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

B. Metaethical Theories

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

**Sensibility Theories**

Constructivism
*Shafer-Landau, Moral Realism (OUP, 2004), chap. 2.

Non-Cognitivism/Expressivism
*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).

Error Theory

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

II. Moral Reasons

**III. Moral Explanations**

**IV. Moral Disagreement**

**V. Moral Epistemology**

**VI. Supervenience**

**VII. Semantic Puzzles**

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


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.


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