



FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMME
PHIL 302: Ethical Theory
20 POINTS

TRIMESTER 1 2015

Important dates

Trimester dates: 2 March to 1 July 2015

Teaching dates: 2 March to 5 June 2015

Easter/Mid-trimester break: 3-19 April 2015

Withdrawal dates: Refer to www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/withdrawals-refunds. If you cannot complete an assignment or sit a test or examination, refer to www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats.

Class times and locations

Lectures: Tuesdays and Fridays: 12.00-13.50pm

Venue: Easterfield EALT206

Names and contact details

Course Coordinator: Richard Joyce

Room No: Murphy 713

Phone: 463 5699

Email: richard.joyce@vuw.ac.nz

Office hours: By appointment

Communication of additional information

This course uses Blackboard and presumes that all enrolled students have valid myvuw.ac.nz addresses. Please check that this account is active and you have organised email forwarding. Additional information and any changes to the timetable or lecture and seminar programme will be advised by email, announced in lectures, and posted on the course Blackboard site.

Prescription

An examination of the foundations of ethics. What is distinctive about moral language? Are moral properties real? Are our moral judgements justified (and if so how)? Topics related to moral psychology and the evolution or moral cognition may also be covered.

Course content

We make moral judgements all the time: We judge some actions to be wrong, others praiseworthy; we judge some people to be good, others wicked; and so forth. But what are we doing when we make such judgements? When we say something like “Stealing is wrong” are we claiming that stealing has the property of wrongness? If so, what kind of property might that be, and by what means do we detect its presence? Perhaps wrongness is an objective feature of the universe, or perhaps it’s a kind of feature that humans somehow collectively invent, or perhaps it doesn’t exist at all. Perhaps when we say “Stealing is wrong” we’re not really asserting anything at all, but rather expressing our disapproval of stealing (rather like saying “Boo to stealing!”). If there are moral facts, are they the same for everyone, or might one morality be true for one group/individual while another morality is true for another group/individual? How do we justify our moral opinions? Can we be said to *know* certain moral facts?

Addressing these questions is the work of metaethics. Metaethical positions to be critically discussed in this course include noncognitivism, the error theory, moral realism, naturalism, non-naturalism, fictionalism, relativism, and constructivism.

Most of the course will be given by Richard Joyce, but several lectures in March will be given by Kim Sterelny, on the topic of the evolution of the human moral faculty and whether this matter may have any metaethical implications.

Course learning objectives (CLOs)

Students passing the course should be able to:

1. demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the field of ethical theory;
2. apply this knowledge in the critical analysis of metaethical theories;
3. advance their abilities to undertake logical and critical thinking;
4. practice and improve their critical writing skills and presentation skills.

Teaching format

The weekly meetings will include lecturing and discussion. There are no tutorials. Students are expected to attend all classes, take part in class discussion, and keep up with the reading.

Mandatory requirements

There are no mandatory requirements for PHIL 302.

Workload

In accordance with Faculty Guidelines, this course has been constructed on the assumption that students will devote 200 hours to PHIL 302 throughout the trimester. This includes weekly attendance at lectures, completion of all set weekly readings, and research and writing for set assessment tasks.

Assessment

Assessment Item	Weighting	CLOs	Due Date
Essay, 2500 words	50%	1,2,3,4	April 20, 5.00 pm
Essay, 2500 words	50%	1,2,3,4	June 5, 5.00 pm

PHIL 302 is assessed on the basis of two essays, worth 50% of the final grade each.

First essay topics will be handed out shortly after the course begins. Second essay topics will be posted on Blackboard before April 2.

Submission and return of work

All essays must be submitted in two ways. A copy of the essay must first be submitted digitally via Blackboard. Make sure you save your file as a Microsoft Word document. The title of your file should have the following format: last name, underscore, first name, underscore, essay number, dot, doc/docx (for example: smith_mary_5.docx). Please also ensure that pages are numbered. A hard copy of the essay must then be submitted to one of the school administrators located in MY518.

Comments will be either posted on Blackboard or returned with the hard copy of the essay. (In the latter case, students can collect their essays from MY518 between the hours of 2.00 and 3.00 pm from Monday to Friday and must show their Student ID card.) Grades will be posted on Blackboard.

Extensions and penalties

- All extensions must be obtained directly from the course coordinator, Richard Joyce.
- Essays submitted late will not get a grade higher than a C- unless the student contacts the course coordinator as soon as practically possible to explain the lateness (preferably before the assessment task is due to be submitted). The circumstances under which an extension will be considered are outlined in section 3.2.1 of the Assessment Handbook. (See: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/documents/policy/staff-policy/assessment-handbook.pdf>.)

Set texts

There is no required textbook for PHIL302. Every lecture has a set reading posted on Blackboard which students will be expected to have read prior to the lectures, and to have thought about (and be ready to discuss). In addition, extra readings will be posted on Blackboard grouped according to topic.

Class representative

The class representative provides a useful way to communicate feedback to the teaching staff during the course. A class representative will be selected at the first lecture of the course. Students may like to write the Class Rep's name and details in this box:

Class Rep name and contact details:

Student feedback

Enhancements made to this course, based on the feedback of previous students, will be covered during the course. Student feedback on University courses may be found at www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/feedback/feedback_display.php.

Other important information

The information above is specific to this course. There is other important information that students must familiarise themselves with, including:

- Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/integrity-plagiarism
- Aegrotats: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats
- Academic Progress: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/academic-progress (including restrictions and non-engagement)
- Dates and deadlines: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/dates
- FHSS Student and Academic Services Office: www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/student-admin
- Grades: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/grades
- Resolving academic issues: www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications
- Special passes: www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications
- Statutes and policies including the Student Conduct Statute: www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/strategy
- Student support: www.victoria.ac.nz/students/support
- Students with disabilities: www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/disability
- Student Charter: www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/student-charter
- Student Contract: www.victoria.ac.nz/study/apply-enrol/terms-conditions/student-contract
- Subject Librarians: <http://library.victoria.ac.nz/library-v2/find-your-subject-librarian>
- Turnitin: www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/wiki/index.php/Turnitin
- University structure: www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/structure
- Victoria graduate profile: www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/graduate-profile
- VUWSA: www.vuwsa.org.nz