PHIL 202: Ethics Core Seminar; Fall 2014
Metaethics Classics
Professor David O. Brink
Syllabus

Here is the tentative syllabus. It's not certainr that we can fit all of these topics in. If we need to revise the syllabus as we go along, we will discuss this in seminar. You might check periodically to make sure that you are operating with the most current version of the syllabus.

These are the required texts.

- *Moral Discourse and Practice* [MDP], ed. S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, and P. Railton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
- Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).
- Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Required readings are drawn from these texts or will be made available electronically and are preceded by '(A)'. Recommended readings are preceded by '(B)'. Full references can be found on the Select Bibliography. I've been extremely selective about recommended readings. There are many other things worth reading; I have tried to offer a manageable number of resources that I know and think would be helpful. Especially recommended readings are preceded by an asterisk. Some required and some recommended texts will be available as Electronic Reserves [ER] on the course website or by email. Some recommended texts will be available as Hard Reserves [HR] in the departmental library (H&SS 8025). Other recommended texts can be found at the university library. If you are having trouble locating a particular text, let me know, and I can try to help (e.g. lend you a copy myself).

0. General. For a nice overview of a number of important metaethical issues and debates and how they interact, see the survey article by Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton.

- (B) *Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward a Fin de Siècle Ethics: Some Trends" [MDP].

1. Moore and the Open Question Argument I. Here we focus on the semantic and metaphysical aspects of Moore's open question argument (OQA) and his critique of ethical naturalism. Is the OQA a good test of property identity? What is nonnaturalism, and how plausible is it? Must the cognitivist be a nonnaturalist?

- (A) G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ch. 1 [MDP].
- (B) David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, ch. 6 [HR]; Mark Timmons and Terence Horgan, "New Wave Moral Realism Meets Twin Earth" and "Troubles for New Wave Moral Semantics: The Open Question Argument Revived;" and David Brink, "Realism, Naturalism, and Moral Semantics" [HR].

2. Moore and the Open Question Argument II. Here we focus on aspects of Moore's OQA and his critique of ethical naturalism involving the normativity of ethics. What assumptions about normativity might the OQA make? Is the OQA more plausible as a test for normativity than as a test

for property identity? What are the implications of the OQA for ethical naturalism and the normativity of ethics?

- (A) Connie Rosati, "Naturalism, Normativity, and the Open Question Argument" [ER] and "Agency and the Open Question Argument" [ER].
- (B) Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward a Fin de Siècle Ethics: Some Trends" [MDP].

3. Moral Motivation and Moral Semantics. Here we try to get a handle on the basic debate between cognitivists and noncognitivists about the nature of moral motivation and the semantics of moral judgments. How do views about moral motivation influence views about the semantics of moral judgments? Should our views about the semantics of moral judgments influence our views about moral motivation?

- (A) C.L. Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" [MDP]; Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, esp. chs. 1-3; and David Brink, "Moral Motivation" [ER].
- (B) John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason;" Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* and *Thinking How to Live*; Simon Blackburn,"Attitudes and Contents;" *Mark Schroeder, *Being For*; David Copp, "Realist Expressivism: A Neglected Option for Moral Realists;" Mark Schroeder, "Hybrid Expressivism: Virtues and Vices;" and *Michael Ridge, *Impassioned Belief*.

4. Moral Explanation. Harman claims that the basic problem with morality is its immunity from observational testing and its explanatory impotence. How plausible are these claims? Should objectivity be tied to explanatory utility? Are moral claims explanatorily impotent?

- (A) Gilbert Harman, "Ethics and Observation" [MDP]; Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations" [HR]; and Peter Railton, "Moral Realism" [MDP].
- (B) David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 182-97 [HR].

5. Moral Conflict and Consistency. Williams thinks that the reality of moral conflict exposes a problem with a commitment to objectivity in ethics. Why, and is he right? What's the right way to understand consistency in ethics? Should we understand it in model-theoretic terms?

- (A) Bernard Williams, "Ethics and Consistency" [ER]; David Brink, "Moral Conflict and Its Structure" [ER]; Ruth Barcan Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency" [ER]; and Ted Cohen, "There are No Ties at First Base" [ER].
- (B) Philippa Foot, "Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma."

6. Generalism vs. Particularism. What would moral principles be like? Would they have to be exceptionless, or could they contain ceteris paribus clauses? Are there true moral principles? Do they have an important role to play in moral reasoning or education?

- (A) Jonathan Dancy, "Moral Particularism" <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-particularism> and Pekka Värynyen, "A Theory of Hedged Moral Principles" [HR].
- (B) Jonathan Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, esp. chs. 1-8 and Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge, *Principled Ethics*.

7. Reconciling Rationalism and Internalism about Practical Reason? How do our assumptions about the normativity of ethics and about practical reason shape our metaethical views? Can we

reconcile rationalist assumptions about the authority of morality and internalist assumptions about practical reason, and what do our views about these two topics imply about the objectivity of ethics? Foot appeals to internalism about practical reason to reject rationalism about the authority of morality. Harman appeals to both internalism and rationalism to defend moral relativism. Mackie appeals to internalism and (conceptual) rationalism to defend an error theory. All assume some form of internalism about practical reason. We can examine the adequacy of this common assumption by looking at the defense that Williams offers.

- (A) Philppa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" [MDP]; Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended" [ER]; J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, ch. 1 [MDP]; and Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" [MDP].
- (B) *Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason" [MDP]; *Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, chs. 4-6; David Brink, "Kantian Rationalism: Inescapability, Authority, and Supremacy" [HR] and "The Significance of Desire" [ER].

8. Rationalism I: Nagel. Nagel defends altruism as a requirement of practical reason, against egocentrism, by analaogy with the way one might defend prudence, as against instrumentalism about pratical reason. Just as failure to recognize prudence involves temporal dissociation, so too, Nagel claims, failure to recognize altruism involves interpersonal dissociation. We want to reconstruct and assess Nagel's complex argument. What assumptions is he making about the relation between motivation and authority?

- (A) Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* and Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, ch. 4.

9. Rationalism II: Korsgaard. What are the diffent sourcs of normativity that Korsgaard discusses, and how is reflective endorsement a superior source of normativity to voluntarism and realism? How is reflective endorsement connected with the value of autonomy? And how do we get from a concern with one's own autonomy to moral concern for others? Does Korsgaard have a satisfactory response to the the Sensible Knave?

- (A) Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*.
- (B) Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*.