Metaethics

Course aims and objectives
This course examines to what extent we can find a place for ethics in a naturalistic, scientific picture of the world. We begin with the topic of moral realism and the arguments for it. We then examine various challenges to the realist view, including challenges from evolutionary theory and neuroscience.

During the course we will address the following questions, among others:
- Do moral judgments express beliefs? If they do, are these beliefs ever true?
- Are there moral facts?
- What implications does evolution have for metaethics?
- What implications does neuroscience have for metaethics?
- Are there any moral explanations of non-moral phenomena? What does this have for the existence of moral facts?

Intended learning outcomes
By the end of this course, students should:
- Have a grasp of fundamental issues and views in metaethics, e.g. moral realism, error theory, expressivism and of some of the implications of evolutionary theory and recent work in neuroscience for metaethics.
- Be able to critically analyse and engage with literature by key philosophers in this field.
- Be able to present arguments clearly and concisely both within a classroom context and in an essay.
- Gain transferable skills in research, analysis and argumentation

Syllabus

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Required readings

Week 1: Introduction to Metaethics
1. Chrisman, M. *What is this thing called Metaethics?* Introduction and Ch 1

Week 2: Nonnaturalist Moral realism
2. Chrisman, M. *What is this thing called Metaethics?* Ch 2
Week 3: **Error Theory**  
2. Chrisman, M. *What is this thing called Metaethics?* Ch 4

Week 4: **Naturalist Moral Realism**  
2. Chrisman, M. *What is this thing called Metaethics?* Ch 5

Week 5: **Expressivism**  
2. Chrisman, M. *What is this thing called Metaethics?* Ch 3

Week 6: **The Supervenience Challenge**  

Week 7: **The explanatory challenge**  

Week 8: **The challenge from evolution**  

Week 9: **The challenge from neuroscience**  

Week 10: **Review**  
This week we will bring together the themes of the course, discuss essay strategies, and anything else you’d like to go over