

## PHILOSOPHY 338 - Metaethics

**Class meets:** Monday and Thursday 11:30-12:50

**Instructor:** Prof. Colin Macleod

**Office:** CLE B328

**Phone:** 721-7521

**e-mail:** cmacleod@uvic.ca

**Web Page:** <http://web.uvic.ca/~cmacleod/>

**Office Hours:** Monday 1:00am – 3:00 pm and by appointment

### Course Text:

Russ-Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo (eds.), *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishing 2007.

### Some Useful Supplementary Resources

Peter Singer (editor), *A Companion to Ethics*.

S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, Peter Railton (eds.), *Moral Discourse and Practice: Some Philosophical Approaches* (OUP 1997).

Darwall, Gibbard, & Railton, 'Toward Fin de siecle Ethics: Some Trends' in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (January 1992) (Available online via the UVIC Library)

Simon Kirchin, *Metaethics*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) (The entire book is available online via UVIC library.)

<http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>

### Course Outline/Course Objectives

This course examines issues concerning the metaphysical, epistemological, and semantic dimensions of moral discourse. We will explore a variety of metaethical problems theories and the philosophical considerations that motivate them. This will include questions such as: Are moral properties real? Do moral judgements have truth values? Are moral judgements intrinsically motivating? What is a moral reason? In the course of addressing these questions we will consider positions in metaethics such as: non-cognitivism, cognitivism, moral realism, moral anti-realism, naturalism, non-naturalism, constructivism, continuity theories, and non-continuity theories.

### About Colin Macleod

Colin Macleod B.A. (Queens), M.A. (Dalhousie), Ph.D. (Cornell) is a Professor of Philosophy and Law. He has been at University of Victoria since 1998. His research focuses on issues in contemporary moral, political and legal theory with a special focus on the following topics: (1) distributive justice and equality (2) children, families and justice and (3) democratic ethics. He is the author of *Liberalism, Justice, and Markets: A Critique of Liberal Equality* (OUP 1998), co-editor with David Archard of *The Moral and Political Status of Children* (OUP 2002) and co-author with Ben Justice of *Have a Little Faith: Religion, Democracy and the American Public School* (University of Chicago Press 2016). His articles have appeared in journals such as *The Chicago-Kent*

*Law Review, Theory and Research in Education, Politics and Society, The Canadian Journal of Philosophy, The Canadian Journal for Law and Jurisprudence, Law and Philosophy, and Dialogue.* He is an executive editor of the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. He is one of the founders of the Consortium on Democratic Constitutionalism (Demcon) and the Victoria Colloquium in Political, Social and Legal Theory <http://www.uvic.ca/victoria-colloquium/> When he is not engaged in philosophical discussion and argument, he enjoys playing hockey and tennis and strumming his guitar while jamming with his musical friends.

### **Formal Course Requirements**

Written work for the course consists of 1 term paper (approximately 3,000 words in length), 1 midterm exam, 1 final exam and (as many as) 10 quote and comment assignments. The term paper is worth 40% of the course grade, the midterm is worth 20% of the course grade, the final exam is worth 30% of the course grade and the quote and comment assignment is worth 10% of the course grade.

### **Informal Course Expectations**

Although no grade is assigned for participation in class discussion or attendance, I expect students to attend class regularly and to participate actively in class discussion. You should feel free to pose questions and raise philosophical issues related to the material we are studying. I expect students to be attentive to and respectful of the perspectives of others in the class but this does not mean you should not voice disagreement with or criticisms of the philosophical views presented by members of the class. We can all learn a lot from lively exchanges of different points of view so I encourage voice your views in an open and thoughtful manner. You should expect to challenge the views of others and to have your views challenged. If there is material in the course that you find puzzling or difficult to understand please ask me about at an appropriate juncture in class or discuss your questions with me during my office hours.

### **Appropriate Academic Conduct**

Students are expected to understand and abide by the University regulations concerning academic misconduct - e.g., plagiarism, cheating etc. For further information about these matters students can consult the University Calendar. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism or academic misconduct, consult me before submitting an assignment

### **Late assignments/missed tests and Grace Period Policy**

Unless you provide me with a written note that provides a compelling reason (e.g., documented medical problem) for granting an extension or for missing an exam, I will not change the due date of assignments nor will I reschedule exams for you. I will accept, without grade penalty, essays (but no other assignments) that are submitted up to one week after the due date. However, essays that are submitted in this period will not receive any comments. After this grace period unexcused essays will not be accepted. For other information with regards to missing deadlines, etc. please see the UVic University Calendar. Information regarding Religious Observance can be located in the posted Departmental Policies.

## Grading

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definition
90-100	A+	9	<b>Exceptional, outstanding and excellent</b> performance. Normally achieved by a minority of students. These grades indicate a student who is self-initiating, exceeds expectation and has an insightful grasp of the subject matter.
85-89	A	8	
80-84	A-	7	
77-79	B+	6	<b>Very good, good and solid</b> performance. Normally achieved by the largest number of students. These grades indicate a good grasp of the subject matter or excellent grasp in one area balanced with satisfactory grasp in the other area.
73-76	B	5	
70-72	B-	4	
65-69	C+	3	<b>Satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory.</b> These grades indicate a satisfactory performance and knowledge of the subject matter.
60-64	C	2	
50-59	D	1	<b>Satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory.</b> These grades indicate a satisfactory performance and knowledge of the subject matter.
0-49	F	0	<b>Unsatisfactory</b> performance. Wrote final examination and completed course requirements; no supplemental.
0-49	N	0	Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental.

### Important Dates

Term Paper: Due on or before April 5(Grace Period ends April 12)

Quote and Comment Assignments: Throughout the term (maximum 1 per week)

Midterm Exam: Thursday February 8

Final Exam: As Scheduled by the University

## **Reading Schedule**

Note: This is a provisional reading schedule. Some revisions may be made during the course of the term. Unless otherwise noted the readings are from the course text.

### **Week of January 1 - Introduction to Metaethics: The Phenomenology of Moral Judgement**

No required reading assignment. Recommended reading: James Sterba “Understanding Evil: American Slavery, the Holocaust, and the Conquest of the American Indians” in *Ethics* 106, January 1996: 424-448. (Available online via UVIC library.)

### **Week of January 8 – Moral Epistemology**

Norman Daniels, ‘Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics’  
Robert Audi, ‘Intuitionism, Pluralism and the Foundations of Ethics’

### **Week of January 15 -Moral Properties and the Challenge from Error Theorists**

G.E. Moore, ‘The Subject Matter of Ethics’  
J.L. Mackie, ‘The Subjectivity of Ethics’  
Richard Joyce, ‘The Myth of Morality’

### **Week of January 22–Non-Cognitivism I - Emotivism**

A.J. Ayer, ‘Critique of Ethics and Theology’  
C.L. Stevenson, ‘The Nature of Ethical Disagreement’  
David Brink, ‘Moral Disagreement’

### **Week of January 29– – Non-Cognitivism II - Quasi-Realism and Expressivism**

Simon Blackburn, ‘How to be an Ethical Antirealist’  
Alan Gibbard, ‘The Reasons of a Living Being’  
Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, ‘Expressivism and Embedding’

### **Week of February 5 - Practical Reason, Desires and Value**

Philippa Foot, ‘Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives’  
Bernard Williams, ‘Internal Reasons’  
T.M. Scanlon, ‘Williams on Internal and External Reasons’ (CS)  
Christine Korsgaard, ‘Skepticism about Practical Reason’

\*\*\*\* **FEBRUARY 8 MIDTERM** \*\*\*\*

### **Week of February 12 – READING WEEK**

### **Week of February 19 - Naturalist Moral Realism**

Peter Railton, ‘Moral Realism’  
Richard Boyd, ‘How to be a Moral Realist’

### **Week of February 26 – Nonnaturalist Moral Realism**

Jean Hampton, ‘The Authority of Reason’  
Russ Shaffer-Landau, ‘Ethics as Philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Nonnaturalism’

**Week of March 5 – Moral Properties and Moral Explanations**

Gilbert Harman, 'Ethics and Observation'

Nicholas Sturgeon, 'Moral Explanations'

**Week of March 12 –Moral Judgement and Motivation – Externalism vs. Internalism**

Michael Smith, 'The Externalist Challenge'

Nick Zangwill, 'Externalist Moral Motivation'

**Week of March 19 – Constructivism**

Ronald Milo, 'Contractarian Constructivism'

Christine Korsgaard, 'The Authority of Reflection'

**Week of March 26 – Interpretation, Objective Truth and Value**

Ronald Dworkin, 'Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe it' in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol 25, no. 2, Spring 1996 pp. 87-139. (Available online via UVic library).

**Week of April 2 - REVIEW**

**Quote and Comment Assignment Instructions**

Over the course of the term, you may complete as many as 10 quote and comment assignments. However, you may only submit **ONE** quote and comment in any given week of term. Your task is to identify an interesting passage in the assigned readings for the week and offer a clear, concise and thoughtful comment on the passage. Make sure you clearly identify the author and source of the passage you quote. **(YOU MUST CITE AN ACTUAL PASSAGE IN THE TEXT.)** In your remarks, provide a brief explanation of the issue raised in the cited passage and then provide a brief response – e.g., a criticism or comment or constructive question about the point or issue in cited passage. Your remarks should never exceed a single, double-spaced piece of paper. The date, your name, student number and the course number should be clearly indicated at the top left hand side of the page. I will assign full marks to any assignment that reflects a good faith effort to engage the material in a thoughtful way. To receive credit for a quote and comment assignment you must submit your assignment in class. **PLEASE DO NOT ASK TO SUBMIT ASSIGNMENTS LATE OR FOR CLASSES YOU DID NOT ATTEND.**

## Guide To Marginal Notations

? = the significance or relevance of a point is unclear or obscure

^ = missing word(s)

BX = be more explicit; develop the point you are making more fully

C = confusing passage;

CIT = incomplete or incorrect or missing citation

G = garbled; you have not effectively conveyed your point

I = incomplete analysis; you have not adequately explained your point

K = awkward or ungrammatical sentence construction

M = misleading

NA = needs argument; you have not developed your argument sufficiently

O = omit; you could have omitted this chunk of text

PT = poor thesis statement

QL = quoted passage is unnecessarily long

RF = ambiguous or unclear referent

RS = run on sentence

SE = supporting evidence is needed to substantiate a claim

TI = tense inconsistency; you have switched tenses in a confusing fashion

U = sentence or phrase does not clearly communicate your point

VA = vague

W = poor or incorrect choice of word