

Syllabus: PHIL93611

The Magic of ‘My’: The ethics of personal attachments

Course Leader

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in Philosophy

Email

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Office Location

Room 208,
Malloy Hall

Office Hour

Monday 1:30-2:30pm

Assessment

Term Paper,
5,000-6,000
words (100%)

Due December 9

Class Structure

Monday Session:
3:30pm-6:15pm

Location:
Malloy Hall, 220

Course Description

“What magic”, William Godwin asked, “is there in the pronoun “my,” that should justify us in overturning the decisions of impartial truth? My brother or my father may be a fool or a profligate, malicious, lying or dishonest. If they be, of what consequence is it that they are mine?”

This course takes Godwin’s challenge seriously: can preferential treatment of ‘our people’—our friends, family, lovers, colleagues, compatriots—be morally justified? If so, how? And if not, why? There are four main themes that we’ll be covering:

PART I: The Impartiality v Partiality debate

We have duties to our loved ones that we don’t have to strangers. But how exactly do these duties fit into the moral sphere? Are they ultimately grounded in our impartial moral duties—for instance, our duties to promote the good? Or are they irreducibly partial? Another possibility is that our obligations to our nearest and dearest don’t fit neatly into the moral sphere at all.

PART II: Friendship & Morality

On some views (most notably, Aristotelian ones), the value of friendship is closely tied to its contribution to moral virtue. But on other views, valuable friendships are only contingently tied to morality; even true and good friendships can expose us to moral danger or indeed, corruption. Which of these perspectives is closer to the truth? And what implications should we draw for friendships with morally bad or vicious people?

PART III: Partiality in Virtue, Belief and Emotion

This part of the course engages with questions about partial virtues, attitudes, and emotions. What is it to be *loyal*—and is loyalty always a virtue, or a good thing? What makes it fitting to *love* someone? What sort of relation must we stand in to another person in order to fittingly feel *proud* or *ashamed* of them? We’ll also explore whether special relationships might conflict with epistemic values: does being a good friend sometimes require being a bad epistemic agent—should we ever believe better of our loved ones than our evidence warrants?

PART IV: Rights & Politics

The final part of the course relates to the social and political sphere. We’ll tackle issues concerning social rights—most notably, (purported) rights to sex and friendship. We’ll also take a closer look at patriotism.

Course Schedule

Week	Subject	Required Reading(s)
Week 1 Aug-25	Moral Theories & Personal Attachments	Michael Stocker: 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' · <u>Note</u> : Please read the syllabus before the first session as well.
Week 2 Sep-1	Impartiality	Peter Railton: 'Alienation, consequentialism, & the demands of morality'
Week 3 Sep-8	Partiality	Samuel Scheffler: 'Relationships and Responsibilities' Errol Lord: 'Justifying Partiality'
Week 4 Sep-15	Friendship & Morality	Elijah Milgram: 'Aristotle on making other selves' Dean Cocking & Jeanette Kennett: 'Friendship and Moral Danger'
Week 5 Sep-22	Morally dodgy friendships	Jessica Isserow: 'On Having Bad Persons as Friends'
Week 6 Sep-29	Loyalty	Troy Jollimore: 'Is Loyalty Redundant?'
Week 7 Oct-6	FICTION WEEK	THELMA AND LOUISE
Week 8 Oct-13	Love's Reasons	Sara Protasi: 'Loving people for who they are.' Chris Howard: 'Fitting love and reasons for loving'
BREAK Oct-20		<u>Note</u> : University's Mid-Term Break, No Classes
Week 9 Oct-27	Epistemic Partiality	Sarah Stroud: 'Epistemic Partiality in Friendship'
Week 10 Nov-3	Partiality & Emotion	Jeremy Fischer: 'Why are you proud of that?' Rosalind Chaplin: 'Being ashamed of others'
Week 11 Nov-10	Rights to Sex	Amia Srinivasan: 'Does anyone have the right to sex?'
Week 12 Nov-17	Rights to Friendship	Anca Gheaus: 'Love and Justice: A Paradox?' Charlie Richards: 'Lying to Make Friends'
Week 13 Nov-24	Patriotism	Stephen Nathanson: 'In defense of moderate patriotism' Paul Gomberg: 'Patriotism is Like Racism'
Week 14 Dec-1	<i>Writing week</i>	<i>Writing week</i>
Week 15 Dec-8	FICTION WEEK	THE ENGLISH PATIENT · <u>Note</u> : Term paper due December 9