

**Philosophy 5300: Advanced Moral Philosophy**  
Autumn 2014 • Tu/Th, 12:45–2:05 PM • Journalism Bldg 0291

Prof. David Goldman  
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Office Hours: Tu/Th 10:15–11:30 AM and by appointment  
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*Course Description*

This course surveys the major currents in moral philosophy through the 20th and early 21st century, with a focus on metaethical issues. Metaethics focuses on the nature and status of morality, addressing questions like: What makes our moral claims—which seem to be claims about what is good, right, wrong, and so on—true or false? Are qualities like goodness, rightness, wrongness, and so on real features of the world? If so, what do those qualities amount to? If not, how do we make sense of the moral claims and arguments that we make in ordinary life?

The first half of the course will work through a standard story about the development of metaethics in (roughly) the first half of the twentieth century. It begins with G. E. Moore’s attack on “naturalism in ethics” in *Principia Ethica* and his own account of goodness as an indefinable, nonnatural property. Next come “nonscognitivist” accounts on which moral language has no cognitive content: it’s neither true nor false. Finally nonscognitivism comes under attack for its purported inability to do justice to our moral and linguistic practices.

In the second half of the twentieth century, things get messier, and we’ll have to be more selective.\* We will focus on two closely related discussions. The first tries to gain insight into morality by reflecting on the nature of practical reasoning—our reasoning about what to do. The second attempts to revive the Aristotelian account of human nature and human function.

*Course Goals*

An advanced philosophy class usually falls into one of two categories. The first category covers the essential, canonical reading on some topic; the second engages with a narrow slice of cutting-edge research. The former has the advantage of giving you the context and background knowledge you need to participate in philosophical discussion; it also ensures that what you’re reading has withstood the test of (at least a little) time. The latter has the advantage of engaging you in lively, ongoing debates.

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\* One consequence of this: we will of necessity exclude some tremendously important works and traditions that develop in the latter half of the twentieth century. Most obviously, we aren’t engaging with work in the Kantian tradition. If we had another six weeks, we’d also be reading, at a minimum, works by Rawls, Nagel, and Korsgaard. Those are some big names to be setting aside.

In this course we'll try to have it both ways. We'll start out by laying an important foundation by reading some widely acknowledged classics. Then we'll give extended attention to the fascinating and controversial neo-Aristotelian project.

The overall goal is—as always, in a philosophy course—twofold. First, we want to engage with some fascinating and important discussions about a topic of immense human significance. And, second, we want to develop our ability to participate in those (ongoing) philosophical discussions: to carefully analyze other people's arguments, formulate arguments of our own, and explain those arguments in clear, precise prose. Let's do some philosophy.

### *Texts*

All readings will be posted on the class website.

### *Grading\**

- 20% Reading responses: I will divide the class into several groups (depending on enrollment) in the first week of September. Every week, the members of one group will post short reading responses (individually—this is not a group project; it's just the scheduling that is arranged with groups) on the course forum while the members of the other groups will comment on/respond to those reading responses. The reading responses should be around 2-4 paragraphs (between 200 and 750 words); the comments have no specific length requirements, but should make some contribution to the discussion. Posts are due each Saturday at 11:59 PM; responses are due by Sunday at 11:59 PM. These reading responses will be graded credit/no credit. A missed reading response post will reduce this portion of your grade by a full letter grade (e.g., from an A to a B), while a missed comment will reduce this portion of your grade by a third of a letter grade (e.g., from an A to an A-). If you miss a post and have a documented excuse, contact me.
- 30% First paper: ~1500 words. Topics handed out 10/2; due 10/16.
- 50% Second paper: ~2500–3000 words, on a topic of your choosing. Due 12/9; a one-paragraph statement of your topic must be cleared with me by 11/20.

Papers should be turned via Carmen's dropbox (preferably in word/pages/rtf format, rather than as a PDF) by 11:59 PM on the dates they are due. **Be sure to put your name in the body of the paper.** I do run turnitin "originality" scans on papers to flag potential plagiarized content.

Every student may avail herself of one *no questions asked* 48-hour extension on a paper for this class. (This policy does not apply to the forum posts.) Just let me know before the

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\* Graduate students may write a seminar-length paper instead. Talk to me for details and to set up a schedule.

paper is due. (You don't have to wait for me to reply to approve your request. So, an e-mail at 11:55 PM telling me that you're taking your extension today is perfectly fine.) All other extensions must involve a documented, approved excuse.

Late papers not excused by the previous paragraph will be penalized at a rate of one-third of a letter grade (e.g., from a B+ to a B) per day late.

Don't plagiarize. Look at the definition of academic misconduct at <http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/csc/> to be certain that you know what this means. Two specific points to keep in mind: (a) you must cite *any* source of ideas or material that you use in your work, whether it is a book, or a website, or a friend who took intro to ethics last year; and (b) you must cite a source *regardless of whether you quote from it directly, summarize it, or just draw on its ideas*. (The one exception: in assignments completed for this class, you don't need to cite lectures, handouts, discussions, forum posts, etc. from this class.) This policy applies to forum posts as well as papers. I report all cases of apparent plagiarism to the proper authorities for further investigation.

### *Schedule of Readings*

- 8/28 introduction: no readings
- 9/2 G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* ch. 1 (1903)
- 9/4 cont'd
- 9/9 Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy" (1939)
- 9/11 Frankena and Moore wrap-up
- 9/16 A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* ch. 6 (1936)
- 9/18 cont'd
- 9/23 P. T. Geach, "Good and Evil" (1956)
- 9/25 cont'd
- 9/30 Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs" (1958–9)
- 10/2 cont'd  
**first paper topics distributed**
- 10/7 cont'd

- 10/9 J. L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values” from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977)  
—focus on §§1, 2, 8–11; skim the rest.
- 10/14 Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives” (1972)
- 10/16 cont’d  
**first paper due 10/18**
- 10/21 Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons” (1980)
- 10/23 cont’d
- 10/28 Warren Quinn, “Putting Rationality in its Place” (1987/1993)
- 10/30 cont’d
- 11/4 Michael Thompson, “The Representation of Life” (1995)
- 11/6 cont’d
- 11/11 Veterans Day: no class
- 11/13 cont’d
- 11/18 John McDowell, “Two Sorts of Naturalism” (1995)
- 11/20 cont’d  
**final paper topics must be cleared by today**
- 11/25 Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* chs. 5, 6 (2001)
- 11/27 Thanksgiving: no class
- 12/2 cont’d
- 12/4 cont’d
- 12/9 overflow/wrap-up  
**final papers due**

\*\*\*\*\*This syllabus is subject to revision.\*\*\*\*\*