

Philosophy 524

Topics in Metaethics: Moral Encroachment

Spring 2020

Tuesdays, 12:30-3:20pm
Marx 201

Professor: Sarah McGrath
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office hours: Mondays 1-2

Course Description:

Ethics as a subject matter concerns questions about how to live: which actions are permissible, forbidden, required, right and wrong. But are ethical considerations limited to the practical realm? Or, alternatively, do ethical facts constrain not only what we should do, but also what we should believe? Can ethical considerations shape what there is? In the first part of the course, we will explore the ways in which moral considerations might encroach upon the epistemic realm, by asking questions such as: Is it possible to wrong someone by believing bad things about them, even if you do not act on these beliefs? Are epistemic norms governing belief—such as norms governing how much or what kind of evidence is required—sensitive to moral requirements? Could it be morally forbidden to believe what your evidence requires that you believe? In the second part, we will explore the ways in which moral considerations might encroach on metaethics and metaphysics. Can first order metaethical facts rule out various metaethical positions, such as moral skepticism, or moral error theory? Can they rule in moral realism? More radically still, might ethical facts play a role in determining metaphysical facts—facts about what kinds of things that there are?

The following guest professors will visit the seminar: Renee Bollinger, Robin Dembroff, Sarah Moss, Mark Schroeder, and Alex Worsnip.

The course syllabus will be posted on Blackboard. Please check there for revisions.

Course Schedule

This schedule is tentative. Readings may be removed, added, or adjusted. These adjustments can be made on the basis of student interest. All readings will be posted on Blackboard, or linked to from Blackboard.

Part One: Ethics in Epistemology

Tuesday, February 4 – Do moral requirements constrain belief?

- Mark Schroeder and Rima Basu, “Doxastic Wrongdoing”

Thursday, February 13 –What’s wrong with inferences from highly probabilifying racial generalizations?

Guest Professor: Renee Jorgensen Bolinger (Princeton)

- Renee Jorgensen Bolinger, “Varieties of Moral Encroachment” (manuscript)

- Renee Jorgensen Bolinger, “The Rational Impermissibility of (some) Racial Generalizations,” *Synthese* (2018)

Tuesday, February 18 – Is moderate pragmatism a stable stopping point?

Guest Professor: Alex Worsnip (UNC)

- Alex Worsnip, “Can Pragmatists Be Moderate?” (winner of the 2019 Young Epistemologist Prize), forthcoming in *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*

Tuesday, February 25 – Can moral reasons be normative reasons for and against belief?

- Stephanie Leary, “Bigotry, Bosses, and Bears: a Pragmatist Argument Against Encroachment” (manuscript);
- Stephanie Leary, “In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95(3) 2017.

Tuesday, March 3 – When and how do beliefs wrong?

- Sarah Moss, “Moral Encroachment,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 2018
- Mark Schroeder, “When Beliefs Wrong,” *Philosophical Topics* 2018
- Mark Schroeder, “Persons as Things,” *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics* 2018

Tuesday, March 10– What exactly *is* encroachment?

Guest Professor: Sarah Moss (Michigan)

Sarah Moss, “What is Encroachment?” (manuscript)

Spring Break is March 16-23

March 24 –

Guest Professor: Mark Schroeder (USC)

- Mark Schroeder, Chapter 6: “Balance in Epistemology”; Chapter 7: “Epistemic Reasons as Right-Kind Reasons”; Chapter 8: “Pragmatic Intellectualism”; Chapter 9: “Doxastic Wrongs”. (From *Reasons First* (book manuscript))

March 31 – [NO CLASS--SM Away]

Part Two: Ethics in Metaethics and Metaphysics

April 7 –Can Ethical Claims Undermine Moral Anti-Realism?

- Ronald Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Believe It.” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1996
- Sharon Street, “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Rethink It.” *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 2016

April 14—Can Ethical Claims Affect What there is?

Guest Professor: Robin Dembroff (Yale)

- Robin Dembroff, “The Real Gender Assumption” forthcoming in Takaoka and Manne (eds.) *Gendered Oppression and its Intersections. Philosophical Topics*.
- TBD

April 21—Can Ethical Claims Rule in Robust Moral Realism?

- David Enoch: “The argument from the Deliberative Indispensability of Irreducibly Normative Truths”, Chapter 2. of *Taking Morality Seriously*

April 28— Mini-Conference

[Seminar participants are invited to present their work on the topics that we have covered; details TBA]

Getting Credit for the Course:

Graduate students in the philosophy department can take the course for credit to earn a unit in either of the following ways:

1. Do one class presentation, write one 5-6 page paper due in week six, and write one 15-20 page paper due during reading period (the week after classes end).
2. Do one class presentation and take a written exam on the course material during reading period.

Graduate students in the politics department can take the course for credit and get a grade by taking option 1 above.

All undergraduates, and graduate students in departments other than philosophy and politics, need permission to audit the class or to take the class for credit. Please see me for undergraduate course requirements.