

Philosophy 296b
Metaethical Themes
Spring 2022
Seminar Room 70 S. Williams
M W 3:30-4:45
Prof. Terence Cuneo

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I. Texts

Course packet (available at bookstore)
Electronic copies of material (posted on Teams)

II. Course Description

This course explores central questions in the foundations of ethics or ‘metaethics.’ Among these questions are: Are there any moral facts or truths? If so, what are they like? Would they give us strong reasons to act? How would we know them, were any to exist? These are fairly abstract questions. Yet their answers can often shape many of our substantive ethical views about what is right and wrong, whether to act as morality says, who is responsible, and so forth.

This class focuses on the view that’s commonly called ‘moral realism.’ Roughly, realism asserts that there are objective moral facts that are authoritative. We explore two interrelated worries about realism. The first states that realism can’t make sense of why there are strong, categorical moral reasons to act. The second is that realism can’t make sense of moral knowledge. We explore prominent articulations of these concerns and how realists might respond.

III. Format of the Course

This is a small(ish) seminar. It will primarily involve me presenting some material and us discussing it together.

IV. Goals

By the end of the term, I’d like you to:

1. Be conversant with central positions, dialectics, and arguments in metaethics.
2. Be able to evaluate how compelling some of those views and arguments are.
3. Understand some sophisticated philosophical terminology such as ‘moral realism,’ ‘hypothetical reason,’ ‘stance-independence,’ etc.
4. Be competent at discerning arguments in texts.
5. Be competent at writing clearly, precisely, and concisely.
6. Compose essays that accurately present the material and push the discussion forward, albeit in modest ways.

V. Requirements & Expectations

A. You will have two writing assignments of 5-7 pages. I’ll distribute prompts and announce the dates on which they’re due. Expect the first to be due a little before midway through the semester.

- B. You'll have four short writing assignments (one page). They will be graded pass/fail.
 - C. There will be a final exam. We'll talk about what format you'd like to have (e.g., take-home, in-class, oral exam)
 - D. You must attend class. If you miss up to two weeks' worth of class, I reserve the right not to pass you.
 - E. We remain in a pandemic, so university life is not business as usual. If you expect to miss class, please let me know in advance. If you fail to complete a reading assignment for class, let me know in advance. If you need an extension, ask beforehand.
 - F. You're responsible for knowing the material on the Expectations & Requirement handout
- You must hand in all the assignments in order to pass this class. The distribution is: Papers (70%), final exam (30%)

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A	94-100%
A-	90-93%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-79%
C	74-76%
C-	70-73%
D+	67-69%
D	60-66%
F	0-59%

The **final exam** is: May 10th.

VI. Plagiarism

Be aware of the university's rules regarding plagiarism and cheating. The penalty for committing plagiarism may include receiving a grade of "failure" for the course, so please take the university's code of conduct very seriously in preparing your work.

VII. Reading Schedule (this is subject to change)

Block 1: Moral Realism and a challenge

J. Bengson, T. Cuneo, R. Shafer-Landau, "Moral Realism"

C. Korsgaard, Prologue and Introduction to *The Sources of Normativity*

Block 2: Reasons

P. Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"

R. Joyce, excerpts from *The Myth of Morality*

K. Manne, "Internalism about Reasons: Sad but True?"

C. Korsgaard, excerpt from *The Sources of Normativity*

D. Parfit, excerpt from *On What Matters*

R. Shafer-Landau, "A Defence of Categorical Reasons"

Block 3: Epistemology

S. Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value"

D. Enoch, "The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism: How to Understand it and How Best to Cope with it."

W. FitzPatrick, "Debunking Evolutionary Debunking of Ethical Realism"

D. Locke, "Darwinian Normative Skepticism."