Phil 10019
META-ETHICS
F11.10-13.00, Dugald Steward Building 3.10

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Office Hrs: Tue, 12-1

Course Description:
Ethics and moral philosophy study how to live and, more narrowly, what is morally right and wrong and why. Metaethics studies the nature of ethical and moral thought, talk, and reality. It thus focuses on questions in metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language and mind pertaining to moral sentences, thoughts, properties and facts, like the following:

- Is moral language representational and are moral thoughts cognitive or are they instead non-representational and non-cognitive?
- If the former, do moral sentences and thoughts represent things as having naturalistically reducible properties or instead irreducible non-natural ones?
- Do moral sentences and thoughts have any truth-makers at all or are they all somehow erroneous? If they do, how do we find out about them?

In this course we will study these questions and get acquainted with the story of 20th century metaethics starting from Moore’s Open Question argument, continuing with the development of non-cognitivism and the advent of error theory, and finishing with contemporary naturalist, reductive, non-naturalist, and hybrid views.

Assignments and Grading:

• Midterm Essay, due 24th of October, 12pm
  - 1500 Words
  - Worth 40% of the final grade

• Final Essay, due 12th of December, 12pm
  - 2500 Words
  - Worth 60% of the final grade

Readings:

• The textbooks for the course will be Matthew Chrisman’s *What is this thing called Metaethics?* (Routledge 2017) and Mark Schroeder’s *Non-Cognitivism in Ethics.* (Routledge 2013).

• Extra introductory material can also be found in Mark van Roojen’s *Metaethics* (Routledge 2015), and the readings marked with * are drawn from David Plunkett’s & Tristram McPherson’s *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (Routledge 2017).

• Required readings for each week are marked in bold and must be read in preparation for the seminar, the other readings are recommended
**Schedule (might be subject to minor changes):**

**W1, 20.09: Introduction to Metaethics**

Chrisman, Introduction & Ch. I  
Schroeder, Ch. I

van Roojen, Ch. 1, Ch. 2.1-2.4  
McPherson & Plunkett “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics”*  
Darwall “Ethics and Morality”*

**W2, 27.09: Moore’s Non-Naturalism and the Open Question Argument**

Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Ch. I  
Chrisman, Ch. 2

van Roojen, Ch. 2.5  
Finlay & Laskowski “Conceptual Analysis in Metaethics”*

**W3, 4.10: The Non-Cognitivist Turn: Emotivism**

Ayer, *Language, Truth, & Logic*, Ch. 6  
Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Ch. 1  
Schroeder, Ch. 2

Stevenson “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms”  
Bedke “Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism”*

**W4, 11.10: The Frege-Geach Problem**

Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Ch. 2  
Geach “assertion”  
Schroeder, Ch. 3

Searle “Meaning and Speech Acts”  
Hare “Meaning and Speech Acts”

**W5, 18.10: From Emotivism to Expressivism**

Schroeder, Ch. 4

Chrisman, Ch. 3  
Schroeder, Ch. 5-8  
van Roojen, Ch. 8  
Camp “Metaethical Expressivism”*  
Woods “The Frege-Geach Problem”*  
Cuneo “Quasi-Realism”*
W6, 25.10: Back to Cognitivism: Error Theory

Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right & Wrong*, Ch. I
Chrisman, Ch. 4

van Roojen, Ch. 5
Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*
Olson “Error Theory in Metaethics”*
Olson, *Moral Error Theory: History, Critique, Defence*, Parts II & III

W7, 1.11: Back to Cognitivism: Varieties of Naturalism

Chrisman, Ch. 5
van Roojen, Ch. I1-I2

Railton “Naturalistic Realism in Metaethics”*
Roberts “Thick Concepts”*
Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Ch. 9

W8, 8.11: Reducing the Normative

Schroeder “Realism and Reduction: The Quest for Robustness”

Finlay, *Confusion of Tongues*
Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*

W9, 15.11: Contemporary Non-Naturalism

Enoch “Non-Naturalist Realism in Metaethics”*

van Roojen, Ch. 13
Väyrynen “The Supervenience Challenge to Non-Naturalism”*
Roberts “Why Believe in Normative Supervenience?”
Vavova “Evolutionary Debunking of Moral Realism”

W10, 22.11: Hybrids of Cognitivism & Non-Cognitivism

Boisvert “Expressive-Assertivism”
Schroeder, Ch. 10

Toppinen “Hybrid Accounts of Ethical Thought and Talk”*
Fletcher “Hybrid Views in Meta-Ethics: Pragmatic Views”
Ridge, *Impassioned Belief*, Ch. 3

W11, 29.11: Is Metaethics Neutral? & Summing Up

Schroeder “Normative Ethics and Metaethics”*
Berker “The Unity of Grounding” (Sections I-3 and 7)