AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Can moral judgments be true or false like ordinary descriptive claims can? Are there any moral facts? If so, what kinds of facts are they, and how do we know about them? Do moral judgments have an intrinsic ability to motivate action?

These are all questions of metaethics. In this seminar, we will explore each of them in roughly that order – moral semantics, the metaphysics of morality, moral epistemology, and moral psychology. We will decide on readings for the last five sessions of class together as the semester progresses.

ASSESSMENT

Participation (20%), Final paper of 5000-6000 words (80%)

SCHEDULE

12 Aug  Introduction to metaethics
Smith, *The Moral Problem*, Chapter 1

19 Aug  The open question argument and noncognitivism
Moore, *From Principia Ethica*. DGR
Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms”  DGR

26 Aug  Error theory about morality
Mackie: from “Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong”  DGR

2 Sep  Moral observations and explanations
Harman: “Ethics and Observation” (DGR)
Sayre-McCord: “Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence” (handout)

9 Sep  Internalism:
Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”  DGR
Smith, *The Moral Problem*, Chapter 3

16 Sep  Internalism cont’d
Svavasdottir, "Moral Cognitivism and Motivation" (handout)

30 Sep  Humeans and their opponents
McDowell, “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?” (handout)
Sinhababu, “The Humean theory of motivation reformulated and defended” (handout)

7 Oct
Smith's Solution
The Moral Problem, Ch. 5 and 6

READINGS

Michael Smith, The Moral Problem
Darwall / Gibbard / Railton, Moral Discourse and Practice
All readings will be made publicly available by email, so you need not buy books