

Huron Brief Course Outlines

Fall/Winter 2023-2024

Course Title: Group Agency

Course Number and Section

PHILOSOPHY

3645F - 550

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

This course will begin with an introductory survey of recent work on group agency, in which it is assumed that groups can be the bearers of moral responsibility. A precondition for this seems to be that groups can act intentionally; but if they can act intentionally it would appear that groups, as groups, would have to be capable of having beliefs and desires. These, however, are most naturally thought of as mental states, and it is not clear how groups can have mental states. A variety of recent philosophical approaches to these issues will be sketched, and preliminary assessments will be considered. The course will then turn to a work by a major philosopher – Michael Bratman's recent book 'Shared Agency', which extends his well-known planning theory of agency to groups. Throughout the course, students will be expected to work out the implications of philosophical proposals concerning group agency when these are applied to the real world, and especially to corporations. For this reason, students will have to read independently two empirical studies: one concerning the history of companies, and in the other specifically about the corporate actions by British Petroleum in the context of the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Students will have to incorporate material from these empirical studies into the assignments for the course.

Learning Outcomes:

Students should come to master a number of different kinds of technical concepts involved in social explanation: e.g., common knowledge, group membership, collective belief, group coordination, shared planning, joint commitment, plural subjects, collective responsibility.

Textbooks and Course Materials:

(Although texts below are available in electronic editions, for this course you will NEED the paper editions.)

Michael Bratman, Shared Agency (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

John Micklethwaite and Adrian Woodbridge, The Company: A Short History of a Revolutionary Idea (New York: Random House, 2003)

Earl Boebert, James M Blossom, Peter G Neumann, Deepwater Horizon: A Systems Analysis of the Macondo Disaster (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)

Methods of Evaluation:

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
First In-Class Test	10/16/2023	33%
Second In-Class Test	11/13/2023	33%
Final Exam	Dec. TBD	34%

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.