

## Key Topics in Recent Meta-Ethics

**Lecturer:** Mr. Farbod Akhlaghi-Ghaffarokh

**Time:** Wednesday Weeks 5-8, 11AM-12PM, Hilary Term 2020

**Location:** Lecture Room, Radcliffe Humanities Building, Faculty of Philosophy

### Lecture Series Outline:

These lectures will cover recent work on four key topics in meta-ethics within a lecture each: moral supervenience, companions-in-guilt arguments, the problem of creeping minimalism, and so-called relaxed/quietist moral realism. The lectures aim to help students taking FHS *Ethics* by covering in detail some recent work on meta-ethical topics on the Reading List (e.g. The Metaphysics of Ethics, and Value and Normativity). But no knowledge of the topics will be presumed, those taking *Knowledge and Reality* may benefit from the lectures, and anyone interested is warmly encouraged to attend.

### Lecture 1: Moral Supervenience

The assumption that morality supervenes on the non-moral is ubiquitous, with Gideon Rosen calling it the 'least controversial' thesis in meta-ethics. But there is surprisingly little discussion of whether this thesis is plausible. And some recent work has cast doubt upon moral supervenience itself and, in turn, arguments that rely upon it. This lecture will address such recent work and ask: what is moral supervenience? Should we accept or reject moral supervenience? What, if anything, follows from the truth or falsity of moral supervenience? And, if we think some form of moral supervenience holds, with what kind of necessity does it hold?

Background Reading:

McPherson, Tristram. (2019). 'Supervenience in Ethics'. *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Ethics*: §§1-2 & 5

Rosen, Gideon. (Forthcoming). 'What is Normative Necessity?'. In *Metaphysics, Meaning, and Modality: Themes from Kit Fine*, edited by Mircea Dumitru, Oxford: Oxford University Press (Accessible here: [https://www.academia.edu/9159728/Normative\\_Necessity](https://www.academia.edu/9159728/Normative_Necessity))

### Lecture 2: Companions-in-Guilt Arguments in Meta-Ethics

Companions-in-guilt arguments in meta-ethics have recently received significant attention. These arguments raise questions regarding both whether various meta-ethical arguments overreach and, relatedly where appealed to, the relationship between ethics and epistemology, aesthetics, the prudential, and mathematics. This lecture will introduce these arguments and ask: what are companions-in-guilt arguments, what different versions of these arguments are there, how should we assess their success, and are any successful in showing that certain arguments in meta-ethics (such as those for the moral error theory) overreach?

Background Reading:

Cowie, Christopher. (2018). 'Companion-in-Guilt Arguments'. *Philosophy Compass* 13 (11): 1-11

Cowie, Christopher. (2015). 'Good News for Moral Error Theorists: A Master Argument against Companions in Guilt Strategies'. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94 (1): 115-130

### **Lecture 3: The Problem of Creeping Minimalism**

The problem of creeping minimalism is commonly understood to threaten traditional distinctions between seemingly competing theories in meta-ethics (and, if Jamie Dreier is correct, perhaps between realist and anti-realist theories more generally). This lecture will ask: what is the problem of creeping minimalism, why is it taken to threaten much meta-ethical debate, who is it supposed to be a problem for, and are any of the proposed solutions to it from Dreier and others successful? We will also ask whether theorists who have addressed the problem of creeping minimalism have been too quick to think that it is a problem in the first place.

Background Reading:

Dreier, Jamie. (2004). 'Meta-ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism'. *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (1): 23-44

Dreier, Jamie. (2018). 'The Real and the Quasi-Real: Problems of Distinction'. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 48 (3-4): 532-547

### **Lecture 4: Moral Realism: Relaxed or Robust?**

The dispute between so-called 'Relaxed/Quietist' and 'Robust' moral realists challenges a number of fundamental assumptions in meta-ethics, including how to understand and to evaluate theories about the metaphysics of morality. The debate is only beginning to receive sustained attention. This lecture will introduce these views and ask: what does the distinction between these theories amount to, what do relaxed/quietist views aim to show, do relaxed/quietist views collapse into other familiar theories, why should we care about this debate, and – focusing on the views of Tim Scanlon, Derek Parfit, Ronald Dworkin, and Matthew Kramer – are any such relaxed/quietist views successful?

Background Reading:

Kremm, Douglas. & Schafer, Karl. (2017). 'Metaethical Quietism'. In *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, edited by Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett, London: Routledge, pp. 643-658

McPherson, Tristram. (2013). 'Quietism'. In *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, edited by Hugh LaFollette, Accessed Online, pp. 1-5 (Accessible here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444367072.wbiee802>)