

PHIL 285: Special Topics— Culturally Structured Agency

Tues 1-3:50pm, Winter 2018

Vargas

Welcome!

This is a seminar about culturally structured agency. Many theories of human agency accept that agency requires various mentalistic features—e.g., beliefs, desires, and maybe intentions. Some accounts of human agency have also emphasized that certain distinctive forms of human agency and human practices more generally rely on social scaffolding to produce and support various normative dispositions, capacities, sensibilities, and normative orientations. However, this social scaffolding is presumably subject to considerable variation across time, place, and community. One way of putting that is that variations in *culture* can produce variations in the forms of *agency*. This seminar is about that apparent fact, and the goal is to get a better grip on the various forms culturally-structured agency, including the hows and the whys of the cultural structuring of agency. The course draws from anthropology, psychology, and recent philosophical work on moral psychology and the philosophy of the social sciences.

Contact info

mrvargas@ucsd.edu

Office: HSS 8089

OH: T 4-4:50, W 11:40-12:30

Attendance

Enrolled seminar participants should attend every session. If enrolled, please alert me in advance of any anticipated absence. If you aren't enrolled, du watcha like.

Evaluation

25% Response papers

70% Term paper (includes Prospectus)

5% Seminar participation

Response papers: five short weekly reading response papers (600 words max), turned in between weeks 2 and 8. Each paper should be sent as an e-mail attachment to da prof by 8 pm on the day before the seminar in which the relevant issues will be discussed. Your grade will be calculated based on the grades of your five best papers. (This means that you can turn in all seven and drop the lowest three grades, or you can simply turn in five). Your paper should engage with one of the readings for the week, and do one of the following (or something similar): (i) provide a careful reconstruction of a difficult piece of reasoning to be found in a relevant text, (ii) evaluate the validity or soundness of an argument in a relevant text, (iii) articulate and provide support for a philosophical position that competes with those found in the relevant texts, or (iv) offer a new

defense of a position found in the reading. At least once in the term, you will be asked to present the substance of your response paper to the class. You won't be graded on it, but you are expected to do it at least once.

Term paper: First, you'll do a prospectus (emailed attachment) delivered to me by *Thursday at 8pm of Week 8*, topic chosen in consultation with me. Second, you will submit a 4500-5500 word paper sent by email attachment. *Paper due at the end of the ordinarily assigned final exam timeslot.*

Provisional reading schedule

All readings are required reading unless explicitly noted.

All readings are available via pdf at <TritonEd.ucsd.edu>.

1/8 Motivations, questions, ambitions

Suggested background reading

Vargas, M (2018) "The Social Constitution of Agency and Responsibility"

Henrich, et al (2010) "The weirdest people in the world"

Nettle, D (2017) "The Cultural and the Agentic"

1/15 What is culture?

Geertz, C (1973) "Thick Description: Towards and Interpretive Theory of Culture"

Richerson and Boyd (2005) *Not by Genes Alone* (Ch. 1-3)

1/22 Recent-ish work on culture

Appiah, A (2018) *The Lies that Bind* (ch 1, 6)

Henrich, J (2016) *The Secret of Our Success* (Ch. 1-6)

1/29 Social norms

Bicchieri, C (2017) Ch. 1-3 (let's skim Ch. 2; main aim for us is the terminology)

2/5 Reasoning

Mercier and Sperber (2011) "Why do humans reason?" (selections)

Vavona (2018) "Irrelevant Influences"

2/12 Adaptive preferences

Khader, S (draft) Adaptive Preferences and the Moral Psychology of Oppression

Mitchell, P. (2018) Adaptive Preferences, Adapted Preferences

Dorsey, D (2018) Adaptive Preferences are a Red Herring

Notes on paper writing

2/19 Religion

- Appiah, (2018) "Creed"
- Harari (various)
- van Leeuwen, N (2014) "Religious Credence is not Factual Belief"

2/26 Patriotism

- MacIntyre, A (1984) Is Patriotism a Virtue?
- Keller, S (2005) Patriotism as Bad Faith
- Primoratz SEP on Patriotism

3/5 Race and poverty

- Zheng, R (draft) "Race and Moral Psychology"
- Morton "A Moral Psychology of Poverty?"

3/12 Responsibility, sociality, and the state

- McTernan, E (draft) "Moral character, liberal states, and civic education"
- Rudy, F (draft) Towards a Deep Social Theory of Moral Responsibility