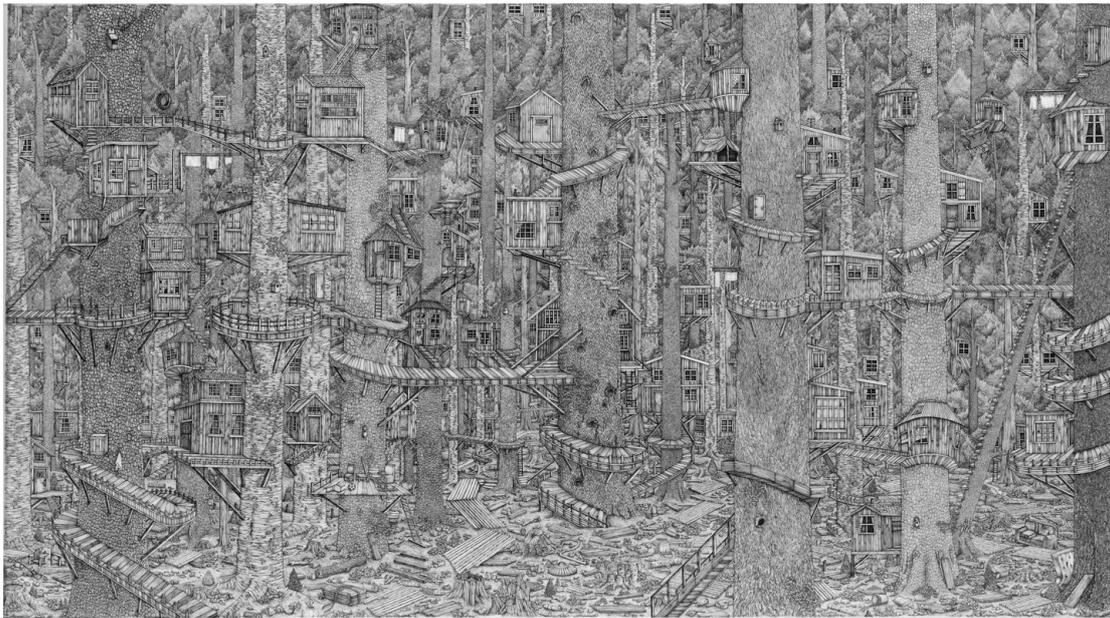


## Metaethics 2021/2022



'Only then, we'll leave the woods' Olivia Kemp

### People

#### Course Organiser

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#### Course Secretary

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### 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 1
Week 5	Naturalist moral realism 2: moral twin earth
Week 6	Expressivism
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, Monday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021

### 60% Final Essay [2500 words]

**Deadline:** Midday, Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2021

## Readings

Below you will find a list of the **required readings** for each week. Supplementary readings will be posted on the Learn site. Readings are all available online through the library, or Google (in the case of e.g. the SEP).

If you would like to do background reading prior to the start of the course I recommend the Chrisman textbook (see below).

## 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.

*What is this thing called Metaethics?* (2016) by Matthew Chrisman – a textbook covering all of the main metaethical theories

The online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has entries on most of the topics that we will cover.

*The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (2007) edited by David Copp

*The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (2017) edited by David Plunkett and Tristram McPherson

## 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

Enoch, D. (2017) 'Non-Naturalist Realism in Metaethics' in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*

### Week 3: Error Theory

Mackie, J.L. (1977) 'The Subjectivity of Values' in his *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* London: Penguin.

### Week 4: Naturalist Moral Realism 1

Sturgeon, N. (2007) *Ethical Naturalism* in David Copp (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, OUP

### Week 5: Naturalist Moral Realism 2: Moral Twin Earth

### Week 6: Expressivism

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

### Week 7: The Challenge from Evolution

Street, S. (2006) 'A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,' *Philosophical Studies* 127: 109-66.

### Week 8: Thick Concepts

Roberts, D. (2018) 'Thick Concepts' in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*

### Week 9: The Supervenience Challenge

McPherson, T. (2012) 'Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience' in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* vol 7

### Week 10: The Explanatory Challenge

Harman, G. (1977) *The Nature of Morality*, New York: Oxford University Press, Ch 1

### 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