

Philosophy 285: Deliberation and Reasons-Responsiveness

Winter 2017: Thursdays 1-3:50

(Draft 1/5)

Dana Kay Nelkin

Office Hours: Wed. 12-1 Fri. 10-11, and by appointment

Office: 8035

dnelkin@ucsd.edu

Course Web Site: TritonEd

Course Description

On a number of accounts that otherwise vary quite a bit, reasons-responsive capacities are thought to play a central role in free and responsible agency, and decisions and actions taken on the basis of rational deliberation have often been taken to be the fundamental loci of free and responsible agency. In these way, reasons-responsiveness, free and responsible agency, and deliberative capacities have been taken to be tightly connected. Another way in which deliberation and free agency have been thought to be linked is through the idea that in rationally deliberating about what to do, we necessarily take ourselves to be free (or that, as Kant puts it, we necessarily act under “the idea of freedom”).

But these claims that make rational deliberation central to free and responsible agency have come under scrutiny, as has the idea that deliberation plays—or even *can* play—as central a role in human life as we tend to assume. In this seminar, we will explore some challenges to the centrality and importance of deliberation in human agency and also in free and responsible agency. Topics will include (i) an exploration of arguments—some that rely on empirical findings and some that do not—that challenge the idea that deliberation deserves its privileged status as a reasons-responsive process, (ii) an exploration of arguments that *input* to deliberation is limited in ways we have not realized, and (iii) an exploration of arguments that deliberation does not in fact require anything like a robust commitment to our own freedom.

For some examples of (i), we will consider arguments that deliberation cannot play a fundamental role because it is itself done for reasons and yet a looming regress suggests that non-deliberative roles for reasons must come first (see, e.g., Nomy Arpaly and Tim Schroeder 2012), that non-deliberative and affective processes are far more reasons-responsive than we realized (e.g., Peter Railton 2014), and that deliberation makes us worse at being reasons-responsive than we would otherwise be (see, e.g., Markus Schlosser 2013). When it comes to (ii), we will explore in some detail recent arguments that so-called “transformative experiences” cast doubt on the idea that before having them, we can really reason well about *whether* to have them (e.g., L.A. Paul), even though these seem to be among the most important decisions we make in life. And finally, for examples of (iii), we will explore the question of what we are really talking about when we say we consider “alternatives” in deliberation (e.g., Derk Pereboom 2014).

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Notes:

- All required readings will be available for download from our TritonEd website.
- I have included some optional recommended readings below, and will add more throughout the seminar. (Please check the TritonEd website periodically for updates.)
- While required readings will not include many articles in empirical psychology journals, I encourage you to track down relevant articles via references in philosophy texts and via search programs such as Psych Info and Scholar. (The same goes for other philosophy articles and books that you might be interested in.)
- We will be reading portions of several recently published books, and while I will make PDFs of those portions available, some of you might like to have the entire books. These include: John Doris, *Talking to Ourselves*, Hilary Kornblith, *On Reflection*, Barbara Montero, *Thought and Action: Expertise and the Conscious Mind*, and L.A. Paul, *Transformative Experience*.
- There might be some small changes to the readings listed below. If so, I'll be sure to give you good lead time.

I. The role of deliberation and reflection in rational agency

Week 1: Nomy Arpaly and Tim Schroeder (2012), "Deliberation and Acting for Reasons"; Hilary Kornblith (2012), *On Reflection*, Introduction

Week 2: Peter Railton (2014), "The Affective Dog and Its Rational Tail: Intuition and Attunement"; Julia Annas (2011), *Intelligent Virtue* (excerpt)

(recommended: David Velleman (2008), "The Way of the Wanton" Peter Railton (2009) "Practical Competence and Fluent Agency"; Michael Brownstein (2014) "Rationalizing Flow: Agency in Skilled Unreflective Action")

Week 3: Barbara Montero (2016) *Thought in Action* (chapters 2 and 4); Kornblith (2012), *On Reflection* (chapters 2 and 5)

II. The role of deliberation and reflection in free and responsible agency

Week 4: John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza (1998), *Freedom and Control* (chapter 3); Markus Schlosser (2013), "Conscious Will, Reason-Responsiveness and Moral Responsibility"; Joshua Sheperd (2015) "Scientific Challenges to Free Will and Moral Responsibility"

(recommended: Dana Nelkin 2005, "Freedom Responsibility and the Challenge of Situationism"; David Brink (2013) "Situationism, Responsibility and Fair Opportunity"; Fischer and Ravizza (1998), chapters 1, 2, and 7; Susan Wolf (1992), *Freedom Within Reason*, chapter 4)

Week 5: John Doris (2015) *Talking to Ourselves* (excerpts from chapters 2-7)

Week 6: Neil Levy (2016), "Implicit Bias and Moral Responsibility: Probing the Data"; Jules Holroyd (2012), "Responsibility for Implicit Bias"

III. Deliberation and the Idea of Freedom

Week 7: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (excerpts); Hilary Kornblith (2012), *On Reflection* chapter 3; Fritz Warfield and E.J. Coffman (2005), "Deliberation and Metaphysical Freedom"

Week 8: Dana Nelkin (2011), *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility* (excerpts) and excerpts from a symposium on the book (2013) from Randolph Clarke, Laura Ekstrom, and Gary Watson; Derk Pereboom (2014), *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life* (excerpt)

IV. Deliberation and transformative choices: does deliberation have a role?

Week 9: L.A. Paul (2014), *Transformative Experience* (excerpts)

Week 10: Ullman-Margalit (2007), "Difficult Choices: To Agonize or Not To Agonize?"; Ruth Chang (2015), "Transformative Choices"

(recommended: Agnes Callard (in press), *Aspiration*)

Requirements:

- 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 me (Dana) 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.
- One long (4500-5500) term paper sent by email attachment, due March 23, preceded by a prospectus (also emailed) due March 11.

- The long paper should address positions and/or arguments to be found in the course readings or in readings previously approved on the basis of the prospectus.
 - The prospectus (2-3 pages) should include an articulation of your paper's main thesis, the paper's rough structure, along with a summary of some of the arguments you will be planning to use in support of the main thesis, and a bibliography.
-
- Attendance is expected at every meeting. If you need to miss a session, please communicate with me (if possible, ahead of time).

 - Your grade will be based on the quality of your papers (70% for the term paper, 25% for the short papers), and your participation in seminar (5%).