

# METAETHICS

SPRING 2020 | INSTRUCTOR: JASON FARR  
MW 3:30PM - 4:43PM | JAF301@GEORGETOWN.EDU  
WALSH 390 | OH: WED 1PM - 3PM (FLOOR 2 LAU)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND AIMS

- In this course we will explore the foundations of normativity and morality. Broadly speaking, the course is divided into three units. The first unit explores some historical shifts from ancient conceptions of normativity to modern ones. The second unit explores 20th century skeptical challenges to morality, including relativism, skepticism, and evolutionary debunking. The third unit covers some different contemporary attempts at reconstructing a firm understanding the foundations of normativity, including issues of social identity (race, gender, etc.), truth, and social practices.

The primary skill we will practice is philosophical reflection, by which we will train ourselves to use new perspectives on our form of life and systematically interrogate our understanding of normativity. Along the way, we will practice reading and writing philosophical texts, charitably reconstructing philosophers' arguments, and learning to craft careful, well-constructed arguments of our own. And, importantly, we will practice respectful and detailed discussion of our own moral perspectives.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

### REQUIRED TEXTS

*Foundations of Moral Philosophy: Readings in Metaethics*  
Edited by: Steven M. Cahn and Andrew T. Forcehimes  
All other readings on Canvas.

### READINGS

Philosophical readings are difficult, and part of most classes will be dedicated to understanding the assigned readings. When helpful, I will use the latter part of class periods to set you up to be able to complete the next assigned reading. You will be expected to have read thoroughly (though certainly not completely understood) the readings assigned for each class.

### DISCUSSION PUZZLEMENTS

You will submit one discussion puzzlement **each day a new reading is assigned**. Your puzzlement is due by 10am the day of class. Discuss something from the reading that you are intrigued by or puzzled about—something you'd like to discuss further in class. Puzzlements are graded according to whether you can show a) that you have read the material and, b) that you are engaging philosophically with the material. You may skip **five** puzzlements.

### PAPERS

**Three papers** will be assigned throughout the course. Each paper will be based on your choice among several prompts that I assign. The first paper will be roughly 1,000 words (about 3 1/2 pages), the second roughly 1,200 words (about 4 pages), and the third roughly 1,600 words (about 6 pages). You will get detailed feedback on the first two papers that will prepare you for the following papers, and you will get detailed feedback on the third if you request it.

### SMALL ASSIGNMENTS

Roughly **5** will be assigned randomly throughout the course. They will be short and relatively easy, some having to do with practicing philosophical writing. The lowest grade will be dropped.

### ATTENDANCE

You may skip **three** classes without a valid excuse. Beyond that, doctors notes or similar are required. For each unexcused absence beyond three, I will lower your participation grade by a third of a letter grade.

### EXTENSIONS & LATE PAPERS

You are no doubt very busy! Extensions of an appropriate length will thus happily be granted, but only if you email me more than 24 hours in advance of the deadline. Late papers will incur grade reductions of a third of a letter grade per day past the deadline.

### PARTICIPATION

Participation is extremely important in a philosophy class. You will be expected to participate in discussions each class. That said, how much you speak in class will not correlate perfectly with your participation grade. You are graded on genuine and serious engagement with the material, as well as exhibiting respect and courtesy in discussions both with peers and with me.

### DRAFTS

I do not read drafts of papers. However, I am *more* than happy to go over an outline of your paper in office hours.

### GRADE BREAKDOWN

1<sup>st</sup> Paper: **10%: DUE FEBRUARY 14TH**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Paper: **25%: DUE MARCH 27TH**  
3<sup>rd</sup> Paper: **35%: DUE MAY 6TH**  
Small assignments: **5%**  
Discussion Puzzlements: **10%**  
Participation: **15%**

### PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. We will discuss these issues in class, but please acquaint yourself with Georgetown policies [here](#) and [here](#).

### ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with a multitude of different disabilities and learning styles will absolutely be given accommodation when and where possible. Please inform me at the beginning of the course so accommodations can be made.

# COURSE READINGS AND SCHEDULE

I may change readings (with sufficient notification to you) throughout the term. I will likely supplement with podcasts and videos. These will be assigned in class.

DATE / THEMES	TOPIC	READINGS WE WILL DISCUSS	ADDITIONAL MATERIALS IF YOU'RE INTERESTED / DUE DATES
January 8	WHAT IS METAETHICS?	Introductory: No Assigned Reading	<a href="#">SEP</a>
January 13	TELEOLOGY	Aristotle, from <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , FMP (29-34)	<a href="#">Video</a> <a href="#">Podcast</a> <a href="#">SEP</a>
January 15	TELEOLOGY	Aristotle, from <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , FMP (29-34)	
January 20	<b>HOLIDAY</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
January 22	SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION	Hobbes, Hume, FMP (52-61)	<a href="#">SEP</a> Korsgaard, Preface to SON (On Canvas)
January 27	SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION	Hobbes, Hume, FMP (52-61)	<a href="#">SEP</a>
January 29	THE ENLIGHTENMENT	Kant, from <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , FMP (62-74)	<a href="#">Podcast</a>
February 3	THE ENLIGHTENMENT	Kant, from <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , FMP (62-74)	<a href="#">SEP</a>
February 5	REALISM	Mill, from <i>Utilitarianism</i> , FMP (75-79)	<a href="#">SEP</a> <a href="#">Podcast</a>
February 10	REALISM	Moore, from <i>Principia Ethica</i> , FMP (95-101)	<a href="#">SEP</a> Railton, Smith FMP
February 12	ERROR THEORY	Mackie, from <i>Inventing Right and Wrong</i> , FMP (221-231)	<b>FIRST PAPER DUE 2/14</b> Harman, FMP (435-446) <a href="#">SEP</a>
February 17	<b>HOLIDAY</b>	<b>CLASS ON TUESDAY INSTEAD</b>	
February 18	ERROR THEORY	Joyce, "Moral Fictionalism," FMP (247-259)	
February 19	RELATIVISM	Benedict, from <i>Moral Relativism</i> , (On Canvas) Midgley, "Moral Isolationism," FMP (259-262)	<a href="#">SEP</a> <a href="#">IEP</a>
February 24	RELATIVISM	Benedict, from <i>Moral Relativism</i> , (On Canvas) Midgley, "Moral Isolationism," FMP (259-262)	Harman, Darwall FMP (263-280)
February 26	DEBUNKING	Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," FMP (408-421)	Vavova, FMP
March 2	<b>OUT OF TOWN</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
March 4	DEBUNKING	Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," FMP (408-421)	
March 9 & 11	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
March 16	EMOTIVISM	Ayer, from <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" FMP (151-168)	<a href="#">Podcast</a> Hare, FMP
March 18	EMOTIVISM	Ayer, from <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" FMP (151-168)	Schroeder, Gibbard, FMP
March 23	ANTI-RELATIVISM	Excerpts from Blackburn, "How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist," (On Canvas)	<a href="#">Podcast</a> Blackburn, FMP (176-182)
March 25	TRUTH	Blackburn, "Deflationism" from <i>On Truth</i> , (On Canvas)	<b>Second Paper Due 3/27</b>
March 30	ARISTOTLE AGAIN	Foot, <i>Natural Goodness</i> , Chp. 2, (On Canvas)	<a href="#">Aeon article</a>
April 1	KANT AGAIN	Korsgaard, "Self-Constitution," FMP (317-329)	Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy" FMP (305-317)
April 6	KANT + ARISTOTLE	Korsgaard, "Self-Constitution," FMP (317-329)	
April 8	IDENTITIES & SOCIALITY	Mills, "'But What Are You Really?' The Metaphysics of Race," (On Canvas)	Haslanger (On Canvas) Outlaw (On Canvas)
April 13	<b>HOLIDAY</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
April 15	IDENTITIES & SOCIALITY	Lindemann, <i>Holding and Letting Go</i> , Chp 1, (On Canvas)	
April 20	IDENTITIES & SOCIALITY	Lindemann, <i>Holding and Letting Go</i> , Chp 1, (On Canvas)	
April 22	IDENTITIES & SOCIALITY	Haugeland, excerpt from "Heidegger on Being a Person" (On Canvas)	
April 27	HYBRID VIEWS	Farr, "From Commitments to Projects," (On Canvas)	
May 6			<b>FINAL PAPER DUE 5/6</b>

HISTORICAL

CHALLENGES

REBUILD

