

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-2016**  
**Winter 2016**  
**Philosophy 3710G: Meta-ethics**

**Class Times:** Tues., 11:30-1:30 & Thurs.,  
 11:30-12:30  
**Location:** Talbot College room 202  
**Instructor:** Dr. Ryan Robb

**Office Location:** Stevenson Hall 4126  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 1:30-3:30  
**E-mail:** [rrobb@uwo.ca](mailto:rrobb@uwo.ca)

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is designed to introduce students to some of the main problems and approaches in contemporary meta-ethics. Meta-ethics is the study of the presuppositions of moral discourse and is therefore concerned with epistemological, metaphysical and semantic issues (at least). We will consider a variety of questions, including but not limited to: What is the meaning of the word “ought” in the judgment that “You ought not to break your promises”? Do such judgments express beliefs about what is the fact of the matter morally, or attitudes of a different kind (e.g., desires)? Is moral knowledge possible? If not, why not? If so, what is the nature of such knowledge? And how do we arrive at it? In what sense (if any) are moral judgments true? If there are moral truths what is their nature? In what way (if at all) are they similar to ordinary scientific truths? What is the relationship between moral judgment and motivation to act? If one sincerely judges that lying is wrong, is one necessarily motivated not to lie? If not, why not?

### **OBJECTIVES**

This course has two main objectives. Most importantly, to help students develop the ability to formulate and express complex philosophical ideas clearly, either verbally or in writing. The second is to familiarize students with the main problems in contemporary meta-ethics.

### **ASSESSMENT**

10% - Participation/Attendance  
 15% - 4 in class quizzes, worth 5% each (your best 3 results will be kept)  
 75% - 3 1000 – 1200 word essays

### **TEXTS**

All readings are found on OWL, in folders located under the ‘Resources’ tab.

## **READING SCHEDULE**

**Week One** (January 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>): **Organization and Introduction/ The Naturalistic Fallacy**

Required Readings: Moore, Principia Ethica, §§ 1-17

**Week Two** (January 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>): **The Naturalistic Fallacy**

Required Readings: Frankena, “The Naturalistic Fallacy”

**Week Three** (January 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>): **Non-naturalism**

Required Reading: Shaver, “Sidgwick’s Minimal Meta-ethics”  
Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic, ch. 6

Optional Reading: van Roojen, “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism” (to be found on the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

**Week Four** (January 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>): **Expressivism**

Required Readings: Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms”

**Week Five** (February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>): **Expressivism**

Required Readings: Blackburn, “How to be an Ethical Anti-realist”  
Blackburn, “Is Objective Moral Justification Possible on a Quasi-Realist Foundation?”

**Week Six** (February 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>): **Error Theory**

Required Reading: Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong, ch. 1

**NOTE:** First Essay Assignment is due on Thursday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

**NOTE:** February 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> is reading week, so no class.

**Week Seven** (February 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>): **Error Theory**

Required Reading: Joyce, “Moral Fictionalism”

**Week Eight** (March 1<sup>st</sup> and March 3<sup>rd</sup>): **Ethics and Evolution**

Required Readings: Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value”

**Week Nine** (March 8<sup>th</sup> and March 10<sup>th</sup>): **Ethics and Evolution**

Required Readings: de Lazari-Radek and Singer, “The Objectivity of Ethics and the Unity of Practical Reason”

**NOTE: Second Essay Assignment is Due on Thursday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014.**

**Week Ten** (March 15<sup>th</sup> and March 17<sup>th</sup>): **Ethics and Observation**

Required Reading: Harman, The Nature of Morality, ch. 1

Optional Reading: Lenman, “Moral Naturalism” (to be found on the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

**Week Eleven** (March 22<sup>nd</sup> and March 24<sup>th</sup>): **Naturalism**

Required Readings: Sturgeon, “Harman on Moral Explanations of Natural Facts”

**Week Twelve** (March 29<sup>th</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>): **Moral Motivation**

Required Readings: Smith, “The Humean theory of Motivation”

**Week Thirteen** (April 5<sup>th</sup>): Final in-class quiz

**NOTE: Third Essay Assignment is due on Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016.**

**ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

Essays:

Essay 1: Thursday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Essay 2: Thursday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Essay 3: Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016

In-class Quizzes:

Quiz #1: January 28<sup>th</sup>

Quiz #2: February 25<sup>th</sup>

Quiz #3: March 17<sup>th</sup>

Quiz #4: April 5<sup>th</sup>

Quiz Format: Quizzes are based on the readings and the lectures. Each quiz will have five questions. You will be asked, for example, to define a key term in a reading, to describe a philosophical position or outlook, to outline an argument in brief, to detail an objection to an argument in brief, etc.

## REGULATIONS

### 1. Submission of essays

Please submit your assignments electronically. Do not submit a paper copy.

In order to submit your assignment, simply visit the OWL site for this course. On the left-hand navigation menu you will find the assignment tool. Click on this tool and you will find the assignment guidelines and basic instructions for submitting your assignment. To submit your assignment upload it and click on the submit button at the bottom of the page.

A corrected version of your paper will be returned to you through the OWL site.

### 2. Turnitin.com

All required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as course documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

### 3. Extensions

If you miss a quiz, you will **NOT** be permitted to make it up. However, with respect to the remainder of the course work, exceptions to the above work submission dates may be granted only as a result of petition to the Academic Counselor of the student's faculty. **Instructors have no authority to waive this requirement, and any unofficial arrangements they make with students will not be respected by the administration.**

All course work must be submitted by the last day of classes, i.e., Wednesday April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

Academic policies on examinations, appeals, absences due to illness, etc. may be found in the 2014-15 Academic Calendar. For further information, contact the Philosophy Undergraduate Counselor, Professor Andrew Botterell, Stevenson Hall 3140, 519-661-2111, ext. 85758, your Faculty's Academic Counselor or the Ombudsperson.

### 4. Late essays and penalties

An essay will be considered late if it is handed in after the due date. Late essays will be penalized at the rate of **five** percentage points on the first day it is late, followed by a deduction of **one** percentage point for each subsequent day up to a maximum of 50%, at which point a grade of 0 will be automatically recorded

NOTE: This policy DOES NOT apply to Essay #3, which is due on the last day of classes for

the semester... accordingly, if Essay #3 is not submitted on time, a grade of 0 will (regrettably) be automatically applied.

## 5. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating. Plagiarism is unacknowledged copying or paraphrasing of the words or ideas of another person. In general, anyone who learns something from a source (other than course lectures or general background knowledge any student of the course could reasonably be expected to have) and then presents that knowledge as their own discovery is considered to have plagiarized, even if the words used to express the ideas are not exactly the same.

Examples of plagiarism include: misrepresenting co-authored or group work as individually done, cutting and pasting copied or paraphrased work by others in with your own work, paraphrasing or otherwise altering the order of words or phrases and/or substituting words or phrases of similar meaning without acknowledgement that you are doing so, aiding and abetting such offences, among others.

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a MAJOR academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

## 6. E-mail policy

I am **not** able to respond to philosophical concerns or questions over e-mail. I will deal with such concerns or questions during my office hours **only**. If you have a problem turning in an assignment on time or you need to make an appointment with me or you have some private issue you would like to communicate to me, feel free to use e-mail. Otherwise, please attend my office hours or make an appointment to see me.

## 7. Prerequisites

You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as a basis of appeal. If you are not eligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time, and you will receive no fee adjustment. These decisions cannot be appealed.

The **ONE** Prerequisite for this course is: **Philosophy 2700**

8. The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://www.uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to

understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

9. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.