

PHIL GR 9110 Metaethics: The Value of Truth

Location: Zoom

Time: Fall 2020, Tuesday 10:10am-12pm EST

1. Course Description

Most people think that lying is wrong. The specifics are contested. What *is* lying? Why is lying wrong? Is lying always wrong? Should ethicists focus on lying, or rather on a range of attitudes that are responsive to the value of truth? These questions sit at the intersection of ethics, normative epistemology, and the philosophy of language. The seminar aims to bring together contributions in these fields, with a view to the larger question of how the value of truth figures in ethical life.

We start with an introduction to recent analyses of lying, as well as the most famous normative position on lying, formulated in Kant's famous essay "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Love of Humanity." Throughout the semester, we go back and forth between the question of what lying is, and normative questions about whether and why lying is (always?) wrong.

The seminar includes two sessions of the Workshop in Ancient and Contemporary Philosophy. Jens Timmermann (St. Andrews) will visit to discuss his book manuscript on Kant's essay, and Seana Shiffrin (UCLA) will visit for discussion of her book *Speech Matters* (2014).

2. Week-by-Week Plan

Week 1, Sept 8: Introduction to the Ethics and the Nature of Lying

Reading 1: Mahon, James Edwin, "The Definition of Lying and Deception," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/lying-definition/>.

Reading 2: Selections from Plato's *Republic* on "lying in words" and "lies in the soul": *Republic* 380d-382e and 412e-415d.

Week 2, Sept 15: Kant's Absolute Prohibition of Lying

Reading 1: Immanuel Kant, "On the Supposed Right to Lie from Love of Humanity."

Reading 2: Japa Pallikkathayil, "The Truth about Deception," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 98 (2019): 147-166.

Week 3, Sept 22: Assertion Accounts of Lying

Reading 1: Jennifer Lackey, "Norms of Assertion," *Nous* (2007).

Reading 2: Andreas Stokke, "Lying and Asserting," *Journal of Philosophy* (2013).

Optional readings: John McFarlane, "What Is Assertion?," in ed. Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen, *Assertion*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 79-96, esp. 79-86; Timothy Williamson, "Knowing and Asserting," *The Philosophical Review* 105 (1996): 489-523; Stokke "Lying,

Deceiving, and Misleading,” *Philosophy Compass* 8/4 (2013): 348-359; Stokke, “Insincerity,” *Nous* 48:3 (2014): 496-520; Robert Stalnaker, “Assertion” and “Common Ground,” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 25 (2002): 701-721; Jennifer Saul, “Lying,” chapter 1 in Saul, *Lying, Misleading, and What is Said* (OUP 2012).

Week 4, Sept 29: Gricean Accounts of Lying

If you haven’t yet encountered Grice’s work, please consult the following video as intro: Karen Lewis, “Gricean Pragmatics” <<http://www.wi-phi.com/contributor/karen-lewis>>.

Reading 1: Don Fallis, “What is Lying?” *Journal of Philosophy* (2009).

Reading 2: Fallis, “Lying and Deception,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* (2010).

Optional readings: Stokke (2018), Chapter 2 “Lying and Gricean Quality,” chapter 2; Stephen Schiffer, “Gricean Semantics and Vague Speaker Meaning,” *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* (2017); Paul Egré and Benjamin Icard, “Lying and Vagueness,” in ed. Jörg Meibauer, *The Oxford Handbook of Lying*, Oxford University Press 2018.

Week 5, Oct 6: Bald-Faced Lies and Misleading

Reading 1: Roy Sorensen, “Bald-Faced Lies! Lying Without The Intent To Deceive,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 88 (2007): 251–264.

Reading 2: Alex Barber, “Lying, Misleading, and Dishonesty,” *The Journal of Ethics* 24 (2020): 141–164.

Optional readings: Ronja Rutschmann and Alex Wiegmann, “No need for an intention to deceive? Challenging the traditional definition of lying,” *Philosophical Psychology* 30:4 (2017): 438-457. Saul (2012), chapter 2, “The Problem of What is Said”; Stokke *Lying and Sincerity* (Oxford University Press, 2018), Chapter 1 “Lying, Deception, and Deceit” and Chapter 2 “Common Ground.”

Week 6, Oct 13: Lying and Fiction

Reading 1: Emar Mair, “Lying and Fiction,” in ed. Jörg Meibauer, *The Oxford Handbook of Lying*, Oxford University Press 2018.

Reading 2: Claudia Claridge, “Lying, Metaphor, and Hyperbole,” in ed. Jörg Meibauer, *The Oxford Handbook of Lying* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Optional reading: Emanuel Viebahn, “Non-Literal Lies,” *Erkenntnis* (2017).

Week 7, Oct 20: Lying About

Reading 1: Richard Holton, “Lying About,” *Journal of Philosophy* (2019).

Reading 2: Berit Brogaard, “Ignorance and Incompetence: Linguistic Considerations,” in *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance* (2016).

Week 8, Oct 27: Lying and the Value of Knowledge

Reading 1: Plato, selection from *Hippias Minor* on liars with and without knowledge and the question of what makes someone a good liar.

Reading 2: Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton University Press, 2010), ch. 3.

Optional reading: Duncan Pritchard, “The Value of Knowledge,” in eds. Jonathan Matheson and Rico Vitz, *The Ethics of Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Election Day

Week 9, Nov 10: Workshop in Ancient and Contemporary Philosophy

Guest speaker: Jens Timmermann, St Andrews, on his book manuscript on Kant's "Supposed Right to Lie."

Commentators: Des Hogan, Princeton, Molly Gurdon Pinkoski, Columbia

Week 10, Nov 17: Lying, Knowledge, and Belief

Reading 1: Jennifer Lackey, "Group Lies" (2020).

Reading 2: Ben Holguin, "Lying and Knowing," *Synthese*:1-21 (forthcoming).

Optional readings: Timothy Williamson, selections from "Is Knowing a Mental State?" (1995) and Williamson "Knowledge First Epistemology" (2011); Sam Fox Krauss, "Lying, Risk, and Accuracy," *Analysis* (2017) on lying in terms of degrees of belief.

Week 11, Nov 24: Truth and Virtue

Reading 1: Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton University Press, 2010), ch 4.

Reading 2: Aristotle on truthfulness as a virtue in *NE* IV.7.

Optional reading: Howard J. Curzer, "Truthfulness and Integrity," ch. 10 in *Aristotle and the Virtues*, OUP 2012.

Week 12, Dec 1: Workshop in Ancient and Contemporary Philosophy with Seana Shiffrin

Guest speaker: Seana Shiffrin, UCLA, on her *Speech Matters: On Lying, Morality, and the Law* (Princeton University Press, 2014), ch. 1 "Lies and the Murderer Next Door."

Commentators: Karen Lewis (Barnard/Columbia), Thimo Heisenberg (Bryn Mawr College)

Week 13, Dec 8: Final Discussion

3. Requirements

Format: In order to prevent "Zoom fatigue," seminar meetings are collaborative. For each class, we have required reading and supplementary readings. I would like to ask two students to prepare mini presentations each week. Students who take the class for E-credit are required to take on one or two of these presentations; students who take the class for R-credit can opt to take on some presentation(s) or not, as they prefer. Specifically, this means:

- Ideally the two presenters email/chat/etc. ahead of time about the reading.
- Each presenter writes a 1-page (or less) handout about the reading and circulates it one day ahead of class.
- Presentations are 5 minutes, with a 3-4 minute summary of what strikes you as most important and 1-2 minutes where you lay out a question/topic for discussion.

This task is intended as low-stakes, but also as an opportunity to learn how to present material in a comprehensible and straightforward fashion that helps others engage with it.

A typical class consists of:

- Intro KMV (15 minutes)
- Presentation first reading (5 minutes)
- Discussion (20 minutes)
- Presentations second/supplementary reading (5 minutes)
- Discussion (20 minutes)

- KMV on other supplementary readings/background/etc. (15 minutes)
- General discussion (rest of class time)

E-credit writing requirements: Regular contributions to in-class presentations and team work in preparing the presentations. Two 6-page papers or one 12-page paper. If students are interested in writing longer papers, for example, with a view to having writing samples for applications, please let me know. Students may write on themes in the history of philosophy (Kant, Plato), on topics at the intersection of metaethics and normative ethics, topics in normative epistemology, and on topics at the intersection of philosophy of language and ethics. For short papers, it is often best to write a response to one of the articles we are reading. For longer papers, you can either respond to one of the assigned articles or address a question that comes up in several readings. Please talk to me about topics you are considering, or send me an email in which you offer a brief sketch of what you have in mind.

Due dates:

- Please let me know by email by Oct 6 whether you plan on writing two short papers or one longer paper,
- the first short paper is due Oct 27,
- the second short paper and the longer paper are due one week after our last class, Dec 15.

Required E-credit and optional R-credit contribution: At least 2 times per semester, you should post a question or comment on the Discussion Board. This can be minimal: a question of clarification, a note about some passage you find puzzling or interesting, or an observation about some detail. It can also be a bit more extensive: you can respond to someone else's post, raise an objection to a proposal defended in the reading, offer an interpretive proposal, and so on.

R-credit requirements: Careful reading in preparation for class and participation in class. In addition, you either take on one mini-presentation or you post at least twice per semester on the Discussion Board.

4. Academic Integrity and Honor Code

Please consult Columbia University's policies on academic integrity as well as Columbia's honor code:

<http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/ccschonorcode>

<http://bulletin.columbia.edu/general-studies/undergraduates/academic-policies/academic-integrity-community-standards/>

These policies explain Columbia University's academic regulations and how you can safeguard the integrity of your original work. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the details of what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty. You are expected to confirm to these policies in your academic work. It is important that you understand that academic dishonesty can lead to disciplinary action, including failure in the course and suspension, or even expulsion, from the University.

5. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with Disability Services. More information on the Disability Services registration process is available online at www.health.columbia.edu/ods. Registered students must present an Accommodation Letter to the professor before an exam or other accommodations can be provided. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability are invited to contact Disability Services for a confidential discussion at (212) 854-2388 (Voice/TTY) or by email at disability@columbia.edu.