

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Metaethics
Course Code	: PHI3278
Recommended Study Year	: 2-4 Years
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional Approach
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours/week
Category in Major Programme	: Programme Elective - Ethics and Practical Philosophy Profile
Prerequisite(s)	: PHI1003 Ethics: East and West (Note: This prerequisite is waived for BAPAI Senior Year students.)
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

Are there any moral facts? What would moral facts be like if any? Can we know whether something is right or wrong? If yes, how? What kind of mental states are expressed by moral judgments? What is the link between moral judgment and motivation? This course will discuss such fundamental questions regarding morality by introducing major philosophical positions in contemporary metaethics, such as naturalism, non-naturalism, cognitivism, non-cognitivism, realism, constructivism, internalism, and externalism. This course will also emphasize the close connections between metaethics and other subfields of philosophy like metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind.

Aims

The course aims to enable students:

1. To be aware of the difference and connection between metaethics and normative ethics
2. To acquire an understanding of the major philosophical positions in metaethics.
3. To grasp the basic conceptual framework of analytic philosophy that is necessary for moral inquiries.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students are expected

1. To understand the distinctive questions and aims of metaethics.
2. To outline and evaluate major philosophical schools in metaethics.
3. To grasp the connections between metaethics and other subfields of philosophy.
4. To be able to construct reasoned arguments on moral issues.

Indicative Content

1. The open question argument
2. Non-cognitivism
3. The error theory
4. Naturalist moral realism
5. Non-naturalist moral realism
6. Moral supernaturalism
7. Moral constructivism
8. Moral relativism
9. Moral epistemology
10. Moral psychology

Teaching Method

Lectures, discussions, presentations and assignments

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

1. Students will give presentations on topics and questions that are related to the relevant lectures and readings. They are expected to follow the lines of thoughts and respond critically to the arguments in question (to measure outcomes 1, 3, and 4).
2. Students will write an academic paper which will be on a selected topic in contemporary metaethics. They are expected to write clearly and argue analytically (to measure outcomes 1, 3, and 4).
3. Students will take a final examination. They are expected to understand the metaethical theories correctly and be able to construct reasoned arguments for/against the positions (to measure outcomes 1-4).

Assessment

20% participation, 20% presentation, 30% paper, 30% final exam

Required Readings

Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction*, Acumen Pub Ltd, 2011
Electronic materials

Supplementary Readings

Alexander Miller, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003
David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989
Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995
Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo (eds.), *Foundations of Ethics*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007
Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard and Peter Railton (eds.), *Moral Discourse and Practice*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997
Stephen Darwall, *Philosophical Ethics*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1998

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations and Course Work. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.
- (5) Students must adhere to the University’s guidelines and practices when using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The official documents “Guidelines for Using GAI Tools at Lingnan University” and “Best Practices for Ethical and Responsible Use of GAI Tools in Course Assessments” can be found here: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices>.