

METAETHICS

Spring 2017

Time: Wednesday 2:30-5:30pm

Location: S3.2 SR5

Email: andrewforcehimes@gmail.com (I try to answer student e-mails within 24-hours. If I do not get back to you within 24-hours, I probably overlooked it. Email me again. I will *not* think this rude.)

Office: HSS 06-14

Office Hour: 11am-12pm (please let me know you are coming over email beforehand, so that I will be sure to be in my office when you arrive.)

1. Course Description

1.1 Whereas theories in normative ethics ask questions concerning what we are required to do and who we are required to be, theories in metaethics ask questions *about* ethics. Metaethical theories, that is, provide systematic accounts of the nature of ethics. In this course, we will examine the most promising such theories, evaluating each for their strengths and weaknesses.

2. A Non-Exhaustive List of Basic Policies

2.1 Use of laptops and cell phones in class is not permitted. Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) to see why.

2.2 Understand and conform to the NTU Honor Code. Click [here](#) for its content.

3. Grading

3.1 Your grade is determined by your performance on two papers and two homework assignments, which have the corresponding weights:

Essay #1:	40%
Essay #2:	50%
Chart	10%

3.2 Essay

3.2.1 Your paper, if late, will not be accepted. For this reason I suggest that you aim to finish your paper a full day before it is due. If you plan ahead in this way, you will be able to address any unexpected problems you encounter and still submit your paper on time. I also suggest that you periodically save your work by sending it to yourself via email, printing it, or otherwise securing a copy in case your computer crashes, is stolen, catches fire, etc.

3.2.2 In the interest of impartiality, the only excuses for a late paper that will be accepted are sent to me directly from the Dean or are due to serious [illness](#).

3.2.3 Your paper will be turned in electronically on Blackboard. The file name should be: YOUR_FULL_NAME_PAPER_1. This will check your paper for plagiarism. All instances of plagiarism, even if accidental, will result in a zero for the paper.

3.2.4 Philosophical writing is different from much other writing you are familiar with. It is critical that you appreciate the particular expectations of writing in this discipline. Click [here](#) for guidance about writing a philosophy paper.

3.3 Chart

3.3.1 Charting out conceptual space is a very helpful way of understanding an area of philosophy. In this class you will make a chart near the end of the class that will map the various theories and the objections that each theory faces.

3.3.2 To map out conceptual space, you will need to identify a few *basic* concepts. You will then combine these concepts in various ways – like building blocks – to construct a number of different theories. You may find that the various configurations – the way these blocks can be combined – leads to many more theories than we’ve had time to look at in this class. That is the point. Taxonomy, though unexciting, needs to be done. Until we have a clearer view of the alternatives, we cannot hope to decide which view is true, or is the best view. Often, once you also see the objections that standard theories face, you may find one of these more exotic theories rather attractive.

4. Handouts

4.1 I often provide handouts to supplement the readings. They are designed to (i) serve as a handy reference for technical jargon and defined terms, (ii) provide a reliable guide to the text, and (iii) free up class time for discussion.

4.2 Handouts are not substitutes for the assigned reading. In many cases, I provide a potentially controversial interpretation of the text. You can’t take it for granted that my interpretation is correct. One of the most important lessons you should learn from this course is that in philosophy there are no experts. Of course the professionals have read more than you have, and they’ve spent more time thinking about the issues. But for all that, when you are discussing a philosophical question, you can’t say ‘Plato says, X’ as if that were an argument for X. And the same goes for me.

4.3 Past versions of my handouts can be found [here](#). These are *not* final versions. I will bring hardcopy handouts to class. These hardcopies are what you should use to study.

5. Assignments

5.1 Readings are to be completed before class. E.g., If the class schedule states “18th Moore, Principia Ethica;” you are to read Moore, Principia Ethica *before* the start of class on the 16th.

5.2 One textbook must be purchased for this course: Cahn & Forcehimes, [Foundations of Moral Philosophy](#) (Oxford, 2016). You may purchase copies of this text from Booklink @ NTU Pte Ltd Blk S4, Level B5. A single copy of the textbook is also available from the Library.

5.2 Tentative Schedule:

CLASS SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTION

11: Syllabus; Forcehimes, [The Driving Forces of Metaethics](#)

REALISM

18: Moore, Principia Ethica; Railton, Naturalism and Prescriptivity

25: Parfit, Against Non-Analytic Naturalism

1: Jackson & Pettit, Moral Functionalism; Nuccetelli & Seay Does Analytic Moral Naturalism Rest on a Mistake

(Recommended: Smith, Realism)

NON-COGNITIVISM

- 8: Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic; Blackburn, Antirealist Expressivism and Quasi-Realism
(Recommended: Hare, *The Language of Morals*)
- 15: Schroeder, What Is the Frege-Geach Problem?; Gibbard, The Reasons of a Living Being
(Recommended: Ridge, Ecumenical Expressivism)

ERROR THEORY

- 22: Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong; Dworkin, Against External Skepticism
(Recommended: Olson, In Defense of Moral Error Theory)

5th Essay Due (2,500 words *maximum*)

CONSTRUCTIVISM

- 8: Korsgaard, Self-Constitution; Street, Coming to Terms with Contingency
(Recommended: Rawls, Themes from Kant's Moral Philosophy)

EPISTEMOLOGY

- 15: Hills, Moral Epistemology; McGrath, Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise
(Recommended: Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics)
- 22: Street, A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value; Vavova, Debunking Evolutionary Debunking

EXPLANATIONS

- 29: Harman, The Nature of Morality; Sturgeon, Moral Explanations

REASONS & MOTIVES

- 5: Nagel, The Possibility of Altruism; Svavarsdóttir, Moral Cognitivism and Motivation
(Recommended: Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature)
- 15: Williams, Internal and External Reasons; Parfit, Against Subjective Theories of Reasons
(Recommended: Chang, Grounding Practical Normativity)

16th Chart Due

TBA: Final Essay Due (2,500 words *maximum*)