

Philosophy Graduate Seminar: Moral Epistemology, Winter 2012

Professor: Patricia Marino

Office: HH 332

Office Hours: Tue 1-3 (except Jan 10), and by appt.

Email: pmarino@uwaterloo.ca

Course Description:

Most broadly, this course concerns the relationship between ethics and science. There's often been thought to be a problem in bringing to bear a naturalistic or scientific epistemological approach to matters of values, ethics, and norms. For example, Moore's open question argument and Mackie's arguments from queerness and relativity both suggest a kind of gap between the descriptive facts of the world and normative truths -- a gap like that posited by Hume between what is and what ought to be. Moore inferred from this gap that moral facts were non-natural facts, and Mackie concluded that there were no facts of morality in the ordinary sense at all.

In this course, we'll discuss recent research bearing on these matters. In week 2, we'll discuss a contractarian alternative to morality, in which there needn't be moral facts because the facts about what to do are grounded in enlightened self-interest. In week 3, we'll discuss moral fictionalism, which says that moral beliefs are false but somehow useful to us; one version of this is based on an "evolutionary debunking" argument of Richard Joyce. In week 4 we'll consider a different debunking argument, given in a recent paper by Sharon Street, which presents a "dilemma" for moral realism: realism, she says, cannot explain any relation between the evaluative attitudes that are the result of evolutionary forces and the "independent evaluative truths" that realism posits" (p. 109). In weeks 5 and 6 we'll consider two responses to Street, from constructivist and naturalist realist points of view, respectively.

In week 7, we'll consider further moral non-naturalism and the cognitive naturalism of Paul Thagard. After the break, in week 8, we'll talk about a claim deeply contrary to that of Joyce and Street, that evolution is evidence for moral truth -- in the form of moral realism or virtue ethics. In weeks 9 and 10 we'll consider the relation between neuroscience and morality and the new "experimental ethics" methodology. In weeks 11 and 12 we'll have student presentations -- if there are few enough students in the class that we can do all the presentations in week 12 we can decide among ourselves which of several interesting topics to discuss in week 11.

Requirements:

Attendance and participation in each seminar meeting is required. Everyone must bring at least one informed and thoughtful question about the reading to class -- a question designed to stimulate discussion, or about something puzzling. These have to be written down and handed in at the start of class.

There is one paper required, which should be around 4500-6000 words. Everyone will do a presentation during the last two weeks of class. These will take the form of a conference

presentation on the topic of your final paper -- about 20-25 minutes of presentation followed by 10-15 minutes of discussion in a question-and-answer format.

When you do your presentation you must also hand in to me a (roughly) 10 page paper that represents the content of your presentation. You can present in any style you like -- slides, talking, reading, whatever -- but the 10 page paper should contain the ideas of your presentation explained in written-paper style. I will comment on this, and you should use these comments to improve the final version of the paper to be handed in during the exam period.

Grades:

Participation: 15%

Presentation: 10%

Presentation paper: 10%

Final paper: 65

Topics and Readings:

Jan 4 Introduction

-- review in class of some themes in G E Moore, "The Subject Matter of Ethics" -- from *Principia Ethica* sections 1 through 15, and J. L. Mackie, "A Refutation of Morals" from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*.

Jan 11 Moral Skepticism and Contractarianism

-- David Gauthier, "Why Contractarianism?" in *Contractarianism and Rational Choice*, 1991. PHOTOCOPY

-- Morris, "Moral Standing and Rational-Choice Contractarianism" in *Contractarianism and Rational Choice*, 1991 PHOTOCOPY

Jan 18 Moral Fictionalism

-- Richard Joyce, "Morality, Schmorality," in P. Bloomfield (ed.), *Morality and Self-Interest* (OUP, 2007): 51-75, post-print at http://www.victoria.ac.nz/staff/richard_joyce/acrobat/joyce_morality.schmorality.pdf PDF

-- Nadeem Hussain, "The Return of Moral Fictionalism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2004 vol. 18 (1) pp. 149-188 PDF

Jan 25 Street's Darwinian Dilemma

-- Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value" *Philosophical Studies* 2006 vol. 127 (1) pp. 109-166. PDF.

Feb 1 The Darwinian Dilemma and Constructivism

-- Christine Kosgaard, "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy in America at the Turn of the Century*, 2003 pp. 99–122. PDF

-- Sharon Street, "Constructivism about Reasons," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 3, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), pp. 207-245. PDF.

Feb 8 The Darwinian Dilemma and Naturalist Realism

-- David Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism about Moral Realism," *Philosophical Issues*, 2008 vol. 18 (1) pp. 186-206. PDF.

-- Sharon Street, "Reply to Copp," *Philosophical Issues*, 2008 vol. 18 (1) pp. 207-228. PDF.

Feb 15 Intuitive Non-Naturalism and Cognitive Naturalism

-- Matthew Bedke, "Intuitive Non-Naturalism Meets Cosmic Coincidence," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 2009 vol. 90 (2) pp. 188-209. PDF.

-- Paul Thagard, "Ethical Coherence," *Philosophical Psychology* 1998 vol. 11 (4) pp. 405-422.

Feb 22 NO CLASS

Feb 29 Evolutionary Moral Realism and Virtue Ethics

-- Scott James, "The Caveman's Conscience: Evolution and Moral Realism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 2009 vol. 87 (2) pp. 215-233 PDF.

-- Christopher Toner, "Evolution, Naturalism, and the Worthwhile: A Critique of Richard Joyce's Evolutionary Debunking of Morality," *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 42, No. 4, July 2011. PDF.

Mar 7 Intuitions and Neuroscience

-- Peter Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," *Journal of Ethics* 2005 vol. 9 (3) pp. 331-352

-- Joshua Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul," in *Moral Psychology, Vol. 3: The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Disease, and Development*, W. Sinnott-Armstrong, Ed., MIT Press 2007 at <http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~jgreene/GreeneWJH/Greene-KantSoul.pdf> (just read the article not the comments and replies). PDF.

Mar 14 Moral Epistemology and Experimental Ethics

-- Selim Berker "The Normative Insignificance of Neuroscience," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2009 vol. 37 (4) pp. 293-329

-- Guy Kahane, "The Armchair and the Trolley: an Argument for Experimental Ethics," *Philosophical Studies* forthcoming, at <http://philpapers.org/archive/KAHTAA-2.1.pdf>. PDF

Mar 21

-- student presentations

Mar 29

-- student presentations