4 (again)
- * Ralph Wedgwood, "Practical Reasoning as Figuring Out What is Best: Against Constructivism" (photocopy; also available online through the library subscription at <http://www.kluweronline.com/issn/0167-7411/contents> – in volume 21 (2002) of *Topoi*)

Thursday, December 9th

- * Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason" (photocopy)
- * Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, Lectures 1 and 2 (available online at <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~korsgaard/#Publications>)

Tuesday, December 14th

- * Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, Lectures 3-6 (available online at <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~korsgaard/#Publications>)