

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2011-2012

Philosophy 3710F: Metaethics

Autumn Term 2011
Tues 9:30-11:30, and Thurs 9:30-10:30
UCC-63

Instructor: Katharina Paxman
Office: STH 3137
Office hours: TBA or by appointment
kpaxman@uwo.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Moral philosophy is often divided into two general areas: normative ethics and metaethics. Though the discourse in each area frequently overlaps, the distinction is philosophically useful. Roughly speaking, normative ethics is concerned with the content of particular moral theories, and the consideration of what makes certain actions or motives morally good or bad. Metaethics, on the other hand, takes a step back from these debates in order to question the metaphysical, epistemological and semantic status of moral debate in the first place. This course will focus on these sorts of metaethical questions. It will provide an introduction to the major ontological views in metaethics (error theory, expressivism, constructivism, sensibility theories and moral realism), as well as to some related metaethical debates, including questions of moral motivation, moral reason, and moral knowledge. We will work primarily from a collection of contemporary readings on these topics, supplemented with consideration of some of the classical sources of these debates as found in the Western philosophical tradition. Questions we will consider include: Are moral theories/judgments a product of human invention or do they have some objective source? Is morality more a matter of taste than truth? What is the nature of the source of moral truths? In virtue of what can moral facts claim to have authority? How are moral facts related to other facts (for instance, human psychology)? How do moral facts motivate?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course aims to familiarize students with the major debates in metaethics. They will be challenged to engage in philosophical discourse, both in class discussion and in written form. They will have read selections from classical texts assigned in class, in addition to the required anthology of more recent work on the subject. They will have honed their skill in philosophical analysis and argument, both spoken and written.

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

Some lecture, but heavy on class-generated discussion, guided by regular student presentations.

TEXT

Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology, eds. Russ Shafer-Landau & Terence Cuneo, Blackwell Publishing, 2007

Additional readings to be provided in class

REQUIREMENTS

Class presentation: 20%

*One page write-up on reading (x2): 20%

Term paper: 50%
Participation: 10%

*Students may select the readings for which they do the assignments, but assignments **MUST** be handed in at the beginning of the class in which the reading is to be discussed. At least two must be handed in over the course of the term. If more than two are submitted, the two with the highest marks will be counted in the final grade.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/proceduresappeals.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus cannot be used as grounds of appeal.