

PHIL 152-01. Recent Ethical Theory Spring 2018

Class Meetings

Tuesday/Thursday 3-4:15pm Douglass Hall 110

Instructor

Kyle Swan | Department of Philosophy | California State University, Sacramento |
Mendocino Hall 3030 | 6000 J Street | Sacramento, CA 95819-6033 | (916) 278-2474 |
kyle.swan@csus.edu

Office hours

Tuesday/Thursday 10:30am-2:30pm

Reasonable Accommodation

If your circumstances require accommodation or assistance in meeting the expectations of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. You may need to provide documentation to the University office of SSWD (in accordance with the University policy outlined here: <http://www.csus.edu/umannual/acad/UMA00215.htm>).

Description

From the catalogue:

Major topics in ethical theory with attention to their contemporary formulation, including such topics as utilitarianism vs. rights-based theories and the dispute over the objectivity of ethics.

More!

Our focus will be on recent debates in the area in ethical theory called meta-ethics. Meta-ethics is a discussion of the nature of ethics. It investigates second-order questions about ethics, rather than first-order questions about whether some action is right or wrong.

We will have two main topics. The first concerns the nature of moral value: Do moral judgments have descriptive content? Do moral properties exist? If so, what can we know about these properties? What are they like? Are they reducible to any more basic category of properties?

The second topic concerns the nature of normative authority: Why should I care about moral properties, if they exist? Or, why should I care about moral claims? Do they have motivating force, or any kind of claim on me and what I do? What reason do I have to do moral things?

Course Objectives and Outcomes

By the conclusion of this course, it should be true that students (1) **understand** the metaphysical, semantic, epistemic, and psychological issues that are relevant to moral

theorizing and are able to (2) **apply** this understanding to make sense of our moral practices, (3) **analyze** current problems and controversies and (4) **evaluate** proposed solutions to them. You will need to give evidence of your ability to understand, apply, analyze and evaluate in your writing and contributions to class discussions.

Class procedures and conduct

Once we get up and running, I will lecture on Tuesday of each week. These lectures will be fairly scripted, but it won't be out of place for me to pepper you with questions about your reading and you should always feel free to stop me whenever you have a question. Thursday meetings will be mostly unscripted (at least, by me). The default will be for these meetings to be "**Card Talk**" sessions. Come to these meetings with one or two questions, challenges or objections related to material presented or covered in the lecture or the reading assignments that the lecture was based on. Write your question(s) on a 3x5 index card. I will collect these and open the floor or call on students at random to present one of their questions. I will also use the cards to take roll. Your questions must be such that they give evidence that you have done some careful thinking about the material in order for you to receive attendance credit.

Please avoid disrupting class meetings and other ways of being rude. This means that you shouldn't use electronic devices, carry on private conversations with people around you, sleep, read, arrive late or leave early.

Text

All required readings are pieces available on the internet or SacCT. See schedule below.

Schedule

Jan 23, 25 Introduction to the course

30, Feb 1 Is morality authoritative?

Philippa Foot, Morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives
William Frankena, The philosopher's attack on morality

6, 8 Where could authority come from?

Bernard Williams, Internal and external reasons

13, 15 Old-school expressivism

A.J. Ayer, Critique of ethics and theology

20, 22 New-school expressivism

Allan Gibbard, Wise choices, apt feelings (excerpt)

27, Mar 1 Error theory

John Mackie, Ethics: inventing right and wrong (excerpt)

6, 8 Error and evolutionary biology

Richard Joyce, Darwinian ethics and error

Herbert Gintis, et al., Explaining altruistic behavior in humans

13, 15 Constructivism I: relativism

Gilbert Harman, Moral relativism defended

Spring Break

27, 29 Constructivism II: Kantian constructivism

Christine Korsgaard, The sources of normativity (excerpt)

Analytical essay Stage 1 due March 29

April 3, 5 Secondary-property realism

John McDowell, Values and secondary qualities

10, 12 Ethical non-naturalism

G.E. Moore, Principia ethica (excerpt)

Analytical essay Stage 2 due April 12

17, 19 Ethical supernaturalism

Stephen Clark, God's law and morality

Richard Joyce, Theistic ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma

24, 26 Ethical naturalism

Nicholas Sturgeon, Ethical naturalism

Analytical essay Stage 3 due April 26

May 1, 3 Coming down from the perch to look at our moral practices

P.F. Strawson, Freedom and resentment

P.F. Strawson, Social morality and individual ideal

8, 10 Taking stock, review for exam...

Analytical essay Stage 4 due May 10

Final exam: Tuesday May 15, 3-5pm.

Assessment

Please do not plagiarize or cheat. If you do then *at a minimum* you will be marked with a zero on the assignment. Multiple and/or flagrant violations will lead to me assigning a failing grade for the course and initiating disciplinary action through the Office of Student Affairs. Familiarize yourselves with the University's Academic Honesty Policies and Procedures document (here:

<http://www.csus.edu/um anual/AcademicHonestyPolicyandProcedures.htm>).

Your writing assignments will be vetted through Turnitin in SacCT. Here is the CSUS policy regarding Turnitin:

“Consistent with Sacramento State’s efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, instructors may use a tool called Turnitin to compare a student’s work with multiple sources. The tool compares each student’s with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a ‘similarity score’. The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, the instructor must make a complete assessment and judge the originality of the student’s work. All submissions to this course may be checked using this tool.

You may choose to submit papers to Turnitin assignments without identifying information included in the paper (e.g. name or student number). The system will automatically show this information to faculty in your course when viewing the submission.

Turnitin services are now integrated in the Assignment function of SacCT. More information is available here

<http://www.csus.edu/atcs/tools/turnitin/index.html>.”

I also recommend the use of the Smarthinking tool for your paper assignments. Smarthinking is a FREE on-demand, live person, writing assistance service provided by Pearson Publishing. This allows students to submit their written work and receive constructive feedback to improve their writing, typically within 24 hours. It is available as a link at the top of the SacCT page.

Your final course mark is based on the following:

- a. preparation for, attendance at and relevant participation in all meetings (13). This includes your submitted questions for Wednesday Card Talk.
- b. reading summaries (17). These are short (about 200 words), summaries of the assigned readings. You summary:
 - should be thoughtful and grammatical and your own work.
 - should **not** be simply a point-by-point, blow-by-blow, surface-level summary of the reading assignment. Rather it should be a focused presentation of what you take to be the (or a) key argument the author makes in advancing his or her thesis. Your emphasis should be on clarifying it and explaining how it is supposed to work.
 - should use the method of successive elaboration described in the document in SacCT.
 - are due at the accompanying Thursday Card Talk meeting in your SacCT Journal. You are assigned 1 point, .5 or zero for each entry/summary based on my judgment of the care you took in preparing it.
- c. Progressive analytical essay assignment (35). It's a progressive assignment in the sense that it's completed in stages.

Stage 1: summary of target article/chapter, using method of successive elaboration (5)

Stage 2: revised summary, plus develop an objection (5)

Stage 3: revised summary and objection, plus develop a thesis and a bullet-point list of premises (5)

Stage 4: completed essay (20)

Your final essay should be 2000-2500 words, presented free of spelling and grammatical errors. I will assign marks based on the cogency of your analysis. Spelling and grammatical errors will also affect your grade if they are frequent enough to become distracting. The following resources will be useful:

<http://www.csus.edu/phil/Guidance/How%20to%20Write%20an%20Analysis.htm>

<http://www.csus.edu/phil/Guidance/WritingGuidelines.html>

<http://www.csus.edu/phil/Guidance/Grading%20Standards.html>

- d. final exam (35)

$a + b + c + d = \text{final course mark}$

Grading scale:

93 and above = A

90-92 = A-

87-89 = B+

83-86 = B

80-82 = B-

77-79 = C+

73-76 = C

70-72 = C-

67-69 = D+

63-66 = D

60-62 = D-

59 and below = F