

PHIL 260; Spring 2007
The Normativity of Ethics
David O. Brink
Paper #1

Write a short paper, approximately 6-8 pages, on one of the following topics. (Some of these topics could also be considered for the longer paper. Some might be better suited for a short paper and some might be better suited for a long paper, but most could be adapted (narrowed or expanded) to work for either purpose.) It is possible to write on another topic, if you prefer, but it is necessary to meet with me in advance and to agree on the contours of an alternate topic. This paper is due in class on Wednesday, May 2. (Students wishing to write the longer paper first should consult with me to okay their topic and set up a different timetable.) Students are welcome to consult me on the topics and readings associated with their papers.

1. In "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" C.L. Stevenson articulates an emotivist metaethical theory. What contribution does emotivism make to debates about moral motivation, and how plausible is emotivism? (Relevant readings: Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" and Smith, The Moral Problem, chs. 1-2)
2. In Thinking How to Live Allan Gibbard argues that he can derive various traditional cognitivist and realist marks of objectivity from expressivist resources. He gives an account of the validity of inferences that mix fact and plan and claims that this solves the so-called Frege-Geach problem for noncognitivism. Explain and evaluate the Frege-Geach problem and Gibbard's expressivist solution. (Relevant readings: Geach, "Assertion" and Gibbard, Thinking How to Live, esp. ch.3; Brink, "Review of Gibbard")
3. In "Virtue and Reason" John McDowell defends a cognitive account of moral motivation. Explain his account and assess it as a contribution to debates about moral motivation. (Relevant readings: McDowell, "Virtue and Reason")
4. In The Moral Problem Michael Smith provides a kind of rationalist solution to what he calls the moral problem. Explain and assess Smith's solution. (Relevant readings: Smith, The Moral Problem, esp. chs. 1, 5-6 and Brink, "Moral Motivation")
5. In The Moral Problem Michael Smith rejects externalist solutions to the puzzle about moral motivation. Reconstruct and assess Smith's critique of externalism. (Relevant Readings: Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"; Smith, The Moral Problem, esp. chs. 1 and 3; and Brink, "Moral Motivation")
6. What is the "directions of fit" conception of belief and desire, and how is this conception related to puzzles about moral motivation? How plausible is such a conception? (Relevant readings: Smith, The Moral Problem, chs. 4-5 and Velleman, "The Guise of the Good")
7. There are debates about how, if at all, work in psychiatry and neuroscience dealing with psychopathy, sociopathy, and ventromedial brain damage bears on metaethical debates about moral motivation. Review some of this work, reconstructing and assessing claims about the metaethical implications of some of this empirical work. (Relevant readings: Damasio, Descartes' Error; Shaun Nichols, "How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism, or Is It Irrational to Be Immoral?"; Adina Roskies, "Are Ethical Judgments Intrinsically Motivational? Lessons from Acquired Sociopathy"; Jesse Prinz, "The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments")