

Philosophy 4310: **TWENTIETH-CENTURY METAETHICS** (Fall 2008)
 Tuesdays-Thursdays, 11:30-1:00
 Earth and Planetary Sciences 203

Instructor and Office Hours

Eric Brown
 Wilson 213
 Tuesdays, 4:00-5:00, and by appointment
 eabrown@wustl.edu
 935-4257

Description

Metaethics is the study of how one can and should (or cannot and should not) understand and justify ethical judgments. Here are some examples of ethical judgments, from the clearly moral to what possibly lies outside of ethics: 'It is wrong to torture babies for profit'; 'Setting cats on fire for personal amusement is not to be done'; 'Bill is a pig-headed creep'; 'We don't do that sort of thing, young lady'; 'You shouldn't pass out at your boss' party'; 'It is rude to fart loudly without apologizing'. The following are some metaethical questions we might ask about these judgments. What do they mean? Are they true or false? If they are true or false, in virtue of what? If they are true or false, can knowledge of them be had? How, or why not? If they are not true or false, what status do they have? If they are not true or false, can some of them be justified and others not? How, or why not?

The goal of the course is to explore the answers that have been given to these questions by the most influential writings in metaethics, so that everyone in the course is prepared to explore some problem(s) in metaethics independently.

Requirements

This is a graduate-level course. Attendance is not optional, and participation is expected. To pass the course or to receive a quality grade, one must satisfy the writing requirement and the examination requirement.

The writing requirement may be satisfied in one of two ways.

(A) Two short papers (maximum 2500 words each, excluding notes), one due at **noon on Friday, 10 October**, and the other due at **noon on Friday, 12 December**. The papers should be submitted as e-mail attachments, and they should include a word count.

(B) One longer, research paper (maximum 7500 words, excluding notes), due at **noon on Friday, 12 December**. As a research paper, this is expected to take account of the literature in the field. Anyone wanting to write a longer paper should notify me in writing (email is fine) by Friday, 10 October.

All writing submitted for this class should satisfy the desiderata noted in "Some Guidelines for Writings" distributed in class. The writing requirement is worth 200 points, 100 points each for the short papers of option A or 200 points for the long paper of option B.

The examination will be a short in-class exam at a **time to be announced**. The exam will present a list of a dozen passages from our readings or perhaps just names of concepts and

arguments (e.g., the naturalistic fallacy), and you will be asked to characterize ten of them, by explaining each of the ten and its significance in twentieth-century metaethics. The exam is worth 100 points.

When final grades are assessed, participation will be taken into account for borderline cases.

Books

All of the reading for this course will be available for downloading on-line. Students will have to be able to navigate successfully to three kinds of on-line sources:

- (1) The "e-Journals" at <http://library.wustl.edu> (if you are on campus) or at <http://libproxy.wustl.edu> (if you are not).
- (2) "E-Res" at <http://eres.wustl.edu>, using the password 'Ethics' (exactly what is between the inverted commas).
- (3) Individual websites of some philosophers.

In the syllabus, for every required text, I have indicated whether that text is available in an on-line journal ('e-Journal'), via E-Res ('E-Res'), or at a philosopher's webpage (URL identified).

Some of you might nevertheless like to own a compendium or two of essays in twentieth-century metaethics. The following three very general and outstanding collections include much of metaethical interest:

- Sellars and Hospers, eds. Readings in Ethical Theory. Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952.
- Cahn and Haber, eds. 20th Century Ethical Theory. Prentice-Hall, 1995.
- Shafer-Landau, ed. Ethical Theory. Blackwell, 2007.

Among collections tailored more narrowly for metaethics, the following are the two biggest: Fisher and Kirchin, eds. Arguing About Metaethics. Routledge, 2006.

- Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, eds. Foundations of Ethics. Blackwell, 2007.

Also valuable are:

- Sayre-McCord, ed. Essays on Moral Realism. Cornell, 1988.
- Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton, eds. Moral Discourse and Practice: Some Philosophical Approaches. Oxford, 1997.
- Rachels, ed. Ethical Theory 1: The Question of Objectivity. Oxford, 1998.

Some of you might also want an introductory text or two. I recommend the following:

- S. Darwall, Philosophical Ethics. Westview.
- A. Miller, Introduction to Metaethics. Polity, .

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on-line is also a useful resource, with articles on

- Metaethics (G. Sayre-McCord)
- Practical Reason (R. Jay Wallace)
- Moral Reasoning (H. Richardson)
- Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-cognitivism (M. van Roojen)
- Moral Motivation (C. Rosati)
- Moral Epistemology (R. Campbell)
- Moral Skepticism (W. Sinnott-Armstrong)
- Realism (A. Miller)
- Moral Realism (G. Sayre-McCord)
- Moral Anti-realism (R. Joyce)
- Moral Naturalism (G. Lenman)
- Moral Non-Naturalism (M. Ridge)
- Moral Relativism (C. Gowans)
- Value Theory (M. Schroeder)

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value (M. Zimmerman)

Value Pluralism (E. Mason)

One thing to notice is that the various authors of these articles are not in perfect agreement about how to use the various labels. Be careful.

Syllabus

Introduction (Thurs Aug 28)

UNIT ONE: NONNATURALISM

The Open Question Argument (Tues Sept 2)

Moore, Principia Ethica (Cambridge, 1903; "revised edition" Cambridge, 1993), chp. 1.

(E-Res)

optional: Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," Mind 48 (1939): 464-477. (e-Journal)

Intuitionism (Thurs Sept 4)

Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?," in The Right and the Good (Oxford, 1930), 16-41.

(E-Res)

optional: Strawson, "Ethical Intuitionism," Philosophy 24 (1949). (e-Journal)

Predecessors include Price (A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals [1757]) and Reid (Essays on the Active Powers of Man [1788]).

Fellow-travelers include Moore (Principia Ethica [1903] and "The Conception of Intrinsic Value," reprinted in his Philosophical Studies [1922] and in the "revised edition" of Principia [1993]), Prichard ("Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?," Mind 21 (1912), and Duty and Interest [1928]), and Ewing (Definition of Good [1947]).

Successors include Audi (The Good in the Right [2004]) and recent essays by McNaughton and Rawlings.

UNIT TWO: NON-COGNITIVISM

Emotivism (Tues Sept 9)

Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," Mind 46 (1937): 14-31. (e-Journal)

Stevenson, "The Nature of Ethical Disagreement," in Facts and Values (Yale, 1963). (E-Res)

Predecessors include, in some sense, Hume.

Fellow-travelers included the positivists, including, most influentially, Ayer (in Language, Truth, and Logic). One might compare Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics."

Successors include the expressivists (see below).

Prescriptivism (Thurs Sept 11)

Hare, "A Moral Argument," in Freedom and Reason (Oxford, 89-98). (E-Res)

UNIT THREE: TOWARD ARISTOTELIAN NATURALISM

Toward Aristotelian Naturalism (Tues Sept 16)

Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," Philosophy 33 (1958): 1-19. (e-Journal)

Geach, "Good and Evil," Analysis 17 (1956): 33-42. (e-Journal)

Thick Ethical Concepts (Thurs Sept 18)

- Foot, "Moral Arguments," Mind 67 (1958). (e-Journal)
 Burton, "'Thick' Concepts Revised," Analysis 52 (1992): 28-32. (e-Journal)
 Garrard and McNaughton, "Thick Concepts Revisited," Analysis 53 (1993): 57-58. (e-Journal)
 Burton, "Reply to Garrard and McNaughton," Analysis 53 (1993): 59-61. (e-Journal)

From Is to Ought (Tues Sept 23)

- Anscombe, "On Brute Facts," Analysis 18 (1958). (e-Journal)
 Searle, "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'," Philosophical Review 73 (1964): 43-58. (e-Journal)

Moral Motivation (Thurs Sept 25)

- Foot, "Moral Beliefs," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 59 (1958-1959). (e-Journal)

UNIT FOUR: FROM HUMEANISM TO ANTI-REALISM

Humeanism (Tues Sept 30)

- Williams, "Ethical Consistency," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 39 (1965): 103-124 (e-Journal)

Humeanism and Moral Reasons (Thurs Oct 2)

- Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," Philosophical Review 81 (1972). (e-Journal)
 optional: McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," The Aristotelian Society s.v. 52 (1978): 13-29. (e-Journal)

Anti-Realism: Queer Properties and Disagreement (Tues Oct 7)

- Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," in Ethics (Penguin, 1977), 15-49. (E-Res)
 Predecessors include Nietzsche and Mackie's earlier article, "A Refutation of Morals," Australasian Journal of Philosophy (1946).
 Successors include Joyce, The Myth of Morality (2001). Joyce goes through error theory to fictionalism; for a different route to fictionalism, see Kalderon, Moral Fictionalism (2005).

Anti-Realism: Explanation (Thurs Oct 9)

- Harman, "Ethics and Observation," in The Nature of Morality (Oxford, 1977), 3-10. (E-Res)

UNIT FIVE: NATURALISM

Non-reductive Naturalism, aka "Cornell Realism" (Tues Oct 14)

- Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist," in Essays on Moral Realism, ed. G. Sayre-McCord (Cornell, 1988). (E-Res)

"Cornell Realism" on Disagreement and Queerness (Thurs Oct 16)

- Brink, "Moral Realism and the Sceptical Arguments from Disagreement and Queerness," Australasian Journal of Philosophy 62 (1984): 112-125. (e-Journal)
 Brink expands upon his programmatic suggestions in Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

"Cornell Realism" on Explanation (Tues Oct 21)

Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations," in Morality, Reason and Truth, ed. D. Copp and D. Zimmerman (Rowman & Littlefield, 1985), 49-78; reprinted in Essays on Moral Realism, ed. G. Sayre-McCord (Cornell, 1988), 229-255. (E-Res)

Reductive Naturalism (Thurs Oct 23)

Railton, "Moral Realism," Philosophical Review 95 (1986): 163-207. (e-Journal)
There is a vlog of a debate between Railton and his former student Don Loeb at
<http://bloggingheads.tv/diavlogs/13443>

UNIT SIX: PROBLEMS FOR THE NATURALISTS

Problems with Externalism (Tues Oct 28)

Garner, "On the Genuine Queerness of Moral Properties and Facts," Australasian Journal of Philosophy 68,2 (1990): 137-146. (e-Journal)
Smith, "The Externalist Challenge," chapter 3 of The Moral Problem (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 60-91. (E-Res)

Externalist Reply (Thurs Oct 30)

Svavarsdóttir, "Moral Cognitivism and Motivation," Philosophical Review 108 (1999): 161-219. (e-Journal)
optional: Dreier, "Dispositions and Fetishes: Externalist Models of Moral Motivation," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 61 (2000): 619-638.
optional: Zangwill, "Externalist Moral Motivation," American Philosophical Quarterly 40 (2003): 143-154.

Problems with Supervenience (Tues Nov 4)

Blackburn, "Supervenience Revisited," in Essays in Quasi-Realism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 130-148. Reprinted from Exercises in Analysis, ed. Hacking (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). (E-Res)
Jackson, "The Supervenience of the Ethical on the Descriptive," in Foundations of Ethics, ed. Shafer-Landau and Cuneo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 449-454. Reprinted from his From Metaphysics to Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 118-129.
optional: Dreier, "The supervenience argument against moral realism," Southern Journal of Philosophy 30 (1992): 13-38.

Problems with Moral Semantics (Thurs Nov 6)

Horgan and Timmons, "New Wave Moral Realism Meets Moral Twin Earth," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 16 (1991): 447-465. (e-Journal)
Horgan and Timmons, "Troubles for New Wave Moral Semantics: The Open Question Argument Revived," in Arguing about Metaethics, ed. Fisher and Kirchin (London: Routledge, 2006), 179-199. reprinted from Philosophical Papers 21 (1992): 153-175. (E-Res)
optional: Sayre-McCord, "'Good' on Twin Earth," Philosophical Issues 8 (1997): 267-292.
optional: Copp, "Milk, Honey, and the Good Life on Moral Twin Earth," Synthese 124 (2000): 113-137.
optional: Horgan and Timmons, "Copping Out on Moral Twin Earth," Synthese 124 (2000): 139-152.

UNIT SEVEN: MODERN NON-COGNITIVISMS AND OFFSPRING

Blackburn's Quasi-Realism (Tues Nov 11)

Blackburn, "How to be an Ethical Antirealist," Essays in Quasi-Realism (Oxford, 1993), 166-181. Reprinted from Midwest Studies in Philosophy 12 (1988). (E-Res)

Several of the other essays in Essays in Quasi-Realism helpfully develop Blackburn's view. See also Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), esp. chps. 4-5, and Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

The Frege-Geach Problem, Part One (Thurs Nov 13)

Schueler, "Moral Modus Ponens and Moral Realism," Ethics 98 (1998): 492-500. (e-Journal)

Blackburn, "Attitudes and Contents," Ethics 98 (1998): 501-517. (e-Journal)

The Frege-Geach Problem, Part Two (Tues Nov 18)

Sinnott-Armstrong, "Expressivism and Embedding," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 61 (2000): 677-693. (e-Journal)

Gibbard's Norm-Expressivism (Thurs Nov 20)

Gibbard, "The Reasons of a Living Being," in Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association 62 (2002): 49-60. (E-Res)

Gibbard's address draws on ideas that he develops at length in Wise Choices, Apt Feelings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), and Thinking How to Live (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Horgan and Timmons' Nondescriptivist Cognitivism (Tues Nov 25)

Horgan and Timmons, "Nondescriptivist Cognitivism: Framework for a New Metaethic," in Foundations of Ethics, ed. Shafer-Landau and Cuneo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 58-70. Reprinted from Philosophical Papers 29 (2000): 121-153. (E-Res)

NO CLASS — Thanksgiving (Thurs Nov 27)

UNIT EIGHT: SUBJECTIVISMS

Ideal Observer Theory and Subjectivism (Tues Dec 2)

Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer Theory," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 12 (1952): 317-345. (e-Journal)

Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value," Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 63 (1989): 113-137. (e-Journal)

Relativism (Thurs Dec 4)

Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," Philosophical Review 84 (1975): 3-22. (e-Journal)

Harman, "What is Moral Relativism?," in Values and Morals, ed. A. Goldman and J. Kim (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978), reprinted in his Explaining Value (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000). (E-Res)

optional: Williams, "The Truth in Relativism," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 75 (1974-1975): 215-228. (e-Journal)

Review Session (TBD)

Final Exam (Tues, Dec 16, 1-3 pm)

