

PY3702 | VALUE AND NORMATIVITY

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Edgecliffe B18

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 2–3pm

Lectures: M, 11–1, St Mary's College, Lecture Room 1

Tutorials: Please sign up for tutorials on MMS

DESCRIPTION

This module will deal with a range of core debates in recent philosophy concerning the nature of normativity and value. They will be approached through study of contemporary work in metaethics. Rather than focusing primarily on ethical questions like *How should we live?* or *What is the right thing to do in this situation?*, we'll focus on metaethical questions like *What is it for something to be good?* and *How do we know what the right thing to do is, in this situation?* Various positions on the nature and status of moral properties, moral language, and moral knowledge, will be introduced and evaluated. We will also discuss the nature of moral reasons and their relationship to practical rationality—including the question of *why* we should be moral in the first place.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

By the end of this module students will have gained some basic knowledge of contemporary metaethics, including the landscape of views and the arguments and methods used to support them. The students' own philosophical skills should be sharpened, as well. This module should prepare students for further study, especially in moral philosophy, but also in "core" areas of philosophy including metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language.

To meet these outcomes, students should attend all lectures and tutorials. Students should also do the readings before the relevant lectures and tutorials, and come to both—especially tutorials—prepared to discuss the material.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Noncognitivism in Ethics*, by Mark Schroeder
 - We'll read several chapters from this book, and it is not available as an online book through the St Andrews library.

POLICIES

Please read the latest version of the booklet 'Philosophy Handbook for Undergraduates' very carefully regarding absences, lateness of essays, academic alerts, plagiarism etc. Copies are available from the main office in Edgecliffe or online at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/philosophy/current/ugrad/>. Ignorance of the information in the handbook will not be accepted as an excuse for failing to meet module requirements.

ASSESSMENT

Your final grade for this module will be determined by an essay (50%) and an exam (50%). The essay will cover weeks 1–5; the exam will cover weeks 6–11. The Philosophy Handbook for Undergraduates contains lots of valuable information and advice about writing your essay.

ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS: Write an essay of no more than 3,500 words answering one of the following questions. This to be submitted via MMS by 11:59pm on 11 March (end of Week 7, right before Spring Vacation).

1. Is moral disagreement good evidence against moral realism?
2. Explain and critically evaluate the argument from queerness for the moral error theory.
3. Explain and evaluate ethical intuitionism as an epistemological thesis.

In each case, a good essay will explain the meaning of the question, explain different potential answers which have been proposed by different philosophers, and critically engage with these different views, either settling for one of the answers (and explaining why), or explaining why none of the answers is satisfactory.

Requests for extensions, etc., should go to the module coordinator (JS).

ADVICE AND EXPECTATIONS

This is a 30-credit module, so it should occupy about half of your working week—around 18–20 hours per week. If you feel that you are having trouble keeping up, even though you're spending 18–20 hours per week on this module, come and talk to us.

You should come to the seminar each week prepared to discuss the material from the assigned readings. Since the readings have been written with an audience of professional philosophers in mind, this will likely require reading, making notes, and re-reading. Remember that only three of the 18–20 hours per week will be spent in class, so you should expect and plan to spend 15–17 hours per week thinking about the material on your own. For each week, there is a required reading for the seminar, plus several additional readings. To excel, you should read at least some of these supplementary readings each week. That said, it is better to gain a good understanding of a couple of them rather than rushing through all of them.

In preparing for the seminar, you need to think about what you hope to get out of it: what you don't understand, what you'd like to understand better, what you think about

the issues. Make a note of these points before the seminar. After the seminar, make time to look at those notes again, to see how you've progressed. If you don't feel you've progressed, then come and talk to one of us.

Lectures will be primarily for introducing the issues. But since the class is two hours long, we expect there to be a significant amount of discussion even in lectures. Thus, you should read through the material at least once before lecture.

You also need to plan ahead for your essay, and for the exam. Beyond the required reading for your seminars, you may also want to read some introductory/overview articles mentioned below (often from *Philosophy Compass*, or the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*), and you will need to read more deeply on the topic you select for your essay, and in preparation for the exam. In addition to the readings listed below, you can find more using the following resources:

- Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>)
- *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu>)
- *Philosophy Compass* (<http://philosophy-compass.com/>)
- PhilPapers (<http://philpapers.org>)

And we will be happy to suggest further reading if you talk to us about your interests.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

The following schedule of readings is subject to change. Readings will primarily be made available on MMS. Readings for weeks 1, 6, and 7 are in *Noncognitivism in Ethics*.

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| Week 1 | Metaethics: An introduction We will get a sense of what metaethics is, and why it's interesting. We will also introduce some key ideas that have driven the majority of metaethical theorizing since 1903. Seminar reading Schroeder, Chapter 1 Additional readings Smith, <i>The Moral Problem</i> , Chapter 1 (through section 1.3) |
| Week 2 | Error theory Seminar reading Mackie, 'The subjectivity of values'; Brink, 'Moral realism and the skeptical arguments from disagreement and queerness' Additional readings Nolan, et al., 'Moral fictionalism versus the rest'; Finlay, 'The error in the error theory' |
| Week 3 | Moral knowledge Seminar reading Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , Chapter 5 Additional readings McGrath, 'Moral knowledge by perception'; Crisp, <i>Reasons and the Good</i> , Chapter 3 |
| Week 4 | Moral disagreement |

- Seminar reading** Vavova, 'Moral disagreement and moral skepticism'
- Additional readings** Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, Chapter 6; McGrath, 'Moral realism without convergence'
- Week 5 Why be moral?
- Seminar reading** Parfit, *On What Matters*, Chapter 6; de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 'The objectivity of ethics and the unity of practical reason'
- Additional readings** Kahane, 'Evolution and impartiality'; Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, Chapter 7
- Week 6 Noncognitivism
- Seminar reading** Schroeder, Chapter 2 and Chapter 4
- Additional readings** Ayer, 'Critique of ethics and theology'; Stevenson, 'The emotive meaning of ethical terms'; Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Chapter 1; Blackburn, 'How to be an ethical anti-realist'; Gibbard, 'The reasons of a living being'
- Week 7 The Frege-Geach Problem
- Seminar readings** Schroeder, Chapter 3 and Chapter 6
- Additional reading** Geach, 'Assertion'; Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Chapter 2; Schroeder, 'What is the Frege-Geach problem?'; Blackburn, 'Attitudes and contents'; Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*, Chapters 3 and 4; Schroeder, Chapters 5 and 7
- Week 8 Evolutionary debunking arguments
- Seminar reading** Street, 'A Darwinian dilemma for realist theories of value'
- Additional readings** Copp, 'Darwinian skepticism about moral realism'; Street, 'Reply to Copp'; Vavova, 'Debunking evolutionary debunking'
- Week 9 Naturalism and non-naturalism
- Seminar reading** Railton, 'Moral realism'
- Additional readings** Shafer-Landau, 'Ethics as philosophy'; Schroeder, 'Realism and reduction'
- Week 10 Constructivism
- Seminar reading** Korsgaard, 'The authority of reflection'
- Additional readings** Street, 'What is constructivism in ethics and metaethics'; Milo, 'Contractarian constructivism'; Street, 'Coming to terms with contingency: Humean constructivism about practical reason'
- Week 11 Review and catch up