

Metaethics

COURSE AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Course: PL 3710, Metaethics

Semester: Winter 2009

Time: T 530 – 830 pm

Place: HC-W6

Prerequisites: PL 2700F/G*

Antirequisites: PL 3700E (King's)*

(*See below the policy on prerequisites.)

Instructor: John Turri

Office: V122

Office hours: T 430 – 520; Th 1030 - 1100

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course surveys the major contemporary metaethical theories: non-cognitivism, subjectivism, reductionism, nihilism, and intuitionism. We will investigate the nature of value, evaluation, evaluative statements, moral motivation and reasons for action. We will examine influential attempts to answer the following questions: Can evaluative terms such as 'good' and 'wrong' be defined? Do such terms predicate properties? Can we know that some things are good or wrong, and if so, how? What's the relationship between judging that something is good and being motivated to promote it? Are values objective or subjective?

COURSE GOALS

There are five main goals of this course. The first three goals pertain to the specific content of the course; achieving them means that you have gained some valuable knowledge about an important area of human inquiry. The last two pertain to your development as a thinker more generally; achieving them means that you have exercised and strengthened valuable intellectual skills. By the end of this course you should:

1. Be familiar with a number of influential views on our main topics.
2. Understand how philosophers have argued for and against these views.
3. Cultivate a critical perspective on those arguments and views.
4. Hone your critical skills through the extraction and assessment of philosophical arguments.
5. Avail yourself of the opportunity to improve at formulating and communicating sophisticated ideas and arguments.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (Palgrave, 2005), ISBN: 0230573746. Unless you're independently wealthy, buy the **paperback**.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

1. Jim Pryor, "[Guidelines on Reading Philosophy](#)"
2. Jim Pryor, "[Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper](#)"
3. Michael Huemer, "[A Guide to Writing](#)"
4. William Strunk, Jr., *The Elements of Style*

5. Lewis Vaughn, *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays* (Oxford, 2006), ISBN: 0195179560
6. A. P. Martinich, *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Blackwell, 2005), ISBN: 1405131675
7. Michael Harvey, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing* (Hackett, 2003), ISBN: 0872205738

EVALUATION

1. **Reading reports:** You owe me **four** reading reports—two for each half of the course. (The first half of the course runs from 1/6 – 2/24; the second half from 2/25 – 4/7.) These reports serve **three** purposes: to ensure your consistent thoughtful engagement with the material, to stimulate productive class discussion, and to help you generate ideas for your papers. You must do all four reports to pass the course.

A reading report should summarize the assigned reading for a class meeting, especially the central views, arguments, and objections. It should be **500 words or less**. You decide which readings to report on (save for the exceptions noted in the reading schedule below). You **absolutely must** turn in a report to me no later than **24 hours before** we're due to discuss the material it summarizes; otherwise it will receive no credit. (Turning it in later defeats the first purpose.)

BIG TIME WARNING: Do not submit a report if you won't attend class to discuss the material it summarizes. If you submit a report on time but are absent from class without a legitimate excuse, it will receive no credit — i.e. you'll have to write another one. (Submitting it but not showing up defeats the second purpose.)

Reports will not receive detailed feedback. They will be graded **pass/fail**. A clear and competent attempt will pass. **Clear** reports are free from errors of spelling, grammar and diction and are properly structured with focused paragraphs and apt topic sentences. **Competent** reports accurately summarize the material (or at least are inaccurate attributable to an understandable interpretive mistake). In general a report will pass just in case it demonstrates that you did the assigned reading, thought carefully about it, and took enough time to summarize it carefully. Please do.

Compose your report in a standard 12-point font with 1.5-inch margins all around (please don't use narrower margins). Save your work in native MS Word format (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf). Name the file after the pattern <PL3710_lastname_firstname_report_#>, where '#' is replaced by '1' for your first report, '2' for your second, etc. (If I were to submit my first report, the filename would be 'PL3710_Turri_John_report_1'.) Attach it to an email with the subject heading 'PL 3710 Report' and send it to me (at the email address at the top of this syllabus).

2. **First Consultation + draft + workshop + paper** ('First CDWP' for short): This assignment consists of four parts, culminating in a paper between 1750 and 2500 words. **YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL FOUR PARTS TO EARN ANY CREDIT FOR THE ASSIGNMENT.** This entails that failure to complete **any** part will result in a **zero** for the assignment. Your grade for the assignment will equal your grade for the paper.

First, you will consult with me about a paper topic. The consultation will consist of an email exchange (subject heading 'PL 3710 consultation') *initiated by you*, wherein: (i) you propose a topic and thesis and then (ii) I consider it and respond by either approving it or

requesting alterations. If I approve it, you move on to the next part of the assignment; if I request alterations, you repeat the process until I approve it. My approval of your proposal *does not* imply that your paper will receive high marks, marks that satisfy either of us, or even passing marks. You will select a topic covered in our readings. Your thesis should be specific and non-trivial but not overly ambitious. (I can't define those criteria here; the consultative process will help clarify them for you.) You may of course also speak with me in person about your topic but you still *must* submit a formal proposal by email. Prudence suggests that you retain a record of the email exchange. You must initiate consultation no later than FEBRUARY 1 and receive approval prior to FEBRUARY 5. I encourage you to consult me well before the deadline. **You complete this first part of the assignment if and only if you initiate consultation prior to FEBRUARY 1 and I approve your proposal prior to FEBRUARY 5.**

Second, AT LEAST THREE DAYS BEFORE the first writing workshop, you will submit to me by email a rough draft of your paper (hereafter 'draft'). Your draft is DUE FEBRUARY 7. Your job in the draft is to:

- articulate a thesis, then
- defend it with an explicit, clear, intelligent argument, whose conclusion is your thesis, then
- state clearly and directly the motivation for each premise of your argument.

Compose your work in a standard 12-point font with 1.5-inch margins all around (please don't use narrower margins). Save your work in native MS Word format (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf). Name the file after the pattern: <PL3710_lastname_firstname_draft_1>. (If I were to submit this draft, the filename would be 'PL3710_Turri_John_draft_1'.) Attach it to an email with the subject heading 'PL 3710 Draft 1' and send it to me (at the email address at the top of this syllabus). **You complete this second part of the assignment if and only if you email me your draft BY FEBRUARY 7.**

Third, you will participate in a writing workshop, scheduled to be held in class on **TUESDAY FEBRUARY 10**. (I expect this to not change, and will notify you in advance if it does.) At the workshop you will break up into groups of four or five and present your draft to the others in your group. You will listen sympathetically to each other's presentations, ask helpful questions, and make friendly suggestions (including constructive criticisms). Each presentation should last about ten minutes, followed by up to fifteen minutes of discussion. Unexcused absences (including arriving late and leaving early) from the workshop are strictly prohibited, and will be treated exactly the same way as an absence from an exam. **You complete this third part of the assignment if and only if you fully attend and participate in the workshop as described here.**

Fourth, taking into account feedback from the workshop, you will write an approximately 2,000 word paper. Your paper is **DUE SATURDAY FEBRUARY 14**. (See below for an exception). Your job in the paper is to:

- articulate a thesis, then
- defend it with an explicit, clear, intelligent argument, whose conclusion is your thesis, then

- state clearly and directly the motivation for each premise of your argument, then
- raise what you consider to be the most powerful objection (or two) to your argument, and finally
- persuasively respond to that objection (or two).

Compose your work in a standard 12-point font with 1.5-inch margins all around (please don't use narrower margins). Save your work in native MS Word format (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf). Name the file after the pattern <PL3710_lastname_firstname_paper_1>. (If I were to submit my first report, the filename would be 'PL3710_Turri_John_paper_1'.) Attach it to an email with the subject heading 'PL 3710 Paper 1' and send it to me (at the email address at the top of this syllabus). **You complete this fourth part of the assignment if and only if you submit a paper as instructed.**

Additionally, you may volunteer to present your paper to the entire class on TUESDAY FEBRUARY 24. If you volunteer and are selected to present, then your paper is not due till SATURDAY FEBRUARY 28. Your presentation will provide a friendly, low-stress opportunity to gain valuable feedback to help improve your paper. You will **not** be marked on your presentation's rhetorical effectiveness. NOTE: we will have time for at most five presentations. The earlier you volunteer and the better your draft (especially the latter), the more likely you are to be selected.

3. Second CDWP: Exactly the same as the first CDWP, except (i) the deadlines are different and (ii) email subject-headings and filenames should feature a '2' instead of '1' at the end. You must initiate consultation by MARCH 21 and have it approved by MARCH 25. You must email me your draft by MARCH 27. You must participate in the second writing workshop on MARCH 31. Your paper is DUE APRIL 4, unless you volunteer and are selected to present your paper to the entire class on April 7, in which case your paper is due April 11.
4. Attendance: Attendance is mandatory for the entire session at all writing workshops and student presentations. Each such absence will cost you **five points off your second paper's grade**. (Leaving early or showing up late counts as an absence.) Absence from the workshop will be treated exactly the same way as an absence from an exam.

Breakdown: I will calculate your grade for the course as follows:

Reading reports: 20%
 First CDWP: 30%
 Second CDWP: 50%

NOTE: You must complete **all** assignments to pass the course.

PROVISIONAL COURSE SCHEDULE

This provisional schedule is subject to change. Additions, deletions and amendments will be announced in class or posted on WebCT/OWL. Unless otherwise noted, all reading is from the Huemer text. Starred readings are **optional**. Pay attention to the few **special notes** about restrictions on reading reports. Remember: optional readings are **not eligible** for reading reports. I won't have office hours on: T 1/13, T 1/27, T 2/17, Th 3/12, T 3/24. Contact me for alternative arrangements. The first half of the course runs from 1/6 – 2/24; the second half from 2/25 – 4/7.

DATES	TOPIC	READINGS
1/6	Course introduction	-Course syllabus -HUC Statement on Plagiarism (http://www.huronuc.ca/pdf/FASSonPlagiarism.pdf)
1/13	Noncognitivism	Introduction, chapter 2 ♦ Write your reading report on: 2.1 – 3 and 2.8. * Mark Schroeder, “What is the Frege-Geach Problem?” WebCT
1/20	Subjectivism	Chapter 3 * James Dreier, “Internalism and Speaker Relativism,” WebCT
1/27	Analytic reductionism	Chapter 4.1 – 4.3.5 ♦ Write your reading report on sections 4.1 – 4.3.2 * Cuneo, “Recent Faces of Moral Nonnaturalism,” WebCT
2/3	Synthetic reductionism	Chapter 4.4 ♦ Write your reading report on sections 4.4 – 4.4.3 * Koslicki, “Natural Kinds and Natural Kind Terms,” esp. section IV, WebCT * Sarah McGrath, “Moral Knowledge by Perception,” WebCT
2/10	FIRST WRITING WORKSHOP	
2/24	STUDENT PRESENTATIONS	
3/3	Moral knowledge	Chapter 5 *Huemer, “Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism,” WebCT *DePaul, “Phenomenal Conservatism and Self-Defeat,” WebCT
3/10	Disagreement and error	Chapter 6

DATES	TOPIC	READINGS
3/17	Practical reasons	Chapter 7
3/24	Epistemic and practical reasons	Turri, "The Ontology of Epistemic Reasons," WebCT * Stoutland, "Reasons for Action and Psychological States," handout * Collins, "The Psychological Reality of Reasons," WebCT * Jonathan Dancy, selections from <i>Practical Reality</i> , on reserve
3/31	SECOND WRITING WORKSHOP	
4/7	STUDENT PRESENTATIONS	

GENERAL POLICIES

1. Plagiarism

A student's assignments must be in his or her own words. Every time a student makes use of another person's words or ideas, the student must acknowledge his or her intellectual debt through the appropriate use of quotation marks and citations. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, a major academic offense. Simply put, plagiarism is passing off another person's work as your own. Students are required to read the Huron University College Statement on Plagiarism (<http://www.huronuc.ca/pdf/FASSonPlagiarism.pdf>). If you still have questions about plagiarism, consult your instructor, Department Chair, or Dean, and the style manuals available at the Reference Desk of the Huron University Library.

You may be required to submit any written work for analysis by commercial plagiarism-detection software. For example, I may require you to submit it to turnitin.com. (Alternatively, I may submit it myself, after you've turned it in.) All work thus submitted will be included as a source document in the reference database for detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted. A licensing agreement, currently between UWO and turnitin.com, governs use of this service. Computer-marked multiple-choice tests or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that detects unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

The default penalty for plagiarism is **failure in the course**. The more advanced the course or student's standing, the more entrenched that default status becomes. It is virtually infeasible for more advanced students.

2. Scholastic Offenses

Read this: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>.

3. Academic accommodation

When you request academic accommodation on medical grounds, your request will be granted **ONLY IF** you provide documentation indicating that the condition's onset, duration and severity made it unreasonable to expect you to fulfill your academic responsibilities. When you request accommodation on non-emergency non-medical grounds, you are

strongly advised to do so *well in advance* of the relevant date.

You will be allowed to make up an examination *only if* you missed it either because of medical reasons, because of compassionate grounds involving close family, or other substantial non-medical reasons. (In the special case of final examinations, examination conflicts also warrant accommodation.) In any case, you must provide written documentation. Documentary guidelines and instructions for document submission can be found here: http://www.huronuc.ca/faculty_arts_social_science/academic_counselling/.

Huron students required to provide documentation must submit it directly to the Academic Services Center in the West Wing; non-Huron students must submit it directly to their home Dean. The appropriate authorities and I will then confer. I will try to accommodate you when scheduling a makeup exam, but you will ultimately be expected to re-take the exam at the time and place I indicate.

Late assignments *will not be accepted* unless circumstances are extraordinary and you provide an excuse acceptable to me. I will find an excuse acceptable only if you present it to me *privately during my office hours*. Do not discuss such matters with me in front of other students. I may at my discretion require you to provide documentation or refer you to the academic counselor. If I require you to provide documentation for a late assignment, then if you are a Huron student, you must submit it directly to the Academic Services Center in the West Wing; if you are a non-Huron student, you must submit it directly to your home Dean. The appropriate authorities and I will then confer.

The following excuses will not suffice for missing a deadline: 'I overslept', 'I have a lot of work due in other classes around this time', 'I didn't read that in the syllabus', 'I didn't think that was a strict requirement', 'I didn't hear that announcement in class', 'I didn't see that announcement on WebCT/OWL', etc. This list is illustrative, not exhaustive; many other excuses will similarly fail to suffice.

What I say here about 'late assignments' applies to *all deadlines* for the course, whether specifically tied to an assignment or not.

4. Attendance

Except where explicitly noted, my default procedure is to not officially take attendance. Nevertheless failure to attend class regularly will *significantly* reduce your chances of performing well in the course. I *will not* recapitulate by email points made in lecture or class discussion. I will make important announcements in class, which absent students will miss (obviously); ignorance of such announcements *will not* excuse you from completing any course requirements on time.

5. Reading

You are required to do the assigned reading for this course (obviously). I strongly advise you to read each assigned reading at least twice prior to class, and again once after classroom discussion. I reserve the right to administer surprise quizzes (and adjust the marking scheme accordingly) if students appear to not be doing the reading. Each such quiz will be worth between one and five percent of the final grade. Barring exceptional circumstances (which, if they occur, I will inform you of), I will administer no more than three surprise quizzes in a term.

Come to class having carefully read the assigned material, and ready to answer these questions: What question does the author address? What is the author's thesis? How does the author argue for that thesis? What strengths and weaknesses do you detect in the au-

thor's arguments? Lacking an answer to those questions, you should at least have intelligent questions to ask about aspects of the reading that seem important but are nevertheless puzzling.

6. Grading review

Although rare, serious grading mistakes sometimes occur. If you wish to discuss a mark with me, you must first, within a week of receiving your mark, provide to me a detailed and specific written account of your concerns. I *will not* discuss marking disputes in person unless I have first read your written account and judged there to be a prima facie plausible case that something is amiss. Note well: upon review, your mark may be raised *or lowered* as the case merits. Barring special circumstances I will not review a mark later than two weeks after I **first** attempt to return the assignment (which implies, for example, that if you're continually absent when I attempt to hand back marked assignments, you will forfeit your opportunity to request a review).

When inquiring about a mark, remember that the following statements are irrelevant to an assignment's merits: 'I'm applying to competitive programs, and this mark will hurt my chances', 'A mark like this will prevent me from graduating with honors', 'I will not graduate if I earn marks like this in the course', 'I am on academic probation, and marks like this will prevent me from continuing my studies here', 'I have never gotten a mark like this before', 'I showed you a draft of this and you did not tell me it would earn a mark like this', 'When you looked at a draft of this you did not make this criticism', etc. This list is illustrative, not exhaustive; many other considerations are similarly irrelevant. Some considerations may be irrelevant to an assignment's merits, though not absolutely irrelevant.

7. Drafts

Students sometimes ask me to provide feedback on drafts. I am often willing to do so, and the feedback almost invariably leads to improvement. However, some students labor under false assumptions about this process. Sometimes students assume that my providing feedback assures a high mark, or a satisfactory mark, or at least a passing mark. But that assumption is not true. Sometimes students assume that if I do not criticize something in a draft, then I am tacitly approving of it and thus will not, or may not properly, criticize it in the final, graded draft. But that assumption also is not true. Some students assume that their merely passing along a draft will earn them a higher mark. But that assumption is also not true.

A bit of advice: if I point out some error in a draft you've asked me to review, take special care to ensure that the error does not reappear in the final draft. If such errors reappear, the final draft will be marked more harshly.

8. Usage

English usage will matter **greatly** in the evaluation of all written work. Grammatical mistakes will count heavily against an assignment. Grammar counts. Clarity counts. Spelling counts. Diction counts. Focused paragraphs count. Topic sentences count.

9. Communication

Students are required to check regularly their campus email accounts, as well as the WebCT/OWL site for this course. Important announcements about readings and assignments may be made via those media. Ignorance of such announcements will not excuse you from handing in any assignment on time. By far the best (and preferred) way to contact me is at the email address listed at the beginning of this syllabus. Do not leave me a

voicemail, as I check my messages rarely and sporadically.

10. Email

I usually respond to email queries within a couple days. But remember: email is *emphatically not* a substitute for attending class or coming to office hours. I have no obligation to respond to emails that ask questions along the following lines: ‘What did I miss in class today?’, ‘I missed the lecture on X—could you tell me what that was about?’, ‘I’ve forgotten about Y—could you remind me of the details?’, etc. This list is illustrative, not exhaustive.

A bit of advice: ungrammatical—which would include unpunctuated—emails tend to give a bad impression, even if they do not count towards your grade.

11. Office hours

I encourage you to visit during office hours. If you are puzzled by some material we have covered, it is best to come with a well-defined question already formulated. If you missed a class, visiting office hours is the appropriate way to catch up on missed material. NOTE: DO NOT COME TO MY OFFICE WHILE YOU ARE ILL. Doing so is worse than rude, and I will not take kindly to it.

12. Counseling and support services

Huron philosophy students needing counseling about their program of study or related matters should contact Dr. David Conter. For other academic matters relating to counseling, community-based learning, career development, writing services, cross-cultural services, or international opportunities, visit the Academic Services Center in Huron’s West Wing. Also see http://www.huronuc.on.ca/faculty_arts_social_science/academic_counseling/.

13. Letters of recommendation

I will write a letter of recommendation for a student *only if* she or he has taken *at least two courses* from me. I may make special exceptions for first- or second-year students, so ask me.

14. Recording devices

Lectures may be recorded *only if* permission is given *in advance*. Lectures are intellectual property, and unauthorized use of them constitutes theft.

15. Technological devices

Students may not use technological devices (e.g., laptops, PDAs, cell phones, etc.) in the classroom for *anything not directly* related to the content and purpose of current classroom discussion or activity. Using such devices for any other purpose disrupts and distracts student and professor alike, and inhibits effective instruction and learning. No electronic devices are allowed during examinations, quizzes or like assessment.

16. Extra credit

There will be no extra credit assignments, so make your regular work count.

17. Internet sources

For all assigned work in this course, you may *not* cite *any* Internet resources, except for (a) those explicitly assigned, (b) those I explicitly grant special permission for *in advance* (a typical example might be a relevant journal article or book available electronically through the library), and (c) the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (Note that this excludes Wikipedia.)

18. Students with disabilities

Accommodations for students with disabilities are typically arranged through student ser-

vices. But you should feel free to approach me with any concerns you might have.

19. Late adds

Students joining this course late are responsible for completing *all* the assigned work due prior to their joining. I will not track them down to ensure they complete the work: it is entirely their responsibility.

20. Official syllabus

The official course syllabus is distributed in hard copy on the first day of class and posted on the WebCT/OWL site for this course. Any syllabus posted elsewhere (including on Huron's philosophy department website or on my personal website) is *unofficial* and students *should not* rely on it. The official takes precedence over the unofficial in *all* cases (which is why you should rely on the official).

21. Prerequisites (and antirequisites)

Senate regulations state that you are responsible for ensuring that you meet all course prerequisites. (The same applies to so-called "antirequisites," which are really just prerequisites to have *not* taken certain courses.) If you have neither met all the prerequisites nor received special written permission from your Dean to enroll, then you may be removed from the course and it will be deleted from your record. In the event that you are dropped for this reason, then the decision may not be appealed, and you will receive no adjustment to your fees. No information about prerequisites (or antirequisites) contained in this syllabus is guaranteed to be accurate; you rely on it entirely at your own risk; check the academic calendar for the latest information.