

## Phil 670 – METAPHYSICS AND NORMATIVITY (Contemporary Analytic Philosophy)

**Spatiotemporal location:** Wednesdays, 11:35am-2:25pm LEA 517

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

**Office hours:** Mondays, 12:30-2:30pm in LEA 942 (or by individual appointment over Zoom). You can drop by or reserve a time slot on the sign-up sheet (priority will go to reservations):

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Qm5cE26rY5dcyNvE4f4p4UeIOYmQEHsqUuq-7jITPE/edit?usp=sharing>

**Course Description:** This course will examine certain ideology in metaphysics—grounding, essence, and naturalness—and its applications in ethics and metaethics. First, we'll investigate what each of these notions each amount to, to what extent they're related, and how they're useful for metaphysical theorizing (if at all). Then, we'll investigate which of these notions (if any) are central to debates in ethics and metaethics: for example, are first-order debates in ethics about what metaphysically grounds normative facts, is the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate in metaethics about grounding, essence, or naturalness, and are any of these notions central to understanding what moral realism amounts to? The hope is that getting clearer about what metaphysical claims are at stake in these debates can help us see what it takes to make progress in those debates. And students are encouraged to think about how this metaphysical ideology might be relevant to and help move forward other philosophical debates that they're interested in.

**Learning Goals:** The primary learning goal of this course is to help students develop their philosophical skills to a graduate-level proficiency. These skills include: (i) the ability to read and understand difficult philosophical texts, (ii) the ability to reconstruct and critically evaluate philosophical views and arguments in a clear and precise way, and (iv) the ability to generate your own philosophical ideas and clearly articulate and defend them in both writing and conversation. The secondary learning goal of this course is to develop certain skills that are crucial for doing professional philosophy: providing constructive feedback on others' work and revising your own work in response to feedback.

### Requirements and Grades:

- (1) **In-class Participation (10%):** The success of our seminar depends on everyone participating in an active and respectful discussion. You are expected to attend class, complete the required readings beforehand, and come prepared with questions or comments.
- (2) **Reading responses (10%):** Over the course of the semester, you must submit 4 reading responses (3-400 words each). These should be submitted via myCourses by 11:59 pm the night before class and should involve some sort of reflection about the material—this may involve a brief discussion of a clarificatory question you have about the reading that you think is important to address, drawing connections between this week's topic and other topics we've discussed in prior classes, or a critical comment or objection that you have about some argument in the reading, etc.

- (3) **Term paper proposal (20%):** You will submit a 2,000-word term paper proposal (through myCourses) that will include a brief introduction to the topic of your paper, an outline of your main argument and the philosophical dialectic you plan to include, as well as a reading list. A “guide-sheet” for the term paper proposals is available on myCourses so you know exactly what all to include in the proposal. I’m happy to talk to you about your topic in office hours, give you reading suggestions, etc. If you email me and don’t get a response within 2 workdays, please email again! You are never bothering me by asking for help—*it’s literally my job!*
- (4) **Comments on a peer’s term paper (10%):** You’ll be paired up with another student to swap rough drafts of your term papers. You will email your partner (and CC me!) your rough draft and then email your partner a mock “referee report” with comments about their draft (and CC me again!). Your report should very briefly summarize the paper and identify its strengths in the first paragraph and then develop a few main critical points that you think would be helpful for the author to address to improve the paper. (Sample referee reports are on myCourses to serve as a guide.)
- (5) **Final term paper with revision letter (50%):** Your final term paper should be 5,000-7,000 words and submitted through myCourses. Along with your term paper, you must include a short mock “letter to the editor” that explains what changes you made to your paper in light of your peer’s comments or why you decided not to make certain changes suggested by your peer. (A sample letter to the editor is available on myCourses to serve as a guide.)

### **Late Work/Extensions Policy**

I understand that issues might arise where you may need an extension for your work. If you find yourself in this situation, please email me ASAP and we can negotiate an alternative deadline for you. (However, I cannot guarantee the ability to give extensions for the rough draft & peer comments—that depends on the consent of your peer.)

### **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).

### **Metapolicy**

I reserve the right to make minor changes to the readings, assignments, and policies as the semester progresses. I will only do so fairly, for good reasons, and with plenty of warning.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Topic	Date	Main question	Required Reading	Further Reading*	Work Due
Intro to Seminar	30-Aug	<i>New class, who/what/how dis?</i>	Syllabus	Leary's "Normativity" from the <i>Routledge Handbook of Metaphysical Grounding</i>	
Grounding	06-Sep	<i>What is grounding and is it useful for metaphysical theorizing?</i>	Jessica Wilson's "No Work for a Theory of Grounding", Jonathan Schaffer's "Ground Rules: Lessons from Wilson"	Gideon Rosen's "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction", Jonathan Schaffer's "On What Grounds What", Wilson's "The Unity and Priority Arguments for Grounding"	
Grounding in ethics	14-Sep	<i>Are first-order debates in ethics about metaphysical grounding?</i>	Kit Fine's "Varieties of Necessity" (§4 & 5) and "Guide to Ground" (§1.1), Selim Berker "Unity of Grounding"	Kevin Richardson's "Varieties" from the <i>Routledge Handbook of Metaphysical Grounding</i>	
	20-Sep	<i>Do moral principles ground particular moral facts?</i>	Gideon Rosen's "What is a moral law?", Selim Berker's "The Explanatory Ambitions of Moral Principles"	David Enoch's "How Principles Ground"	
	27-Sep		CLASS CANCELED		
Essence	04-Oct	<i>What is essence and how is it related to grounding?</i>	Kit Fine's "Essence and Modality" and §I.II of "Guide to Ground", Ashley Coates's "Essence, triviality, and fundamentality"	Justin Zylstra's "Essence" from the <i>Routledge Handbook of Metaphysical Grounding</i>	
<b>READING WEEK</b>	<b>11-Oct</b>		<b>NO CLASS</b>		
Physicalism-non-physicalism debate	18-Oct	<i>To what extent are grounding and essence central to the physicalism-anti-physicalism debate?</i>	Louis DeRosset's "Grounding Explanations", Dasgupta's "The Possibility of Physicalism"	Karen Bennett's "By Our Bootstraps", DeRosset's "Grounding the Unreal"	

Naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate	25-Oct	<i>Is the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate about grounding or essence?</i>	Stephanie Leary's "What is Non-naturalism?", Tristram McPherson & David Plunkett's "Ground, Essence, and the Metaphysics of Metanormative Non-naturalism"	Gideon Rosen's "Metaphysical Relations in Metaethics", Leary's "Non-naturalism and Normative Necessities", McPherson & Plunkett's "Supervenience and the Autonomy of Essence: Lessons from Leary's Hybrid Gambit"	
Naturalness in metaphysics	01-Nov	<i>How is the idea of (Lewisian) naturalness useful for metaphysical theorizing?</i>	Ted Sider's "Criteria of Personal Identity and the Limits of Conceptual Analysis", Eli Hirsch's "Ontology and Alternative Languages"	Lewis's "New Work for a Theory of Universals", Hirsch's <i>Dividing Reality</i> (Chapters 1 & 3)	
	<b>Mon Nov 6</b>				<b>Term Paper Proposal (myCourses)</b>
Alternative normative languages and normative realism	08-Nov	<i>Do alternative normative languages present problems for normative realists?</i>	Eklund's <i>Choosing Normative Concepts</i> Chapters 1, 2, & 3	Rest of Eklund's book, Horgan & Timmons's "New Wave Moral Realism Meets Moral Twin Earth", Janice Dowell's "The Metaethical Insignificance of Moral Twin Earth"	
Ideology for normative realists	15-Nov	<i>Is (Lewisian) naturalness helpful for capturing normative realism?</i>	Billy Dunaway's <i>Reality and Morality</i> Chapters 2 and 3	Rest of Dunaway's book, Dunaway & McPherson's "Reference Magnetism as a Solution to the Moral Twin Earth Problem"	
	22-Nov		Billy Dunaway's <i>Reality and Morality</i> Chapter 4 and Conclusion	McPherson's "Ardent realism without referential normativity", Plunkett's "Normative roles, conceptual variance, and ardent realism about normativity"	
	29-Nov	<i>Is grounding or essence helpful for capturing normative realism?</i>	Olla Solomyak's "Realism" from <i>Routledge Handbook of Metaphysical Grounding</i> , Leary's "Choosing normative properties: a reply to	Matthew Vermaire's "Against Schmought", Matti Eklund's "Schmoughts for Naught? Reply to Vermaire"	

			Eklund's Choosing Normative Concepts"		
	<b>Mon Dec 4</b>				<b>Rough Draft Peer Swap (email)</b>
	<b>Fri Dec 7</b>				<b>Peer comments (email)</b>
	<b>Mon Dec 18</b>				<b>Final Term Paper &amp; Revision Letter (myCourses)</b>