

PHILOS 532: Moral Epistemology

Instructor: Eric Wilkinson
Email: wilkinse@uwm.edu
Lectures: 5:30pm – 6:45pm, Tuesday & Thursday
Classroom: Curtin Hall 607
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:00am

Course Description:

How can we acquire moral knowledge? A lively debate exists in contemporary moral epistemology over what kinds of mental states can provide justification for our moral beliefs. Ethical intuitionists contend that thought-experiments can elicit intuitions, which offer *a priori* justification for ethical beliefs. Meanwhile, theories of moral perception allege that we can arrive at thoroughly empirical moral knowledge simply by using traditional sense perception—no need for mysterious intuitions! Moral sense theorists reject both of these views, instead arguing that emotions can justify our moral beliefs. This course will consider these prominent contemporary theories of how we acquire moral knowledge, and how ethical beliefs be justified. In order to broach these questions in contemporary moral epistemology, we will also look at current debates in epistemology overall. Upon completing this course, you will have a strong grasp of recent developments in epistemology in general—and moral epistemology specifically—and will be one step closer to acquiring some moral knowledge.

Assessment & Grading:

| <i>Assignment:</i> | <i>Due Date:</i> | <i>Weight:</i> | <i>Description:</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------|----------------|---|
| Participation | Ongoing | 10% | Attendance and participation are necessary. |
| Presentation | Sign-Up Sheet | 20% | A 30-minute presentation during a day of class. |
| Short Paper | March 13 th | 20% | A five-page argumentative paper. |
| Paper Proposal | April 10 th | 10% | A one-page proposal outlining the final paper. |
| Final Paper | May 15 th | 40% | A fifteen-page argumentative paper. |

Communication Policy: Before emailing, please consult the syllabus for an answer to your query. When emailing, use your university email address and allow at least 48 hours to receive a response.

Late Policy & Extensions: The penalty for late assignment submission is five percent (5%) a day. Extensions will be assessed individually and granted mainly for medical reasons or bereavement.

Disability Accommodations: Those who require disability accommodations must register with the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC). ARC will assist students in determining their needs and will help to communicate the accommodations for registered students to the course instructor.

Academic Integrity: The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee values academic integrity. Thus, students should understand the consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences.

Course Schedule

January 21st – May 8th, 2025
Schedule of Lectures & Readings

| Date: | Lecture Topic: | Primary Reading: | Secondary Reading: |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| January 21 st | Introduction | • Course Syllabus | • No Reading |
| January 23 rd | Sources of Moral Knowledge | | |
| January 28 th | Introducing: Moral Perception | • “Moral Perception” (Preston Werner) | • “Moral Perception and Morally Relevant Perception” (Jacob Sparks) |
| January 30 th | | | |
| February 4 th | McGrathian Moral Perception | • “Moral Knowledge by Perception” (Sarah McGrath) | • “Moral Perception and Its Rivals” (Sarah McGrath) |
| February 6 th | | | |
| February 11 th | Epistemic Dependence | • “Cognitive Penetrability and Ethical Perception” (Robert Cowan) | • “The Mystery of Moral Perception” (Daniel Crow) |
| February 13 th | | | |
| February 18 th | Addressing Epistemic Dependence | • “Moral Perception Without (Prior) Moral Knowledge” (Preston Werner) | • “Perception and Intuition of Evaluative Properties” (Jack Lyons) |
| February 20 th | | | |
| February 25 th | Other Criticisms of Moral Perception | • “Moral Perception, Inference, and Intuition” (Daniel Wodak) | • “High-Level Perception or Low-Level Intuition?” (Elijah Chudnoff) |
| February 27 th | | | |
| March 4 th | Moral Sense Theory as Moral Perception | • “Making Sense of Moral Perception” (Rafe McGregor) | • “Moral Perception and the Contents of Experience” (Preston Werner) |
| March 6 th | | | |
| March 11 th | Introducing: Moral Sense Theory | • “Values and Emotions: Neo-Sentimentalism’s Prospects” (Christine Tappolet) | • <i>Moral Emotions and Intuitions</i> [excerpts] (Sabine Roeser) |
| March 13 th | | | |

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| March 18 th | Spring Recess: No Lectures | • No Readings | • No Readings |
| March 20 th | | | |
| March 25 th | Emotions and Moral Judgments | • <i>Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotions</i> [excerpts] (Jesse Prinz) | • “The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgements” (Jesse Prinz) |
| March 27 th | | | |
| April 1 st | Tracking Theories | • “What Are Moral Intuitions and Why Should We Care About Them? A Neurobiological Perspective” (J. Allman & J. Woodward) | • “The Affective Dog and Its Rational Tale: Intuition and Attunement” (Peter Railton) |
| April 3 rd | | | |
| April 8 th | Criticism of Moral Sentimentalism | • “Sentimental Perceptualism and the Challenge from Cognitive Bases” (M. Milona & H. Naar) | • <i>Regard for Reason in the Moral Mind</i> [excerpts] (Joshua May) |
| April 10 th | | | |
| April 15 th | Introducing: Ethical Intuitionism | • <i>Intuitions as Evidence</i> [excerpts] (Joel Pust) | • <i>The Philosophy of Philosophy</i> [excerpts] (Timothy Williamson) |
| April 17 th | | | |
| April 22 nd | Intellectual Seemings | • <i>Intuition</i> [excerpts] (Elijah Chudnoff) | • “The Intellectual Given” (John Bengson) |
| April 24 th | | | |
| April 29 th | The Phenomenology of Ethical Intuitionism | • <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> [excerpts] (Michael Huemer) | • “Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism” (Michael Huemer) |
| May 1 st | | | |
| May 6 th | Criticisms of Ethical Intuitionism | • “Why Intuition?” (Jennifer Nado) | • “The Instability of Philosophical Intuitions” (S. Swain, J. Alexander & J. Weinburg) |
| May 8 th | | | |

Course Readings:

All course readings are available on Canvas from the beginning of the course and consist of either standalone articles or excerpts from books. Each week there is a primary reading and a secondary reading. To understand the lectures and succeed on assignments, students must read both readings.