PHIL-148-20: Metaethics

Summer 2016 — MTWRF: 10:45am-12:15pm — White-Gravenor 409

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DRAFT SYLLABUS — SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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1   COURSE DESCRIPTION

Are there moral truths? If so, are they universal or relative? Is morality merely an expression of, for example, our emotions? Is God necessary for morality? Can we understand and explain morality from a purely scientific or naturalistic point of view? Some of the most gripping questions in life are about the nature and status of morality itself. In contemporary philosophy, these questions are central to a field known as "metaethics." Metaethics aims to understand and to explain the nature and grounds of morality, moral discourse, and moral practice. In this course, students will learn how to think philosophically about metaethical questions and the answers contemporary philosophers (such as Christine Korsgaard, David Enoch, Sharon Street, JL Mackie, and others) have proposed to them. Work for the course will include regular homework (such as short reading responses of 1-2 pages), a midterm exam, a final exam, and active participation. No prior knowledge of metaethics is required.

2   TEXTS

- The companion text for this course is Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011). It provides a clear introduction to contemporary metaethics.
- All other texts will be made available electronically.

3 REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed on the basis of the following (subject to revision):

Item	Percentage
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	20%
Response Papers and Homework	40%

Exams. Exams will assess both content knowledge and the philosophical skills taught in the course. The final exam will be cumulative and students must earn a passing grade on it in order to pass the course.

Response papers and Homework. Students will submit regular short 1–2-page response papers and/or complete homework assignments on the reading. These will ensure preparation for class and readiness for discussion.

Participation. Active participation is important. This includes making insightful comments, listening and responding thoughtfully to classmates, and completing relevant in-class assignments.

Attendance. Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted one (1) unexcused absence. After one unexcused absence, a student's grade will suffer significantly: the student's participation grade will be reduced, and, for *each additional* unexcused absence, *one full letter grade* will be deducted from the student's overall grade in the course.

To pass this course it is necessary that students turn in all assignments, take all exams, pass the final exam, meet the attendance requirements, and adhere to academic honesty policies.

4 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are required to know and to strictly adhere to Georgetown University's academic integrity and honesty policies. All suspected violations will be reported to the honor council. Any violation of these policies will result in a failing grade for the assignment and, if premeditated or deemed otherwise sufficiently grave, for the course.

5 TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Date	Topic	Reading
Week 1		
7/11/16	Introduction	
7/12/16	Non-naturalist Realism	• David Enoch, "Why I am an Objectivist About Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)"
		• Fisher, *Metaethics*, ch. 4, pp. 55-60
7/13/16		• Russ Shafer-Landau on moral realism, selections
		• Fisher, *Metaethics*, ch. 5, pp. 73–76, 81–88
7/14/16	God and Metaethics	• Philip L. Quinn, "Theological Voluntarism"
		• Fisher, *Metaethics*, ch. 5, pp. 76–81
		• Plato, *Euthyphro*, selections
7/15/16		• Erik Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*, selections
Week 2		
7/18/16	Naturalist Realism	• Nicholas Sturgeon, "Ethical Naturalism"
7/19/16		• Peter Railton, "Moral Realism"
		• Fisher, *Metaethics*, ch. 4, pp. 64–70
7/20/16	Error Theory	• J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, ch. 1
		• Fisher, *Metaethics*, ch. 3
7/21/16		• Stephen Finlay, "The Error in Error Theory"
7/22/16		• Jonas Olson, "In Defense of Moral Error Theory"
Week 3		
7/25/16	Evolution and Ethics	• Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*, selections
7/26/16		• Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value"
7/27/16	Open-Question Argument	• G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ch. 1
		• Fisher, *Metaethics*, ch. 1
7/28/16	*Review and Catchup Day*	
7/29/16	**MIDTERM EXAM**	(exam day, no readings)
Week 4		
8/1/16	Expressivism: Emotivism	• A.J. Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology"
		• Fisher, *Metaethics*, ch. 2
8/2/16	Noncognitivism	• Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*, selections
8/3/16		• New wave expressivism OR Blackburn's Quasi-realism
8/4/16	Relativism and Subjectivism	• Subjectivism, reading TBD
8/5/16		• Harman, "Moral Relativism"
		• Fisher, *Metaethics*, ch. 7

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Date	Topic	Reading
		• Rachels "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"
Week 5		
8/8/16	Constructivism	• Carla Bagnoli, "Constructivism in Metaethics"
8/9/16	Kantian Constructivism	• Selections from Kant's Groundwork
		• Christine Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, selections
8/10/16	Humean Constructivism	• Selections from Hume
		• Sharon Street, "Coming to Terms with Contingency"
8/11/16	*Review and Catchup Day*	
8/12/16	**FINAL EXAM**	(exam day, no readings)