

PHI 117 Foundations of Ethics

Fall 2018

Instructor Information

Instructor

Dr. Justin Morton

Email

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Office Location & Hours

Social Sciences 2281
Friday 1:00-3:00

General Information

Description

It would be wrong for me to give you a D on a perfect paper. Would this be the case even if everyone (including you!) thought it was ok? More generally: are moral facts determined by our attitudes, or are they independent of those attitudes? This is one of the most important questions in all of ethics. In this class, we will learn and evaluate some of the deepest arguments on both sides of this issue.

Expectations and Goals

The goal of this course is twofold. First, as with any philosophy course, the goal is to develop your critical reasoning skills. This will happen in the form of in-class debate and discussion, paper-writing, and close reading of relatively complex philosophical texts. Second is a subject-specific goal: to learn about one of the most important issues in ethics. That issue is whether moral facts are determined by the attitudes of agents.

Course Materials

Required Materials

Good news: no required texts! I'll upload or email all readings.

Optional Materials

If you want to read more on anything, or get background reading on any issues, just come ask me.

Evaluation

4 short (1-1.5 page) critical response papers | 10% each

1 longer paper (5-6 pages) | 50%

Attendance and participation | 10%

The idea behind the short papers is to force you to give a maximally concise summary of an argument, and an equally concise reply to that argument. Concision is an overlooked skill that is nevertheless hugely important. The goal is also to get you started practicing *early* in the course, and in such a way that you have lots of opportunities to correct for mistakes.

The longer paper will constitute your take-home final. The idea here is to develop a fuller line of philosophical argument about one of the themes of the course.

While the response papers must be on an assigned reading, the longer paper need only be directly related to course material (though it's fine if it only relies on assigned readings).

Course Schedule

| Week | Topic | Reading | Notes |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Week 1: Sept. 26-28 | Intro | Plato, selection from <i>Euthyphro</i> Williams, "The Amoralist" Plato, "The Ring of Gyges" | Class cancelled Friday 9/28 |
| Week 2: Oct. 1-5 | The Argument from Queerness Error Theory vs. Relativism | Mackie, "The Argument from Queerness" Olson, selection | |
| Week 3: Oct. 8-12 | Moral Metaphysics: Relativism | Street, "What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?" Street, "In Defense of Future Tuesday Indifference" | First short paper due Friday 10/12 |
| Week 4: Oct. 15-19 | Moral Metaphysics: Error Theory (i.e. Nihilism) | Mackie again Olson, excerpt from <i>Moral Error Theories</i> | |
| Week 5: Oct. 22-26 | Moral Metaphysics: Realism | Enoch, "Why I Am an Objectivist About Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)" Enoch, ch. 2 of <i>Taking Morality Seriously</i> | Second short paper due Friday 10/26 |
| Week 6: Oct. 29-Nov. 2 | Moral Knowledge: Debunking Deontology | Joshua Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul" | |
| Week 7: Nov. 5-9 | Moral Knowledge: The Evolutionary Challenge | Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value" (excerpts) Enoch, ch. 7 of <i>Taking Morality Seriously</i> (excerpts) | Third short paper due Friday 11/9 |
| Week 8: Nov. 12-16 | Moral Knowledge: Disagreement | Cont. from Week 3 McGrath, "Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise" | *No class Monday 11/12 (Veterans Day) |
| Week 9: Nov. 19-23 | Moral Motivation | Plato, <i>Protagoras</i> (excerpt) Shafer-Landau, ch. 6 of <i>Moral Realism</i> | Fourth short paper due Wednesday Wed. 9/21 *No class Friday 11/23 (Thanksgiving) |

| Week | Topic | Reading | Notes |
|------------------------|------------------|--|---|
| Week 10: Nov. 26-30 | God and Morality | Dostoevsky, excerpt from <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality" | |
| Week 11: Dec. 3-7 | God and Morality | Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness" | Long paper (take-home final) due Thursday, 12/13, at 12:30 pm. |

Additional Information and Resources

Electronics policy:

No cellphones or laptops in class. This does not apply to those who have a good reason to be using such. If you do have such an excuse, see me privately.

Student Academic Code of Conduct:

<http://sja.ucdavis.edu/files/cac.pdf>

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism violates the UCD Code of Academic Conduct. Students suspected of plagiarism will be referred to Student Judicial Affairs. For information on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, see the handout "Avoiding Plagiarism". We will also discuss as a class what constitute good citation practices, in the week before the first short paper is due.

American Cultures, Governance, and History (AH):

This course fulfills the AH requirements. Students will learn diverse perspectives on the fundamental nature of morality. They will also learn invaluable critical thinking skills, as well as public discussion skills. The first will be evaluated mainly through the assigned papers; the latter through in-class discussion.

Writing Experience (WE):

This course fulfills the WE requirements. Students will write at least 10 pages over the course of the term. The first four papers are designed so that feedback on each of the prior papers will inform students' work on the next paper. These assignments are designed so that students can practice the basic task of summarizing and criticizing an argument multiple times, improving due to my written feedback on each.