



Susan Wolf, UNC Chapel Hill

## Topics for Public Lectures

### Meaningfulness: A Third Dimension of the Good Life

In thinking about what we want for ourselves and for those about whom we care, we tend to think in terms of the categories of self-interest and morality. We want, in other words, to be both happy and good. These categories, however, leave something out: an interest that our lives be meaningful. This lecture will propose an analysis of meaningfulness in terms of subjective engagement with objective values. Understanding meaningfulness this way brings together the attractive elements of other more popular ways of thinking about the concept and makes intelligible why we should care deeply about having meaning in our lives.

### Selves Like Us: Reflections on what it is to be distinctively human

Since at least the seventeenth century, philosophers have distinguished membership in the species *homo sapiens* from moral personhood, a category closely associated with rational agency. But there are other nonbiological features that are of ethical and practical significance as well, suggesting that there is an ethical, non-biological conception of humanity that is different from the standard philosophical understanding of moral personhood. After reflecting on the benefits and dangers of focusing attention on the idea of “the distinctively human,” the lecture explores the variety of features and capacities that distinguish “selves like us” from lower animals, artificially intelligent machines, and possibly imaginary divine and extraterrestrial rational individuals.

### Criticizing Blame

Philosophers commonly distinguish between responsible and non-responsible individuals, understanding responsible agents as those individuals who are appropriate objects of punishment and reward, blame and credit, as well as such reactive attitudes as resentment, indignation and gratitude. Non-responsible individuals, by contrast, are never appropriate objects of these responses. The lecture will present reasons to question this distinction: By marking a difference between blame and criticism, and the different conditions under which they are justified, we can see that the concepts of responsibility and blame are not as unified as we generally take them to be. This has implications for our understanding of responsibility, blame, punishment and the problem of free will.

### Life Lessons: Analytic Philosophy Meets the Dalai Lama

*The Book of Joy* recounts a five-day conversation between the Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his friend His Holiness the Dalai Lama discussing the question “How does one find joy in the

face of life's inevitable suffering?" It is inspiring reading, to be sure, but how does their advice stand up to the scrutiny of a rigorous, somewhat skeptical and secular philosopher? The lecture will examine the ideas of these two great spiritual leaders, to see what survives when they are subjected to the intellectual and empirical standards of academic philosophical thought.

Topics I would be happy to discuss in philosophy classes (in conjunction with an assigned essay or independently) include:

Moral Saints

Moral Luck

Freedom and Responsibility

Meaning in Life

Blame and Criticism

The Importance of Love

Feminism and Philosophy

\*Please get in touch directly to discuss details or other topics.

In other informal settings, I am also happy to discuss such issues as

The Value of the Arts and Humanities

Being a woman in philosophy