

PHIL 4532
Seminar on Western Philosophy
Moral Realism

2024-25 Term 2

Provisional Course Outline

Time : Mon 1:30PM - 4:15PM

Location : ERB 408

Medium of Instruction : Cantonese and English

Instructor : Dr. Frank Yun-chak Chong (Department of Philosophy)

Email : yunchak@gmail.com

Tutor : TBA

Course Overview:

This course explores Moral Realism and its challenges through reading Shelly Kagan's latest book, *Answering Moral Skepticism* (Oxford, 2023), and relevant articles. It addresses key metaethical questions such as:

- Are there irreducible normative truths?
- Are substantive moral sentences truth-apt?
- How could we know normative facts?
- How do moral values motivate us to act?

Advisory to Majors: to be taken in year 3 or above, and have taken PHIL3000 Ethics

Learning Outcomes:

- Identify and characterize the central questions and positions in metaethical debates related to moral realism.
- Develop skills to read philosophical texts and follow the debates in metaethics.
- Reflect upon the nature of morality.

Course Schedule:

Week	Date	Lecture Topic	Required Reading	Assessment
1	Jan 6	Introduction	AMS. pp. 8-41	
2	Jan 13	Nihilism	AMS. pp. 42-64; 65-78	
3	Jan 20	Noncognitivism	AMS. pp. 79-103	
4	Jan 27	Disagreement	AMS. pp. 104-125	
5	Feb 3	<i>Public holiday</i>		
6	Feb 10	Relativism	AMS. pp. 129-157	
7	Feb 17	Knowledge	AMS. pp. 158-191	
8	Feb 24	Evolution	AMS. pp. 192- 224	Midterm Essay – 1 st Draft
9	Mar 3	<i>Reading week</i>		
10	Mar 10	Explanation	AMS. pp. 225-247 &	
11	Mar 17	Motivation	AMS. pp. 248-276	Midterm Essay – 2 nd Draft
12	Mar 24	Reasons	AMS. pp. 277-308	
13	Mar 31	Reductionism	AMS. pp. 308-341	
14	Apr 7	Realism	AMS. pp. 342-363 & AMS. pp.364-372	
15	Apr 14	Summary		
				Final Essay

Course Textbook:

- Kagan, Shelly. *Answering Moral Skepticism*. Oxford, 2023. (or AMS)

Additional Readings: TBAAssessments:

In-class Participation: 10%

In-class Group Presentation: 20%

Midterm Essay: 30%

Final Essay: 40%

Grade Descriptor:

http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf

Reference:

1. Ayer, A. J. *Language, Truth and Logic*. 1936.
2. Blackburn, Simon. *Essays in Quasi- Realism*. Oxford, 1993.
3. Brink, David. *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*. Cambridge, 1989.
4. Dancy, Jonathan. *Ethics without Principles*. Oxford, 2004.
5. Darwall, Stephen. *Philosophical Ethics*. Westview, 1998.
6. ---. *The Second- Person Standpoint*. Harvard, 2006.
7. Dreier, James. "Meta- Ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism." *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (2004): 23– 44.
8. Dworkin, Ronald. *Justice for Hedgehogs*. Belknap, 2013
9. Enoch, David. *Taking Morality Seriously*. Oxford, 2011.
10. ---. "Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)" in Russ Shafer- Landau, editor, *The Ethical Life*. Oxford, 2015.

11. Fitzpatrick, William. "Debunking Evolutionary Debunking of Ethical Realism." *Philosophical Studies* 172 (2015): 883– 904.
12. Foot, Philippa. "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives." Reprinted in *Virtues and Vices*. University of California, 1978. Originally published in *The Philosophical Review* 81 (1972): 305– 316.
13. ---. *Natural Goodness*. Oxford, 2011.
14. Gauthier, David. *Morals by Agreement*. Oxford, 1986.
15. Gibbard, Allan. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment*. Harvard, 1992.
16. ---. *Thinking How to Live*. Harvard, 2009.
17. Hare, R. M. *The Language of Morals*. Oxford, 1952.
18. Harman, Gilbert. "Moral Relativism Defended." *The Philosophical Review* 84 (1975): 3– 22.
19. ---. *The Nature of Morality*. Oxford, 1977.
20. Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. 1651.
21. Huemer, Michael. *Ethical Intuitionism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
22. Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. 1739.
23. Joyce, Richard. *The Myth of Morality*. Cambridge, 2001.
24. Kagan, Shelly. *Normative Ethics*. Westview, 1998.
25. ---. *The Limits of Morality*. Oxford, 1989.
26. ---. *Answering Moral Scepticism*. Oxford, 2023.
27. Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. 1785.
28. Mackie, J. L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Penguin, 1977.
29. Miller, Alexander. *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*. Polity, 2003.
30. Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. 1903.
31. Moser, Paul and Thomas Carson, editors. *Moral Relativism*. Oxford, 2001.
32. Nagel, Thomas. *The possibility of Altruism*. Oxford, 1970.
33. ---. *The View From Nowhere*. Oxford, 1989.
34. ---. *The Last Word*. Oxford, 2001.
35. ---. *Moral Feelings, Moral Reality, and Moral Progress*. Oxford, 2023.
36. Olson, Jonas. *Moral Error Theory*. Oxford, 2014.
37. Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford, 1986.
38. ---. *On What Matters* Vol. 1 & 2. Oxford, 2011.
39. ---. *On What Matters* Vol. 3. Oxford, 2017.
40. Rachels, James and Stuart Rachels. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*.
41. Railton, Peter. "Moral Realism." *The Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163– 207.
42. Ross, W. D. *The Right and the Good*. Oxford, 1930.
43. Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Harvard, 1998.
44. ---. *Being Realistic about Reasons*. Oxford, 2014.
45. Schroeder, Mark. *Slaves of the Passions*. Oxford, 2007.
46. ---. *Noncognitivism in Ethics*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2024.
47. Shafer- Landau, Russ. *Moral Realism*. Oxford, 2003.
48. ---. *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* Oxford, 2004.
49. Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. 1907.
50. Singer Peter (ed). *Does Anything Really Matter?*. Oxford, 2017.
51. Sinnott- Armstrong, Walter. *Moral Scepticisms*. Oxford, 2006.
52. Smith, Michael. *The Moral Problem*. Blackwell, 1994.
53. Stevenson, Charles. "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms." Reprinted in *Facts and Values* (Yale, 1963). Originally published in *Mind* 46 (1937): 14– 31.
54. Street, Sharon. "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006): 109– 166.
55. Sturgeon, Nicholas. "Moral Explanations." Reprinted in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (ed), *Essays on Moral Realism*. Cornell, 1988. Originally published in *Morality, Reason and Truth*, edited by David Copp and David Zimmerman. Rowman and Allanheld, 1985.
56. Temkin, Larry, "Has Parfit's Life Been Wasted?" in Peter Singer, editor, *Does Anything Really Matter?* Oxford, 2017.

57. Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "Epistemological Arguments for Moral Skepticism" in Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*. Blackwell, 1996.
58. ---. *Normativity*. Open Court, 2008.

Feedback for evaluation:

- a. Course and teaching evaluation survey will be conducted in the second last week of the course. Students are reminded of their responsibility and right to give feedback to facilitate enhancement of the course.
- b. Students are welcome to give feedbacks to the course teacher at any time in person or through emails.

Academic honesty and plagiarism:

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/> .

With each assignment, students are required to submit a [signed declaration](#) (attachment 1) that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via **VeriGuide**, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.