

## Ethics Reading List With a Speciality in Metaethics

The purpose of this list is to inform a graduate student contemplating focusing on metaethics as a major or minor area for his or her comprehensive examinations of some basic reading relevant to the subject. A student may use this information for one or more of two purposes: To decide whether to take a comprehensive exam in this area, and if so, to get started early on reading central texts in preparation for a comprehensive exam in this area. Item C below explains the options students have in filling out their reading list.

The core readings for the *major exam* in metaethics are organized into **A. Historical Sources & Perspectives** and **B. Metaethical Theories**. Core readings for the *minor exam* in this area include the readings under **A** plus the starred readings in **B**. Instructions for filling out the reading list with select readings is explained below under **C. Topics in Metaethics**.

Students who wish to take either a major or a minor exam in this area are strongly encouraged to contact one or more members of the area committee for advice about the area's readings and exam.

### A. Historical Sources & Perspectives

Plato, *Euthydemus* 278-282, 288-293; *Apology*, *Gorgias*, *Republic* 1--9, *Philebus*.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Hume, *Treatise* Book II, part 3, sect. 1-3; Book III, part 1, sect. 1-2; part 2, sect. 1-2; part 3, sect. 1 and 6; *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*; *Metaphysics of Morals*, part 2 (Doctrine of Virtue); *Critique of Practical Reason*, Book II, chaps. 1-2.

J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*.

H. Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics* Book I, chap. 1; Book IV; Concluding chapter.

Elizabeth Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Theory', *Philosophy* 33 (1958).

Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Why is the Search for the Foundations of Ethics so Frustrating?' *Hastings Center Report* (1979).

J. B. Scheewind, 'No Discipline, No History', Donald R. Kelley (ed.), *History of the Disciplines* (U. of Rochester Press, 1997).

### B. Metaethical Theories

#### Moral Realism

\*G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica Principia Ethica* revised edition (CUP, 1903/1993), chap. 1.

\*W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (OUP, 1930), chaps. 1-2

\*Peter Railton, 'Moral Realism', *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986).

\*Peter Railton, 'Naturalism and Prescriptivity', *Social Philosophy and Policy* (1989).

\*Russ Shafer-Landau, 'Ethics as Philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Nonnaturalism' in T. Horgan and M. Timmons, *Metaethics After Moore* (OUP, 2006).

#### Sensibility Theories

John McDowell, 'Values and Secondary Qualities' reprinted in J. McDowell, *Mind, Value and Reality* (CUP, 1998).  
David Wiggins, 'A Sensible Subjectivism?' in *Needs, Values, Truth*, (Blackwell, 1987).

### **Constructivism**

- \*Gilbert Harman, 'Moral Relativism Defended', *Philosophical Review* 85 (1975).
- \*John Rawls, 'Kantian Constructivism in Ethics' selections in S. Darwall, A. Gibbard and P. Railton (eds), *Moral Discourse and Practice* (OUP, 1997).
- Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (CUP, 1996), 91-4, 96-108, 112-126, 128-30.
- \*Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism* (OUP, 2004), chap. 2.

### **Non-Cognitivism/Expressivism**

- \*C. L. Stevenson, 'The Emotive Theory of Ethical Terms', *Mind* 47 (1937).
- \*Alan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Harvard UP, 1990), Part I (chs. 1-5), Part III (chs. 8-9). and Part IV (chs. 14-17).
- \*Simon Blackburn, 'How to be an Ethical Anti-Realist' in S. Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (OUP, 1993).
- Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, 'Cognitivist Expressivism' in Horgan and Timmons (eds.), *Metaethics after Moore* (OUP, 2006).
- \*Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism* (OUP, 2004), chap. 1.

### **Error Theory**

- \*J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, (Penguin, 1977), chap. 1.

**Note:** A number of philosophers have recently defended "moral fictionalism," a view with affinities to the error theory. We have not required any reading on fictionalism for the major exam but recommend that students who plan to work in metaethics familiarize themselves with the position. See, e.g., Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (CUP 2001); Mark Kalderon, *Moral Fictionalism* (OUP 2005).

## **C. Topics in Metaethics**

Students taking metaethics as a major field are allowed to fill out their reading list by either selecting two of the following topics or by selecting one of the following topics and adding two or three readings to that topic in consultation with the metaethics exam committee. For the minor exam, students may fill out their reading list by selecting one of the following topics.

### **I. Moral Motivation**

1. Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Blackwell, 1994), pp. 60-76, 85-91.
2. Nick Zangwill, 'Externalist Moral Motivation' (*American Philosophical Quarterly* 40, 2003), pp. 143-154.
3. Margaret Little, 'Virtue as Knowledge' (*Nous* 31, 1997), pp. 59-77, 79.
4. Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality* (OUP, 2001), pp. 98-116, 126-137.

### **II. Moral Reasons**

1. Philippa Foot, 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' (*Philosophical Review* 81, 1972), pp. 305-316.
2. Bernard Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons' in Ross Harrison, (ed.), *Rational Action* (CUP, 1979), pp. 17-28.
3. Christine Korsgaard, 'Skepticism about Practical Reason' (*Journal of Philosophy* 83, 1986), pp. 5-25.
4. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (OUP, 2003), pp. 176-188, 192-203, 209-213.

### III. Moral Explanations

1. Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (OUP, 1977), pp. 3-10.
2. Nicholas Sturgeon, 'Moral Explanations' in David Copp and David Zimmerman, (eds.), *Morality, Reason and Truth* (Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), pp. 49-75.

### IV. Moral Disagreement

1. Charles Leslie Stevenson, 'The Nature of Ethical Disagreement' in his *Facts and Values* (Yale UP, 1963), pp. 1-9.
2. David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (CUP, 1989), pp. 198-209.

### V. Moral Epistemology

1. Norman Daniels, 'Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics' (*Journal of Philosophy* 76, 1979), pp. 256-282.
2. Robert Audi, *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character* (OUP, 1997), pp. 32-51, 55-8.
3. Margaret Little, 'Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology' (*Hypatia* 10, 1995), pp. 117-137.

### VI. Supervenience

1. Simon Blackburn, 'Supervenience Revisited' in Ian Hacking, ed. *Exercises in Analysis* (CUP, 1985), pp. 47-67.
2. Frank Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics* (OUP, 1998), pp. 118-129.

### VII. Semantic Puzzles

1. George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica* revised edition (CUP, 1903/1993), pp. 53-55, 57-72.
2. Simon Blackburn, 'Attitudes and Contents' (*Ethics* vol. 98, 1988), pp. 501-517.
3. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, 'Expressivism and Embedding' (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61, 2000), pp. 677-693.
4. Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons, 'New Wave Moral Realism Meets Moral Twin Earth' (*Journal of Philosophical Research* 16, 1991), pp. 447-465.

**Recommended Background Reading:** The following works provide broad overviews of metaethics which you may find helpful.

David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (CUP, 1989)

Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward fin de siecle Ethics,"  
*Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 115-189 and reprinted in *Moral Discourse and Practice*,  
Darwall, Gibbard, Railton eds. (OUP 1997).  
Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (OUP, 2003)  
Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Blackwell, 1994)  
Mark Timmons, *Morality without Foundations* (OUP, 1999)

Three recent dedicated metaethics anthologies (in chronological order) Many of the above items can be found in one or other of these books which also include many other important articles and excerpts that students are encouraged to read.

S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, P. Railton eds. *Moral Discourse and Practice* (OUP 1997)  
A. Fisher and S. Kirchin eds., *Arguing about Metaethics* (Routledge, 2006)  
R. Shafer-Landau and T. Cuneo eds. *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, (Blackwell, 2007)

Also notable is J. Dreier, ed., *Contemporary Debates in Ethical Theory* (Blackwell, 2006) which includes chapters covering a range of core topics in metaethics as well as normative moral theory. The essays in this book were commissioned and each chapter features an pro and a con essay (by a prominent contemporary figure) on whatever topic is featured.

For an extensive and up-to-date list of readings in metaethics, we encourage you to consult Jimmy Lenman's Metaethics Bibliography:  
<http://www.lenmanethicsbibliography.group.shef.ac.uk/Bib.htm>