PHILOSOPHY 338 - Metaethics

Class meets: Monday and Thursday 11:30-12:50
Instructor: Prof. Colin Macleod
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Web Page: http://web.uvic.ca/~cmacleod/
Office Hours: Monday 1:00am – 3:00 pm and by appointment

Course Text:

Some Useful Supplementary Resources
Peter Singer (editor), A Companion to Ethics.
Simon Kirchin, Metaethics, (Palgrave McMillan, 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 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
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 you to 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 it 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

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<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Grade Point</th>
<th>Grade Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Exceptional, outstanding and excellent 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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Very good, good and solid 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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory. These grades indicate a satisfactory performance and knowledge of the subject matter.</td>
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<td>60-64</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>50-59</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory. These grades indicate a satisfactory performance and knowledge of the subject matter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>0-49</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory performance. Wrote final examination and completed course requirements; no supplemental.</td>
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<td>0-49</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental.</td>
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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

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

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