

PHI 524 (Spring 2017): Metaphysics for Metaethics
Instructor: G. Rosen
Th. 1:30- 4:20, 201 Marx Hall

The premise of the course is that certain longstanding problems in metaethics are best approached using some relatively new machinery from hyperintensional metaphysics. We'll focus mainly on realist views according to which moral discourse is in the business of stating facts. The main metaphysical challenge for the moral realist is to say how these normative facts are related to the "natural" facts that underlie them. In order to formulate this question properly, one needs a metaphysics of properties and facts and a taxonomy of the various explanatory relations in which one class of facts can stand to another. That's where the new hyperintensional metaphysics comes in. It puts us in a position to formulate the naturalist thesis that every ethical fact is also a natural fact, and also to distinguish reductive versions of the view from non-reductive versions. It permits us to formulate a variety of non-naturalist positions and to explore their consequences, and so on.

We'll spend the first half of the term developing the apparatus — theories of essence and grounding and various notions that can be defined in terms of these, including theories of real definition and the metaphysics of facts and properties.

The second half will be devoted to controversies in metaethics: What is ethical naturalism? Is non-reductive naturalism a tenable view? How should the supervenience challenge to non-naturalism best be formulated and can it be answered? Are pure moral principles metaphysically necessary? If not, can we live without supervenience? Are particular moral facts grounded in part in moral laws? If so, what exactly *is* a moral law? Is there a tenable version of metaphysical particularism: the view that normative facts about particulars are always explanatorily prior to general principles? Is explanation in ethics a special case of metaphysical explanation, or does ethics involve a special explanatory relation of its own?

It will emerge along the way that the engagement with metaethics refocuses attention on certain *recherché* issues in the pure theory of ground and essence: Is every grounding explanation 'backed' by an essentialist grounding law? How are grounding facts themselves grounded? If there are many kinds of grounding, are they all determinates of a generic notion of metaphysical explanation? Those questions will arise, but we'll do our best to resist the impulse to dwell exclusively in the arcane.

Syllabus to be distributed at the first meeting. No reading for Session 1.