

NORMATIVE POWERS

INSTRUCTOR	Angela Sun angsun@umich.edu
DESCRIPTION	Human beings have a remarkable power to change their normative circumstances by mere utterance (or, in some cases, mere <i>thought</i>). Take, for instance, the power of consent. Heidi Hurd famously wrote that "consent can function to transform the morality of another's conduct," turning "a trespass into a dinner party; a battery into a handshake; a theft into a gift; an invasion of privacy into an intimate moment; a commercial appropriation of name and likeness into a biography." ¹ What could possibly explain such an amazing ability? In this course, we will survey a variety of phenomena that may be considered <i>normative powers</i> : promise-making, consent, forgiveness, and resolution-making. Along the way, we will consider the conditions that are needed to make these powers possible and how these powers can be used (or suppressed) for good and evil.
GOALS	By the end of this course, students will have developed the following knowledge and skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-depth understanding of contemporary philosophical debates surrounding promises, consent, forgiveness, and resolutions, as well as why we might think about all these phenomena as normative powers.• The ability to defend a position with clear, rigorous argumentation.• The ability to give constructive, critical, and friendly feedback on others' arguments and ideas.• The ability to communicate complex ideas clearly by discussing them in class and writing philosophical essays.

¹Heidi M. Hurd, "The Moral Magic of Consent," *Legal Theory* 2, no. 2 (1996): 123.

REQUIREMENTS

The requirements of this course are as follows:

- *Paper 1* (25%): For the first paper, you will be asked to identify a phenomenon that is not covered in one of the units in the course that you think should be considered a normative power and explain what control it allows us to have over our normative circumstances. The paper should be no longer than 1500 words.
- *Paper 2 prospectus* (5%): The second paper will be on a topic of your choice. Before you start writing the paper, you must submit a 500-word summary of your main argument for feedback.
- *Paper 2* (35%): As noted above, the second paper will be on a topic of your choice. The paper should be no longer than 2500 words.
- *Peer review for paper 1* (5%): You will provide written feedback on drafts of paper 1 for two of your peers.
- *Peer review for paper 2* (5%): You will provide written feedback on drafts of paper 2 for two of your peers.
- *Discussion questions* (10%): At least once a week (i.e., at least every other class), you must submit a discussion question based on that day's reading to me at least 12 hours before class.
- *Participation* (15%): Come to class having completed the reading and prepared to discuss it!

ACCOMMODATION

I will work with every student interested in taking this course to ensure it's possible to. If you have a disability, are struggling with mental or physical health, or if there is anything else that might prevent you from fully participating in this course, let me know as soon as you can, and we will figure something out.

SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: THE IDEA OF A NORMATIVE POWER

Day 1: What is a normative reason?

Jacob M. Nebel, "[Normative Reasons as Reasons Why We Ought](#)"

Day 2: What is a normative power?

Ruth Chang, "[Do We Have Normative Powers?](#)"

Day 3: Speech acts

J.L. Austin, Lectures I and II of [How to Do Things With Words](#)

UNIT 2: PROMISES

Day 4: Promising as a speech act

Gary Watson, "[Asserting and Promising](#)"

Day 5: Why should we keep our promises?

Thomas Scanlon, "[Promises and Practices](#)"

Day 6: What kinds of reasons to promises give us?

Joseph Raz, "[Is There a Reason to Keep Promises?](#)"

Day 7: Promising against the evidence
Berislav Marušić, "Promising Against the Evidence"

Day 8: Coerced promises
Seana Valentine Shiffrin, "Chapter 2: Duress and Moral Progress" in *Speech Matters: On Lying, Morality, and the Law*

Day 9: Immoral promises
Yuval Eylon, "Just Threats"

UNIT 3: CONSENT

Content note: in this unit, we will discuss nonconsensual sex

Day 10: Consent as a normative power
Heidi M. Hurd, "The Moral Magic of Consent"

Day 11: Does consent require communication?
Tom Dougherty, "Yes Means Yes: Consent as Communication"

Day 12: Intoxicated consent
Alan Wertheimer, "Intoxicated Consent to Sexual Relations"

Day 13: Seduction
Sarah Conly, "Seduction, Rape, and Coercion"

Day 14: Consent and misinformation
Tom Dougherty, "Sex, Lies, and Consent"

UNIT 4: FORGIVENESS

Day 15: What is forgiveness?
Jeffrie Murphy, "Chapter 1: Forgiveness and Resentment" in *Forgiveness and Mercy*

Day 16: The obligation to forgive
Nancy Potter, "Is Refusing to Forgive a Vice?"

Day 17: Forgiving oppressors
Myisha Cherry, "Forgiveness, Exemplars, and the Oppressed"

Day 18: Preemptive forgiving
Nicolas Cornell, "The Possibility of Preemptive Forgiving"

UNIT 5: RESOLUTIONS

Day 19: Why should we respect our resolutions?
Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Origin of Negation" in *Being and Nothingness*

Day 20: Resisting temptation

Michael E. Bratman, "[Temptation and the Agent's Standpoint](#)"

Day 21: Resolutions and intentions

Richard Holton, "[Chapter 1: Intention](#)" in *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*

Day 22: Resolutions and self-promises

Connie S. Rosati, "[The Importance of Self-Promises](#)"

Day 23: The bootstrapping problem

Christian Piller, "[The Bootstrapping Objection](#)"

Day 24: Giving ourselves reasons

Ruth Chang, "[How to Make Hard Choices](#)"