

Philosophy 640: Seminar in Ethics.

2009 Winter. Monday, 4–6 p.m., 2271 Angell Hall. Allan Gibbard

The seminar will be devoted to recent writings in metaethics, broadly conceived. Metaethics centrally treats the meaning of ethical statements and the nature of ethical judgment. More broadly construed, it treats normative statements and judgments in general (perhaps characterizable as those in which the notion of ought or of a reason to ϕ figure), as in normative epistemology and the theory of rationality in action, and it includes the theory of correct normative reasoning. The readings we will study in the seminar are not yet determined (and nominations are welcome).

We will start with T.M. Scanlon's new book *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*. (Scanlon's book isn't paradigm metaethics, but it works to clarify ethical concepts that are often conflated, and its treatment of blame interacts with questions concerning specifically moral concepts.)

Students who take the seminar for credit will do a long seminar paper, due at the end of the writing period. Preliminary work toward part of the paper will be due earlier (2000–3000 words), and the student will make a presentation of this preliminary work to the seminar toward the end of the term.

Schedule and readings (partial and tentative)

Wed. Jan. 21, 7:10–9 p.m.: Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions* (2008), Chaps. 1–3.

Feb. 2: Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions* (2008), Chap. 4.

Feb. 9: Gibbard's expressivism. See [note on readings](#) below.

Feb. 16: Scanlon on reasons. *What We Owe to Each Other* (1998), Chapter 1. See [note](#).

March 2: More Scanlon on reasons. "Metaphysics and Morals" (2003), "Reasons and Decisions" (2006), "Structural Irrationality" (2007).

March 9: Egan, "Quasi-Realism and Fundamental Moral Error" (2007). Blackburn's reply.

March 16: Gibbard on impasses, parochial judgment, etc. from *Wise Choices* (1990) and *Thinking How* (2003).

March 23: Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value" (2006). "Mind-Independence without Mystery" (2008).

March 31, April 2: Street, "Constructivism about Reasons" (2008).

April 6: No assigned reading. Optional: Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It", which criticizes Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It".

References:

- Simon Blackburn, "Truth and a priori possibility: Egan's charge against quasirealism" (forthcoming, as of 2009 Jan.) *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.
- Egan, Andy (2007). "Quasi-Realism and Fundamental Moral Error". *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* **85** (June), 205–217.
- Gibbard, Allan (1990). *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
- Gibbard, Allan (2003). *Thinking How to Live* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Gibbard, Allan (2006). "Moral feelings and moral concepts". Russ Schafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* **1** (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 195–215.
- Scanlon, T.M. (1998). *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Scanlon, T.M. (2003). "Metaphysics and Morals." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* **77**:2 (November 2003), 7–22.
- Scanlon, T.M. (2006). "Reasons and Decisions". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **72**:3 (May), 723–729.
- Scanlon, T.M. (2006). *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, meaning, blame* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
- Scanlon, T.M. (2007). "Structural Irrationality". G. Brennan, R. Goodin and M. Smith (eds.), *Common Minds: Themes from the Philosophy of Philip Pettit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 84–103.
- Street, Sharon (2006). "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value". *Philosophical Studies* **127** (1, January), 109–166.
- Street, Sharon (2007). "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It" (draft, Aug. 30, 2007). Posted as of March 19, 2009 at <http://www1.law.nyu.edu/clppt/program2007/readings/objectivity&truth.pdf>
- Street, Sharon (2008). "Constructivism about Reasons". Russ Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* **3** (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Street, Sharon (2008). "Mind-independence Without Mystery: Why quasi-realists can't have it both ways". (mss. 2008 Apr.)

Readings for January 21 (1st session, Wed. Jan. 21, 7:10–9 p.m.)

Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions* (2008), Chaps. 1–3.

Readings for February 2 (2nd session, regular time)

Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions* (2008), Chap. 4.

Readings for February 9 (3rd session)

The view was expressed at our first substantive meeting that we should spend a session on my own published metaethical theories, as background for other things we will be discussing. My metaethics is elaborated chiefly in two books, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (1990) and *Thinking How to Live* (2003). The whole books, obviously, would be far too much to read. I suggest as first priority excerpts from *Wise Choices* and a preview article for *Thinking How*:

Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, excerpts in Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton, eds., *Moral Discourse and Practice*, 179–198. (In “Resources” on CTOOLS.)

Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (1990), Chap. 8, Objectivity: First Steps, 153–170, especially “Reasons”, 160–164 and “How is validity independent of acceptance?” 164–168. (In “Resources” on CTOOLS.)

Gibbard, “[Normative and Recognitional Concepts](#)”. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64:1 (2002), 151–167. Read from start through sec. 3, pp. 151–161.

That’s a lot, but in case you want to read further in these two books, here are Précis of the books, which could guide you to anything else that interests you. They are followed by symposia, consisting of critiques and replies by me.

Gibbard, “[Précis of Wise Choices, Apt Feelings](#)” (1992). *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52:4 (Dec.), 943–945.

Gibbard, “[Précis of Thinking How to Live](#)” (2006). *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 72:3 (May), 687–698.

An article of mine with more recent thoughts is:

Gibbard, “Moral Feelings and Moral Concepts” (2006). Russ Schafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 195–215. (In “Resources” on CTOOLS.)

My UC Berkeley Tanner Lectures volume *Reconciling our Aims* also has a symposium with replies.

Please understand that I don’t expect you to read more than the first three items, which are considerable reading in themselves.

Readings for February 16 (4th session)

Scanlon’s views on the concept of a reason to do or believe or feel such-and-such is much like my own in many ways, but he labels himself a “cognitivist” and rejects any expressivistic analysis. We can think, among other things, what the difference amounts to.

Scanlon, T.M. (1998). *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Chap. 1. “Reasons” (17–77). [In “Resources” on CTOOLS.]

That's a fair amount of reading, but if you have time, I highly recommend looking ahead at some of the readings for March 2.

Readings for March 2 (5th session)

A comprehensive defense by Scanlon of his view of reasons, including criticism of my accounts.

Scanlon, T.M. (2003). "Metaphysics and Morals." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 77:2 (November 2003), 7–22. [In "Resources" on CTOOLS.]

Scanlon's critique of aspects of my *Thinking How to Live* and my reply are in the symposium in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 72:3 (May).

I don't know if I can create a link that will work, but you can get to it from the UM Library, "Electronic journals and newspapers". See also,

Scanlon, T.M. (2007). "Structural Irrationality". G. Brennan, R. Goodin and M. Smith (eds.), *Common Minds: Themes from the Philosophy of Philip Pettit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 84–103.

Readings for March 9 (6th session)

Egan, Andy (2007). "Quasi-Realism and Fundamental Moral Error". *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85 (June), 205–217.

Simon Blackburn, "Truth and a priori possibility: Egan's charge against quasirealism" (forthcoming, as of 2009 Jan.) *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.

The Egan article can be found through the UM Library's "Electronic Journals and Newspapers". I think there is a way to get the Blackburn article, perhaps from the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* website, but I have lost track of how to do so. Both articles are on CTOOLS in "Resources"

Readings for March 16 (7th session)

The aim of this session is to explore further puzzles raised by the possibility of basic normative disagreement by reading some things I have had to say. These may be relevant both to Andy Egan's paper of the previous week and Sharon Street's papers which we read the following week.

Chaps. 10–11 of my 1990 book

Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment (pp. 189–218). (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. On CTOOLS.)

If you have time, you might (optionally) look at Chaps. 12 & 14 of my 2003 book,

Thinking How to Live. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. On CTOOLS.)

Readings for March 23 (8th session)

Street, Sharon (2006). "[A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value](#)". *Philosophical Studies* **127** (1, January), 109–166. If the link above doesn't work, you can get this on the UM Library website, which goes to springerlink.

Street, Sharon (2008). "Mind-independence Without Mystery: Why quasi-realists can't have it both ways". (mss. 2008 April.) Find this on CTOOLS.

9th session: special arrangements

I can't be here on March 30. We'll have a half session on Tue. March 31, 10:30–11:30 (in the Department Seminar Room), and another half session on Thursday April 2, 6:30–7:30, in a place to be determined.

Reading:

Street, Sharon (2008). "Constructivism about Reasons". Russ Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* **3** (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

No Assigned Readings for April 6 (10th session)

Optional:

Street, Sharon (2007). "[Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It](#)" (mss. 2007 August). (Also on CTOOLS "Resources".

Dworkin, Ronald (1996). "[Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It](#)" (1996), pp. 87–139. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* **25**, issue 2.

Gibbard, Allan (2003). *Thinking How to Live*. Chap. 13: "Deep Vindication and Practical Confidence".

11th and 12th weeks: Presentations

See next page.

11th and 12th weeks: Presentations

We meet in two sessions. The Monday sessions (April 13, 20) will be at the usual time in the usual place, 4:10–6 p.m., Angell Hall 2271 (the Departmental Classroom). The Tuesday sessions (April 14, 21) will again be 4:10–6 p.m., but in Angell Hall 1164 (the Departmental Seminar Room). Everyone registered should attend either both Monday sessions or both Tuesday sessions—ordinarily, the sessions on the day of the week you are giving your own presentation. All participants are welcome to attend these sessions, and registered students are welcome to attend the sessions they aren't required to attend. Here is the schedule; I apologize for the obsessively precise times, but that's the only way I can see to give everybody a fair chance to have discussion.

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE:

Monday April 13, AH 2271:

Campbell 4:10-4:36

Menges 4:38-5:04

Silk 5:06-5:32

Thomas 5:34-6:00

Tuesday April 14, AH 1164:

Ambrose 4:10-4:36

Edmonds 4:38-5:04

Nyholm 5:06-5:32

Peterson 5:34-6:00

Monday April 20, AH 2271:

Arnold 4:10-4:36

Gallow 4:38-5:04

Rigoni 5:06-5:32

Singer 5:34-6:00

Tuesday April 21, AH 1164:

Bryson 4:10-4:36

Mollo 4:38-5:04

Szumanski 5:06-5:32