

PHIL 4830: Senior Seminar in Philosophy

Spring, 2003

Meeting: MWF, 2:00-2:50, Hlms 245
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Focus of the Course:

We will be discussing meta-ethics, with a particular focus on moral realism and ethical intuitionism. Issues we will discuss include:

- the objectivity of value
- how we know about moral value
- how moral values motivate us
- whether and why moral action is rational.

We will also discuss the phenomenon of moral disagreements and attempt to determine what, if any, implications it might have for the preceding issues.

Text:

The text is a course reader available at the CU book store. I have put a copy on reserve in Norlin library (at the circulation desk), in case you have trouble getting it, so you can photocopy the first readings.

Course Requirements:

• *Papers:*

I will ask you to write two short papers, followed by one longer paper to be turned in at the end of the class. Short papers should be around 4 pages, while the long one should be around 15. The long paper may be an expanded version of one (or both) of the earlier ones, in which you expand on the basic argument in the shorter paper, extend the discussion to related issues, etc.

• *Presentations:*

I will also ask each of you to give two presentations to the class, which should be based on your papers; however, you should not merely read the paper to the class. Just come in and talk for 10 minutes to the rest of the class about a topic in meta-ethics that you're interested in. Then the class will discuss what you've said with you.

Who Should Take This Class?

There's only one reason why you should be here. That is because you have a theoretical interest in the nature of moral value and related topics. Also, if you're taking the class, please be prepared to come on time and to do the assigned readings. Lastly, if you're going to have a problem with a professor calling some philosophical positions "true" and others "false," then you shouldn't take a class from me.

Guidelines for the Course:

1. To contact me: send email to the address listed above, and I will probably respond the same day. Or call between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. Leave a message, since I screen my calls.
2. Please feel free come to my office hours to talk about philosophy, or play chess. If you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them, but you needn't have a specific question to come. Prufrock's coffee shop is at 1322 College Ave. (on the hill). Also, if you can't come during the main time, I will *usually* be at my office (266 Hellems) at 3:00 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (except when colloquia and department meetings conflict).
3. During class, please do not hesitate to comment on or ask about anything we discuss. I'd like to have

a discussion-oriented class, so feel free to say what's on your mind.

4. I have a personal web page <home.sprynet.com/~owl1>, which includes some information about the class, including this syllabus & some lecture notes, among other, cooler things. You may wish to view the philosophy humor as well.

Grading:

The papers will be graded on a scale of 1-5, 5 being best. Most people should expect to get '4', with a '5' going only to exceptionally good papers, and '3' or below going to below average papers. Similarly, most people can expect to receive a 'B' in the class. At the end of the course, there will be some vague consideration given to class participation and attendance, particularly for people who are close to the borderline between two grades.

As with many things in the outside world, grades are based on observable performance, rather than effort or virtue. Please do not tell me you should get a higher grade because you worked really hard, or because you really need it.

Please don't obsess about your grade. After you graduate, no one will ever look at your grades again.

Schedule:

This indicates what you should read for each day, and what we will probably be discussing. Note especially paper due dates. The dates for discussing things are flexible, however, and we may go faster or slower than indicated here.

M, Jan. 13	Introduction. Course requirements. What is Ethics? What is Meta-Ethics?
W, Jan. 15	Relativism Benedict
F, Jan. 17	More relativism Postow
M, Jan. 20	<i>No class--MLK Jr. Day</i>
W, Jan. 22	Non-cognitive ethics Stevenson
F, Jan. 24	Error theory Mackie
M, Jan. 27	Criticisms of anti-realism Huemer
W, Jan. 29	Projectivism & quasi-realism Blackburn
F, Jan. 31	Open question argument, naturalistic fallacy Moore
M, Feb. 3	Against the open question argument. Ethical naturalism. Putnam

W, Feb. 5	Student presentations.
F, Feb. 7	Student presentations.
M, Feb. 10	Student presentations.
W, Feb. 12	Student presentations.
F, Feb. 14	Paper #1 due. Moral explanations Sturgeon
M, Feb. 17	More moral explanations Huemer
W, Feb. 19	Review: the first 4 meta-ethical theories.
F, Feb. 21	The Objectivist ethics Rand
M, Feb. 24	More about Rand
W, Feb. 26	Gewirth's ethical rationalism Gewirth
F, Feb. 28	Evolution & ethics Ruse
M, Mar. 3	Contractarian ethics Gauthier
W, Mar. 5	The possibility of a priori knowledge.
F, Mar. 7	More about a priori knowledge BonJour
M, Mar. 10	About foundationalism. Huemer
W, Mar. 12	Student presentations.
F, Mar. 14	Student presentations.
M, Mar. 17	Student presentations.
W, Mar. 19	Student presentations.
F, Mar. 21	Paper #2 due. Ethical intuitionism Prichard
Mar. 24-28	<i>No class--Spring Break</i>
M, Mar. 31	More ethical intuitionism Ross

W, Apr. 2	Intuitionism: response to Mackie Sterling
F, Apr. 4	Criticisms of intuitionism Strawson
M, Apr. 7	More criticisms Smith
W, Apr. 9	More criticisms Wilson Ruse
F, Apr. 11	Humean conception of motivation Hume
M, Apr. 14	Why be moral? Butchvarov
W, Apr. 16	Morality & rational action Sterling
F, Apr. 18	Bad faith. Self-deception, weakness of will Sartre
M, Apr. 21	Weakness of the will Walker
W, Apr. 23	Kohlberg's theory of moral development Langford
F, Apr. 25	Moral psychology Velleman
M, Apr. 28	other stuff?
W, Apr. 30	Review/discussion.
F, May 2	Long paper due. Bye.

Other topics we might discuss:

There is lots of extra time in the above schedule. So we might finish early. If so, here are some further topics we might want to talk about:

- Can one derive an 'ought' from an 'is'? Searle's argument; other considerations.
- Moral disagreement: why it happens, how we should react to it.
- Methods of moral philosophy: the method of 'bare differences'; 'reflective equilibrium'; principles vs. cases; which intuitions are more trustworthy.
- The relationship between value judgements and emotions.
- Other concepts that are sometimes said to be 'normative': "truth", "rationality", intentional concepts.