Metaethics 2020/2021

Georgia O’Keefe ‘From the Lake’ 1924

Course Organiser
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Format
- Recorded videos, available weekly on the Learn site
- There will be weekly synchronous tutorials. You will be automatically added to a tutorial group, details (platform etc) will be on the LEARN page.

Weekly Plan
Each week you should:
- Watch the video lecture
- Read the required reading
- Prepare for the tutorial by filling in the tutorial worksheet (available on the Learn page each week)
- Attend and participate in the tutorial discussion

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’ll examine various challenges to the realist view, including challenges from evolutionary theory.

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

By the end of this course, you should:

☑ Have a grasp of fundamental issues and views in metaethics, e.g. moral realism, error theory, naturalism, expressivism and of some of the implications of evolutionary theory 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

| Week 1  | Introduction to metaethics |
| Week 2  | Nonnaturalist moral realism |
| Week 3  | Error Theory |
| Week 4  | Naturalist moral realism |
| Week 5  | Expressivism |
| Week 6  | Metaethical relativism |
| Week 7  | The challenge from evolution |
| Week 8  | Thick concepts |
| Week 9  | The supervenience challenge |
| Week 10 | The explanatory challenge |
| Week 11 | Review |

Assessment

40% Mid-Term Essay [1500 words]
   Deadline: Midday, Thursday 25th February.

55% Final Essay [2500 words]
   Deadline: Midday, Thursday 15th April

5% Participation: The participation requirement for this course will be met if you attend and participate in the discussion in at least half of the tutorials for this course. If you have an adjustment schedule that impacts on this please get in touch with the course organizer.

Readings

Below you will find a list of the required readings for each week. Supplementary readings will be posted on the Learn site.

General Resources

In addition to the required readings and the supplementary readings there are a number of resources which will be useful throughout the course.

The online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has entries on most of the topics that we will cover. I also recommend the following:


*Metaethics: An Introduction* (2014) by Andrew Fisher

*What is this thing called Metaethics?* (2016) by Matthew Chrisman
**Required readings**

Week 1: **Introduction to Metaethics**  
Chrisman, M. (2016) *What is this thing called Metaethics?* Introduction and Ch 1

Week 2: **Nonnaturalist Moral realism**  

Week 3: **Error Theory**  

Week 4: **Naturalist Moral Realism**  

Week 5: **Expressivism**  
Chrisman, M. (2016) *What is this thing called Metaethics?* Ch 3

Week 6: **Metaethical Relativism**  

Week 7: **The Challenge from Evolution**  

Week 8: **Thick Concepts**  

Week 9: **The Supervenience Challenge**  

Week 10: **The Explanatory Challenge**  

Week 11: **Review**  
This week we will bring together the themes of the course, discuss essay strategies, and anything else you’d like to go over