



SCHOOL OF HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

PHILOSOPHY

PHIL315: SPECIAL TOPIC: EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

TRIMESTER 1 2012

5 March to 4 July 2012

Trimester dates

Teaching dates: 5 March to 8 June 2012

Mid-trimester break: 6–22 April 2012

Last piece of assessment due: 8 June

Withdrawal dates

Information on withdrawals and refunds may be found at:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/admisenrol/payments/withdrawalsrefunds.aspx>

Names and contact details

Kim Sterelny

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Office hours: by appointment

Richard Joyce (course coordinator)

Office room: Murphy 713

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Email: richard.joyce@vuw.ac.nz

Office hours: by appointment

Class times and locations

Tuesday 2:10-4:00 at Hugh Mackenzie LT001

Friday 2:10-4:00 at Hugh Mackenzie LT104

Course delivery

The weekly meetings will include lecturing and discussion. There are no tutorials.

Communication of additional information

There will be a course site on Blackboard, which will contain readings and information about the course. Please check this site regularly.

Course Prescription

This course is a comprehensive examination of the field of evolutionary ethics. Part one examines empirical issues surrounding the evolution of normative thought (e.g., is the human "moral sense" a biological or cultural adaptation?). Part two discusses whether any such empirical hypothesis (if true) would have implications for moral philosophy.

Course content

The subject of reconciling our evolutionary past with our sense of right and wrong is undergoing a resurgent wave of interest. This course is a comprehensive examination of the field of evolutionary ethics, falling roughly into two parts. Weeks 1-6 are taught by Kim Sterelny, and focus on the more empirical issues concerning the evolution of human cognition, cooperation, and normative thought. We will discuss the work of Sarah Hrdy, Geoffrey Miller, Frans de Waal, Robert Frank and others, in trying to understand how human nature and human social life became so very different from that of our ancestors and relatives. Weeks 7-12 are taught by Richard Joyce, and focus more on the philosophical implications of humans' evolutionary trajectory. If humans have an innate moral faculty, might this fact support some version of moral realism, or might it in fact undermine morality, possibly even showing that morality is (in the words of Michael Ruse) an "illusion foisted upon us by our genes"?

Learning objectives

Students passing the course should gain a comprehensive understanding of the field of meta-ethics. They should also advance their abilities to undertake logical and critical thinking, especially as it pertains to value theory. They should also practise and improve their critical writing skills and presentation skills. Students are expected to attend classes regularly, take part in class discussion, and keep up with the reading.

Expected workload

The University's guideline for a 20-point course is 200 hours over the entire trimester, including time in class.

Readings

Readings will be provided on a week-by-week basis, posted on Blackboard. Readings will often form the basis of discussion during lectures, and thus it is essential that students read them carefully in advance. Everyone should be prepared to ask questions or make comments on the readings if called upon in class.

Assessment requirements

PHIL 315 is assessed on the basis of two essays (worth 50% each).

The **first essay** of approx. 2500 words will be due on **Friday 27 April at 5pm**.

The **second essay** of approx. 2500 words will be due on **Friday 8 June at 5pm**.

First essay topics will be handed out in March. Second essay topics will be posted on Blackboard before 6 April.

You must submit two copies of your essay. Submit one electronically via Blackboard (please consult Blackboard for instructions) which will be sent to turnitin.com, an anti-plagiarism website. Also submit an identical hard copy of your essay to the Philosophy Programme office (MY 518).

Penalties

Late essays will be penalised one full letter grade per week or part thereof. An extension can be granted only with the (prior) approval of the course coordinator, and only in exceptional circumstances. Having a lot of other assignments due around the deadline is not a legitimate ground for an extension. Plan ahead.

Class Representative

A class representative will be elected in the first class, and this person's name and contact details will be made available. The class representative provides a communication channel to liaise with the course coordinator on behalf of students.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. "Someone else's work" means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or any other printed source
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organisation or structuring of any such material

Find out more about plagiarism, how to avoid it and penalties, on the University's website: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism.aspx>

Use of Turnitin

Student work provided for assessment in this course may be checked for academic integrity by the electronic search engine <http://www.turnitin.com>. Turnitin is an online plagiarism prevention tool which compares submitted work with a very large database of existing material. At the discretion of the Head of School, handwritten work may be copy-typed by the School and subject to checking by Turnitin. Turnitin will retain a copy of

submitted material on behalf of the University for detection of future plagiarism, but access to the full text of submissions is not made available to any other party.

WHERE TO FIND MORE DETAILED INFORMATION

Find key dates, explanations of grades and other useful information at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study. Find out how academic progress is monitored and how enrolment can be restricted at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/academic-progress. Most statutes and policies are available at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy, except qualification statutes, which are available via the *Calendar* webpage at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/calendar.aspx (See Section C).

Other useful information for students may be found at the website of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Academic), at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/avcacademic.