

Ethics, Epistemology and Explanation
Master course in philosophy, Fall 2016.

The course will be devoted to two, related themes: The nature and significance of debunking arguments in ethics (as well as epistemology), and the nature and significance of normative explanations. The former concerns explanations of normative beliefs; the latter concerns explanations of normative facts. The themes are related because the assessment of instances of the debunking strategy depends on the type of explanations of normative facts that are available.

Teachers:

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Assessment:

Class participation and a 3500 words essay (a 5000 words essay for PhD-students) on a topic that must be approved by the teachers. The essay is due 4 December 2016.

The lecture venues are located in the English Park Campus.

Many of the readings (listed below) are available through the library's e-resources. If you have problems in finding any of them please contact the teachers. We also (at the end) list some texts that we recommend reading ahead of the course but that are not included among the required readings.

Schedule, course content, and literature:

Monday, Nov 14, 10-15.00 & 13.15-15.00 in room 2-1025.

We shall begin by discussing the general form of debunking arguments, the epistemological assumptions on which they rely, the concept of a debunking explanation and the scope and strength of the conclusions the arguments primarily are supposed to establish. We shall also discuss the wider implications that debunking arguments might have and the role they are held to play in contexts such as the realist/anti-realist debate in ethics. One of the instances of the strategy that we shall focus on is Sharon Street's so-called Darwinian Dilemma-argument that invokes an evolutionary account of moral beliefs.

Readings:

Kahane G. (2011). 'Evolutionary Debunking Arguments,' *Nous* 45, 103-25.

Singer, P. (2005). "Ethics and Intuitions", *The Journal of Ethics* 9, 331-352.

Street, S. (2006). "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value", *Philosophical Studies* 127, 109-166.

Tuesday, Nov 15, 10-15.00 in room 2-1023 and 13.15-15.00 in room 2-1025, This day's lectures will be devoted to some possible responses to debunking challenges. The debunking strategy presupposes that the causal history of a belief is relevant in certain ways to its justification. We shall, among other things, discuss certain epistemological views that allow one to question that relevance. In this connection, we shall also explore the relationship between the debunking strategy and the Benacerraf-Field challenge against Platonism in mathematics. Those who stress an intimate relation between these challenges think that both imply that our beliefs in an area are warranted only if we can "explain their reliability". On one of the responses we shall examine, there is no plausible way to explicate this requirement in a way that ultimately supports the debunkers' conclusions.

Readings:

Benacerraf, P. (1973). "Mathematical Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 70, 661-679.
Clark-Doane, J. (2015). "Justification and Explanation in Mathematics and Morality", in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 10 (ed. Shafer-Landau, R.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Joyce, R. (2016). "Confessions of a modest debunker", in *Explanation in Mathematics and Ethics* (eds. Leibowitz, U., and Sinclair, N.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Wednesday, Nov 16 (10-15.00 & 13.15-15.00) in room 2-1023.

Wednesday's first lecture will be devoted to a way of responding to debunking arguments that appeals to so-called "third factor" explanations of the reliability of moral beliefs. We shall in particular look at David Enoch's version of that strategy. Enoch assumes that certain empirical facts may in a non-causal way explain moral facts. This raises questions about the nature of the explanations that are available in ethics and epistemology; i.e., questions that provide the focus of the second main theme of the course. In the afternoon we will take a closer look at how our ordinary thought and talk about explanation works, and draw a number of important distinctions that are oftentimes either ignored or overlooked. Doing so will enable us to see more clearly what's at issue (as well as what's not at issue) in various debates, including recent debates over the nature and varieties of normative explanation.

Readings:

Enoch, D. (2010). "The epistemological challenge to metanormative realism: how best to understand it, and how to cope with it", *Philosophical Studies* 148, 413-438.
Tersman, F. (2015). "Debunking and Disagreement", *Noûs* 00:0, 2015, 1-21.
Jenkins, C. (2008). "Romeo, René, and the Reasons Why: What Explanation Is", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 108, 61-84.
Fogal, D., (2016). "Reasons, Reason, and Context", in *Weighing Reasons* (eds. Lord, E. and Maguire, B.), Oxford University Press.

Thursday, Nov 17, 10-15.00 in room 2-0022 and 13.15-15.00 in room 2-1025, On Thursday the focus will be on normative explanation, understood as a species of metaphysical explanation where the explanandum (what's being explained) is a normative fact. We will discuss Berker's defense of the claim that most traditional "first-order" normative questions-e.g. is the right prior to the good, or the good prior to the right?--are not questions about supervenience, or counterfactual dependence, or conceptual priority, but instead questions about the distinctive variety of non-causal dependence or explanation which metaphysicians now call 'grounding'. Rosen's seminal paper provides a general introduction to and defense of grounding, so understood. Shaheen's paper connects some of the themes from Wednesday afternoon (explanation talk) with those of Thursday (causal vs. metaphysical explanation).

Readings:

Berker, S. (MS) "The Unity of Grounding" (available on Berker's website) Rosen, G., (2010). "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction", in *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, 109-36.
Shaheen, J. (forthcoming). "The causal metaphor account of metaphysical explanation", *Philosophical Studies*, 1-26.

Friday, Nov 18, 10-15.00 & 13.15-15.00 in room 2-1025.

The final day of the course will be spent discussing three (potentially) important applications of the ideas discussed on Thursday: the traditional "supervenience objection" to non-naturalist normative realism, particularism about reasons for action and belief, and the theory of knowledge.

Readings:

Dancy, J. *Moral Reasons*, Blackwell, pp. 55-79 (i.e. §3.5, Ch. 4, and §§5.1-2).

Dancy, J. *Ethics without Principles*, Oxford, pp. 15-17, 38-52, and 73-92 (i.e. §2.1, Ch. 3, and Ch. 5)
Chudnoff, E. (2011). "What Should a Theory of Knowledge Do?" *Dialectica* 65, 561-579.
Väyrynen, P. (forthcoming) "The Supervenience Challenge to Non-Naturalism" in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. D. Plunkett and T. McPherson. (available on Väyrynen's website)

General background reading (recommended, but not required):

Vavova, K. (2015). "Evolutionary Debunking of Moral Realism". *Philosophy Compass* 10, 104-116.
Schechter, J. (forthcoming). "Explanatory Challenges in Metaethics, in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. D. Plunkett and T. McPherson. (available on PhilPapers)
McPherson, T. (2015). "Supervenience in Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/supervenience-ethics/>.