

Texas A&M University, Fall 2017

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YMCA 428B
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SEMINAR IN ETHICS & VALUE THEORY - PHIL 662

MEETING TIMES AND LOCATION

Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:05 am to 12:20 pm in YMCA 401.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Is it possible to gain knowledge about moral issues? If so, how? What are the methods of ethics?

In this seminar we will discuss some key issues in moral epistemology. We will start by discussing the epistemic reliability of moral intuitions. Do moral intuitions produce epistemically reliable moral opinions? We will also discuss the notion of reflective equilibrium, i.e. the idea that we should accept moral judgements that “fit well” (cohere) with our other moral and nonmoral views. Another body of literature to be covered in the seminar addresses the moral relevance of scientific (evolutionary) explanations of moral opinions.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students meeting the requirements of this course will:

- develop their capacity to think critically and analytically about some of the key concepts in moral epistemology, e.g. moral intuitionism, foundationalism, coherence, evolutionary debunking arguments, and contextualism;
- be able to present the material covered in the seminar to other participants and participate actively in class discussions; and
- write a short essay (about 2000- 3000 words) on some aspect of the topics covered in the course.

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Students will be asked to make **two** 30 min class presentations of the assigned readings in the **first seven weeks** of the semester. The format is free, but a good presentation should answer the following questions: 1) What is the main claim of the text? 2) Why does the author think we should believe that claim? 3) Are the author’s arguments convincing? Why, or why not? 4) What is, in your opinion, the most reasonable view to take about the issues discussed in the text?

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Students will write a short essay of no more than 3000 words that covers a topic discussed in class. To ensure that essays are completed before the end of the semester, students will be asked to have a draft version ready on or before 11/12/17, which will be circulated and discussed in class.

The deadline for submitting the final version of the paper is 12/16/17.

GRADING POLICIES AND SCALE

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

Presentation 1 = 25%

Presentation 2 = 25%

Term paper = 50%

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = <60

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Laptops and tablets may be used for academic purposes. The use of cell phones is prohibited.

AGGIE HONOR CODE & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do.”

The Honor Code and the Honor Council Rules and Procedures can be found at <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/>.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information, visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

TOPICS AND READINGS

* Seminar begins with 30 min student presentation

Week 1 (August 28) Introduction

M: Overview: What is metaethics?

W: Sayre-McCord, Geoff, "Metaethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

*Week 2 (September 4) Moral intuitionism

M: Audi, Robert (2015). Intuition and Its Place in Ethics. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1 (1):57-77.

W: Tersman, Folke (2016) "Intuitional Disagreement", *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50, 2012, 639-659.

*Week 3 (September 11) Evolutionary Debunking arguments I

M: Singer, Peter (2005). Ethics and Intuitions. *Journal of Ethics* 9 (3-4):331-352.

W: Kahane, Guy (2011). Evolutionary Debunking Arguments. *Noûs* 45 (1):103-125.

*Week 4 (September 18) Evolutionary Debunking arguments II

- M: Tersman, Folke (2015). Debunking and Disagreement. *Noûs* 50 (4).
- W1: Greene, J.D. (2003). "From Neural 'Is' to Moral 'Ought': What are the Moral Implications of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?", *Nature Neuroscience Reviews*, 4: 847–50.
- W2: Haidt, J. (2001) "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review*, 108(4): 814–34.

*Week 5: (September 25) Reflective equilibrium I

- M: Singer, P. (1974). Sidgwick and reflective equilibrium. *The Monist*, 58(3), 490-517.
- W: Daniels, N. (1979). Wide reflective equilibrium and theory acceptance in ethics. *The journal of philosophy*, 76(5), 256-282.

*Week 6: (October 2) Reflective equilibrium II

- M: DePaul, M. R. (1987). Two conceptions of coherence methods in ethics. *Mind*, 96(384), 463-481.
- W: Schroeter, François (2004). Reflective equilibrium and antitheory. *Noûs* 38 (1):110–134.

Week 7: (October 9) Moral uncertainty I

- M: Lockhart, Ted (2000). *Moral Uncertainty and its Consequences* (pp. 1 -30). Oxford University Press.
- W: Sepielli, Andrew (2013). Moral Uncertainty and the Principle of Equity among Moral Theories. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 86 (3):580-589.

Week 8: (October 16) Moral uncertainty II

- M: Gustafsson, Johan E. & Torpman, Olle (2014). In Defence of My Favourite Theory. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 95 (2):159–174.
- W: Jackson, Frank & Smith, Michael (2006). Absolutist Moral Theories and Uncertainty. *Journal of Philosophy* 103 (6):267-283.

Week 9: (October 23) Impulses from mainstream epistemology

- M: Hills, Alison (2009). Moral testimony and moral epistemology. *Ethics* 120 (1):94-127.
- W: Timmons, Mark (1996). Outline of a Contextualist Moral Epistemology. In Walter Sinnott-Armstrong & Mark Timmons (eds.), *Moral Knowledge? New Readings in Moral Epistemology*. Oxford University Press.

Week 10: (October 30) Moral epistemology & applied ethics

- M: Buchanan, Allen (2002). Social moral epistemology. *Social Philosophy and Policy* 19 (2):126-152.
- W: Peterson, Martin (2017). The Geometry of Applied Ethics. Ch 2. in *The Ethics of Technology: A Geometric Analysis of Five Moral Principles*, Oxford University Press 2017.

Week 11 (November 6) Feminist moral epistemology

- M: Jaggar, Alison M. (2000). Ethics Naturalized: Feminism's Contribution to Moral Epistemology. *Metaphilosophy* 31 (5):452-468
- W: Jaggar, Alison M. & Tobin, Theresa W. (2013). Situating Moral Justification: Rethinking the Mission of Moral Epistemology. *Metaphilosophy* 44 (4):383-408.

Week 12 (November 13) Term paper presentations

Week 13 (November 27) Term paper presentations

Week 14 (December 4)

M and W are redefined days.