

## Meta-Ethics (Phil. 399): Spring 2012

**Instructor:** Dr. Arash Naraghi

**Visiting Instructor:** Dr. Bernie Cantens

**Office location:** Comenius 106

**Email:** [anaraghi@moravian.edu](mailto:anaraghi@moravian.edu)

**Phone:** (610) 625-7835

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 10 am-11am, Wednesday 4pm-5pm and by appointment.

**Lectures:** MW 11:45am- 12:55pm, Main St. Campus, Priscilla Payne Hurd Academic Complex, 103.

### **Course Description:**

Meta-Ethics consists of philosophical questions about ethics. More precisely, it is a branch of moral philosophy that studies the fundamental concepts of morality from metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological perspectives. We explore a broad range of questions. In this course, we mainly focus on two following major questions of Metaethics: (1) In what can the truth of an ethical conviction consist? And (2) If nothing can make an ethical conviction literally true, then why do we think and talk as though they can be?

The course is designed in two parts:

In the first part, I explore different philosophical attempts to answer the above questions. We mainly focus on (1) Expressivism; (2) Constructivism; (3) Moral Error Theories; (4) Sensibility Theories; (5) Theological Voluntarism; and (6) Moral Realism. All these theories concern about what we might call, "Moral Ontology".

In the second part, in addition to Moral Ontology, we briefly discuss more specific problems in Metaethics, such as questions regarding, Moral Reasons, Moral Disagreement, and Moral Knowledge, and we end our course by exploring the idea of Moral Luck. Students are mainly responsible to present the topics of the second part in the class.

### **Course Objectives:**

- To develop a substantial understanding of different views on the nature of ethics.
- To develop skills of analyzing and evaluating arguments for and against different views on the problems at hand vigorously, fairly, and with sympathy.
- To exercise scholarly fairness, sympathy, and tolerance toward different conflicting views, and expand our intellectual horizon.
- To diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes our mind against speculation.
- To enrich our intellectual imagination.
- To learn how to think and write explicitly, clearly, and succinctly.
- To think creatively, and to be able to imagine alternatives to familiar view and situations.
- To improve our understanding of the complexities of the problem, and the rationale behind different position has been taken on in this field.

### **Required Text:**

*Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, edited by Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo, Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

(Some additional articles will be posted on Blackboard throughout the course.)

This book is available at Moravian College Book Store.

**Note:** You will find that you get the most out of the course if you read each assignment before lecture and then re-read the assignment after the lecture.

**Lecture attendance:**

It is not possible to perform well in the course without attending lectures regularly. We will cover substantial amounts of material in the lectures not necessarily included anywhere in the readings. It is highly unlikely that you will learn this material adequately by, e.g., borrowing your friend's lecture notes. You have two class sessions you can miss with no question asked. Beyond those two class sessions, any further missed classes without a really good excuse (involving a note from your doctor, psychiatrist, parole officer, etc.) will cost you 2% of your final grade.

**Important Note:** Please turn off your cell phones before walking into class! If you are having an emergency that requires you to have your cell phone on, please tell me at the beginning of class. No text messaging is allowed during the class, and the use of computers should be strictly confined to the things directly related to the class.

**Academic honesty:**

Students are required to honor academic integrity. The course imposes the application of Moravian College's Academic Honesty Policy. The policy is to be found at Moravian College's *Student Handbook*.

**Course requirements:**

- (1) A regular final exam, scheduled for **Wednesday, May 2, 2012, 1:30PM**. You will receive a Study Guide for the Final Exam prior to the exam to know what kind of questions you should expect on the Final. Make up final exam will be administered only under the most extraordinary of circumstances, and only in light of appropriate supporting documents.
- (2) One paper (1500- 2000 words). On February 24, 2012, you will receive the paper topic on Blackboard. The paper due is **Monday March 12, 2012**. Paper should be typed, double spaced, and spell-checked. You are responsible to submit a hard copy of your paper. In some exceptional cases, you may be allowed to submit your paper through email. If so, you must receive a confirmation email from me, otherwise, you must assume that I have not received your paper. If the paper is turned in late without prior permission, the grade will be adjusted downwards by a third of a grade for each day the paper is late (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc.). It is always helpful to discuss the draft of your paper with your friends, roommates, or classmates so as to solicit feedback.
- (3) You will be required to write weekly short paragraphs (not more than two pages) consist of your critical evaluation of the material to be discussed in the class. In the paragraphs, you should concentrate on a specific concept, theme or question. You are required to complete 10 assignments of this sort by the end of the semester, that is, you have the option of choosing 10 out of roughly 12 assignments I am to assign throughout the semester. Every week, by the end of our Wednesday class, the assignments should be submitted. (There would be no assignment due on Wednesday January 18.)
- (4) Starting March 26, 2012, you would be divided into four groups, and each group is required to present and discuss one of the major problems in Metaethics, as indicated in the "Tentative Lecture Schedule", PART TWO. The details would be announced in the class and on the Blackboard.

**Important note:** *By the end of the semester, all four above-mentioned requirements (midterm exam, final exam, weekly assignments, paper, and class presentation) must be*

*completed in order to pass the course. In other words, if you miss at least one of the above requirements, we will fail the course automatically.*

**Grading:**

Final Exam: 30% - Term Paper: 25% - Weekly assignments: 25%- Class Presentation: 20%.

The grading scale is as follows:

Points	Grade	4-point conversion
95-100	A	4
90-95	A-	3.7
87-90	B+	3.3
84-87	B	3
80-84	B-	2.7
77-80	C+	2.3
74-77	C	2
70-74	C-	1.7
67-70	D+	1.3
64-67	D	1
60-64	D-	0.7
0-60	F	0

## **Tentative Lecture Schedule:**

### **PART ONE:**

**I. Preliminary Remarks:** January 16, 18.

**(1) What is Metaethics?**

**(2) Major Questions and View in Metaethics: An Overview**

**II. Moore's Attack on Ethical Naturalism:** January 23, 25.

**(1) The Naturalistic Fallacy and the Classical Open-Question Argument.**

**(2) Moore's Moral Intuitionism**

**Reading:**

G. E. Moore, "The Subject-Matter of Ethics", pp. 465-473.

**III. Expressivism:**

**(1) Ayer's Emotivism.** January 30, February 1.

**Reading:**

A. J. Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology", pp. 40-45.

**(2) Blackburn's Quasi-Realism.** February 6, 8.

**Reading:**

Simon Blackburn, "How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist", pp. 47-57.

**(3) Gibbard's Norm-Expressivism.** February 13, 15.

**Reading:**

Allan Gibbard, "The Reasons of a Living Being", pp. 71-78.

**IV. Moral Error Theories:**

**(1) Mackie's Error Theory and the Argument from Queerness.** Feb. 20, 22.

**Reading:**

John Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values", pp. 13-22.

*\* On Feb. 24<sup>th</sup>, the term paper topic will be posted on Blackboard.*

**V. Sensibility Theories:**

**(1) McDowell's Moral (Non-Naturalist) Realism.** February 27, 29.

**Reading:**

John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities", pp.137-144.

**VI. Theological Voluntarism:**

**(1) Audi's Divine Command Morality.** March 12, 14.

**Reading:**

Robert Audi, "Divine Command Morality and the Autonomy of Ethics", *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 24, No. 2 April 2007. (The article will be posted on Blackboard.)

*\* The Paper Due is on Monday March 12.*

**VII. Moral (Naturalist) Realism:**

**(1) Reductionist Theories: Railton.** March 19, 21.

**Reading:**

Peter Railton, "Moral Realism", pp. 186-205.

**(2) Non-reductionist Theories: Sturgeon.** March 26, 28.

**Reading:**

Nicholas L. Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations", pp. 337-352.

**PART TWO**  
**(Students' Presentations)**

**I. Moral Reasons:** April 2, 4.

**Reading:**

- (1) Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", pp. 292-298.
- (2) Russ Shafer-Landau, "Moral Reasons", pp. 312-327.

**II. Moral Disagreement:** April 9, 11.

**Reading:**

- (1) Charles L. Stevenson, "The Nature of Ethical Disagreement", pp. 371-375.
- (2) David Brink, "Moral Disagreement", pp. 376-382.

**III. Moral Knowledge:** April 16, 18.

**Reading:**

- (1) Robert Audi, "Intuitionism, Pluralism, and the Foundations of Ethics", pp. 402-419.
- (2) Margaret Olivia Little, "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology", pp. 420-432.

**IV. Moral Luck:** April 23, 25.

**Reading:**

- (1) Bernard Williams, "Moral Luck", from his book, *Moral Luck*, pp. 20-39. (This article will be posted on Blackboard.)
- (2) Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck", from his book, *Mortal Questions*, pp. 25-38. (This chapter will be posted on Blackboard.)

**Study Guide for the Final will be posted on Blackboard on April 26.**

**The Final Exam will be held on Wednesday, May 2, 2012, 1:30PM, Main St. Campus, Priscilla Payne Hurd Academic Complex, 103.**

**Important Note:**

- Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510).
- The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392. The Writing Center tutors will make arrangements with the student who needs tutoring services to meet in an accessible location, such as the library or a study/conference room in PPHAC.