

## PROVISIONAL COURSE OUTLINE

### Phil 434: Metaethics

Winter 2021, McGill University

**Spatiotemporal location:** M/W 10:05-11:25 am over Zoom (live meetings)

**Professor:** Stephanie Leary ([stephanie.leary@mcgill.ca](mailto:stephanie.leary@mcgill.ca))

**\*Prerequisite:** PHIL 334 or permission from the instructor.

### Course Overview

Metaethics is a branch of philosophical inquiry into the nature of our moral thought and talk and how moral “reality” (i.e. whatever that thought and talk is *about*) fits into the rest of reality. So, it’s an area where questions in philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and epistemology all converge onto a common subject matter: morality. For example, here are some of the questions we will engage with in this course:

- (1) *Philosophy of language & mind questions:* Are moral claims best understood as expressing *beliefs* about the way the world is, which can be true or false, or are moral claims simply expressions of pro or con attitudes that can’t be true or false? If they are statements of belief, is their truth-value always relative to some individual or group? Does having a sincere moral judgment require having some corresponding motivation to act?
- (2) *Metaphysical questions:* Does reality contain moral facts and properties? If so, what are they like – are they like the sorts of facts and properties investigated by the sciences, or are they entirely different in kind? Do moral facts depend on features of our psychologies?
- (3) *Epistemological questions:* If there are moral facts, how do we know them? How can we take ourselves to know anything about moral matters, given that there is rampant moral disagreement? Does the fact that evolution played a role in shaping our moral judgments imply that we should be skeptical of them?

### Course Goals

The primary goal of this course is to develop the sorts of thinking, writing, and conversation skills that are essential to doing philosophy: (i) the ability to read and understand difficult philosophical texts, (ii) critical thinking and problem solving skills, (iii) the ability to reconstruct philosophical views and arguments in a clear and logical way, and (iv) the ability to clearly articulate and defend your own ideas in both writing and conversation.

### Method of Instruction

This course is very discussion oriented and will thus be taught through live Zoom meetings during the regularly scheduled class time. (There will be no pre-recorded lecture videos for this course.) Before each meeting, there will be a discussion guide made available on myCourses that students should download (and print, if possible) so that they can consult it throughout the meeting. In order to promote a free discussion amongst students, these live Zoom meetings will not be recorded.

**Assignments and Grades**

All assignments for this course will be take-home writing assignments, which students will be given ample time to complete. There are no exams and there will be no attendance and participation grade, but regular attendance and participation is strongly encouraged and will be crucial for succeeding in the course.

**Course Materials**

All the readings for this course will be made available online through myCourses. There's no textbook for this course.

**Language Policy**

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit any written work that is to be graded in English or in French.

**Academic Integrity Policy**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).