

## **PHIL503: ETHICS PROSEMINAR**

New North 204; M 2-4:30 PM

Mark Murphy  
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and by appt.

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### *Course description*

This course is a graduate-level introduction to ethical theory, focusing on issues in metaethics and moral psychology.

### *Course objectives*

Through active participation in this seminar, you will

- get some grip on the importance of metaethical positions
- become acquainted with how we do ethics now
- get prepared to pass that damned comp

### *Course format*

The format of the course is a fairly even mix of lecture and discussion.

### *Course requirements*

Course requirements include three short papers, one longer paper, a final examination, and seminar participation.

*The short papers.* Each of the three short (1000-1200 words) papers should be a criticism of an argument offered in one of the readings for that week's seminar meeting. Each should be submitted by e-mail as a .pdf document by midnight before the seminar will meet to discuss that particular reading. Members of the seminar have complete freedom to decide which readings they wish to write their short papers on, subject to two provisos: at least one of the papers should be turned in no later than October 3, and one can turn in only one paper per week.

These short papers have a threefold purpose. First, they serve to keep you thinking in a focused, critical way about the views we are discussing in class. Second, I will sometimes use these papers as material for critical discussion. (Because I need to read these papers before class, none of these papers will be accepted after the midnight deadline.) Third, one of these papers will serve as a springboard for the longer paper.

**Note: These are to be short, but not sloppy. Write as if you will be offering these pieces to Analysis, or reading them as comments at an APA meeting.**

*The longer paper.* The longer (3000-3500 words) paper should be an enlargement of one of the short papers turned in on November 14 or earlier. Apart from taking into account my critical remarks and any relevant class discussion, the longer version should consider in greater detail the extent to which the criticism put forward can be answered by the view. This paper will be due by 12 PM on December 5.

*The final exam.* There will be a final exam, which will also serve as the qualifying exam in ethics. It will be at the time scheduled by the registrar (Friday, December 16, 12:30 PM), unless there is unanimous, uncoerced (even by social sanctions) agreement to hold it earlier. And there won't be such agreement. More details on the exam's structure later in the semester.

*Seminar participation.* Let's not turn this into some sort of philosophical Bataan Death March toward the qualifying exam. Ethics is fun, dammit. Let's keep it lively and interesting.

#### *Texts*

Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, Foot, *Natural Goodness*; other papers available electronically.

#### *Consulting*

I'm around on Monday a bit, but available not much more than the listed office hours (11 AM-12 PM). Wednesdays I am much more free; I will definitely be around during office hours (12:30-1:30 PM), but typically throughout midday (11 AM-3 PM or so). Fridays I am generally around, but if you want to be certain that I will be there when you stop by, e-mail me to check. I'm around almost never on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

### **SCHEDULE**

- 8/31           **READING.** Smith, *The Moral Problem*, ch 1; Moore, "The Subject-Matter of Ethics," in FE, pp. 465-473.  
**TOPICS.** The distinction between metaethics and normative ethics. Smith's 'Moral Problem' as a metaethical problem. Can moral concepts be defined? Non-naturalistic and naturalistic definitions. The open question argument.
- 9/5             *NO CLASS: LABOR DAY*
- 9/12           **READING.** Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology," in FE, pp. 40-46; Blackburn, "Moral Realism" (electronic); Smith, *The Moral Problem*, ch. 2.  
**TOPICS.** A rival use of the open question argument. The supervenience problem. Smith's diagnosis.
- 9/19           **READING.** Blackburn, "How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist," in FE, pp. 47-57; Blackburn, "Attitudes and Contents," in FE, pp. 474-484; Schroeder, from *Noncognitivism in Ethics* (electronic)  
**TOPIC.** Expressivism. The Frege-Geach Problem.

- 9/26           **READING.** Zangwill, “Externalist Moral Motivation,” in FE, pp. 243-251; Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,” in FE, pp. 286-291; *The Moral Problem*, ch. 3; Manne, “Internalism about Reasons: Sad but True” (electronic).  
**TOPICS.** Internalism and externalism. Varieties of internalist theses. Reasons and motivation.
- 10/3           **READING.** Hume, excerpt from *A Treatise of Human Nature* (electronic); Nagel, excerpt from *The Possibility of Altruism* (electronic); Little, “Virtue as Knowledge,” in FE, pp. 252-264; *The Moral Problem*, Ch. 4.  
**TOPICS.** The Humean theory of motivation. Does the Humean theory call into question the existence of categorical moral requirements? Alternatives to Humeanism.
- 10/6-10/8       *THEISTIC ETHICS WORKSHOP IN NEW NORTH 204. NOTE WELL: TWO OF THE SPEAKERS ARE AUTHORS WE ARE READING THIS SEMESTER (R. ADAMS, SHAFER-LANDAU)*
- 10/10           *NO CLASS: MIDSEMESTER HOLIDAY*
- 10/17           **READING.** Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values,” in FE, pp. 13-22; Joyce, “The Myth of Morality,” in FE, pp. 23-34.  
**TOPICS.** Error theory.
- 10/24           **READING.** Smith, *The Moral Problem*, chs. 5-6; Milo, “Contractarian Constructivism,” in FE, pp. 120-131; Korsgaard, “The Authority of Reflection,” in FE, pp. 93-106.  
**TOPICS.** Constructivism.
- 10/31           **READING.** Railton, “Moral Realism,” in FE, pp. 186-205; “Naturalism and Prescriptivity” (electronic).  
**TOPICS.** Reductivist naturalism I.
- 11/7           **READING.** Hampton, “The Authority of Reason,” in FE, pp. 206-209; Shafer-Landau, “Moral Reasons,” in FE, pp. 312-327; Shafer-Landau, “Ethical Non-naturalism” and “Supervenience and Causation,” from *Moral Realism: A Defence* (electronic)  
**TOPICS.** Non-naturalist realism.
- 11/14           **READING.** Schroeder, “The Humean Theory of Reasons” (electronic) and “Weighting for a Plausible Humean Theory” (electronic)  
**TOPICS.** Reductivist naturalism II.
- 11/21           **READING.** Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chs. 1-5 (pp. 1-82)  
**TOPICS.** Nonreductivist naturalism.
- 11/28           **READING.** Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, chs. 1-2, 10-11 (pp. 13-82, 231-276) (electronic)  
**TOPICS.** Supernaturalist realism.
- 12/5           WRAPUP WITH DINNER AT MURPHY’S HOUSE, 6:30 PM; I WILL ALSO HOLD AN OPEN DISCUSSION MEETING A COUPLE OF DAYS BEFORE THE COMP