



FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
SCHOOL OF HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**PHILOSOPHY**  
**PHIL 312: Philosophy of Values: Meta-ethics**  
**20 POINTS**

**TRIMESTER 1 2014**

**Important dates**

**Trimester dates:** 3 March to 2 July 2014  
**Teaching dates:** 3 March to 6 June 2014  
**Easter/Mid-trimester break:** 18 April to 4 May 2014  
**Last assessment item due:** 6 June 2014

**Withdrawal dates:** Refer to [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/withdrawals-refunds](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/withdrawals-refunds). If you cannot complete an assignment or sit a test or examination, refer to [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats).

**Class times and locations**

Lectures: Mondays 2:10-4pm; Tuesdays 12-2pm.  
Venues: Murphy LT102 (Mondays); Hugh Mackenzie LT001 (Tuesdays)

**Names and contact details**

Course Coordinator: Richard Joyce  
Room No: Murphy 713  
Phone: 463 5699  
Email: richard.joyce@vuw.ac.nz  
Office hours: By appointment

Kim Sterelny: kim.sterelny@anu.edu.au

**Communication of additional information**

This course uses Blackboard and presumes that all enrolled students have valid myvuw.ac.nz addresses. Please check that this account is active and you have organised email forwarding. Additional information and any changes to the timetable or lecture and seminar programme will be advised by email, announced in lectures, and posted on the course Blackboard site.

**Prescription**

This course will investigate the foundations and presuppositions of moral theory, exploring moral language (e.g., are moral judgements really assertions?), moral ontology (e.g., what kind of property is moral goodness?), and moral epistemology (e.g., how can moral beliefs be justified?).

## Course content

We make moral judgements all the time: We judge some actions to be wrong, others praiseworthy; we judge some people to be good, others wicked; and so forth. But what are we doing when we make such judgements? When we say something like “Stealing is wrong” are we claiming that stealing has the property of wrongness? If so, what kind of property might that be, and by what means do we detect its presence? Perhaps wrongness is an objective feature of the universe, or perhaps it’s a kind of feature that humans somehow collectively invent, or perhaps it doesn’t exist at all. Perhaps when we say “Stealing is wrong” we’re not really asserting anything at all, but rather expressing our disapproval of stealing (rather like saying “Boo to stealing!”). If there are moral facts, are they the same for everyone, or might one morality be true for one group/individual while another morality is true for another group/individual? How do we justify our moral opinions? Can we be said to *know* certain moral facts?

Addressing these questions is the work of meta-ethics. Meta-ethical positions to be critically discussed in this course include noncognitivism, the error theory, moral realism, naturalism, non-naturalism, fictionalism, relativism, and constructivism.

Most of the course will be given by Richard Joyce, but several lectures in April will be given by Kim Sterelny, on the topic of the evolution of the human moral faculty and whether this matter may have any meta-ethical implications.

## Course learning objectives (CLOs)

Students passing the course should be able to:

1. demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the field of meta-ethics;
2. apply this knowledge in the critical analysis of meta-ethical theories;
3. advance their abilities to undertake logical and critical thinking;
4. practice and improve their critical writing skills and presentation skills.

## Teaching format

The weekly meetings will include lecturing and discussion. There are no tutorials. Students are expected to attend classes regularly, take part in class discussion, and keep up with the reading.

## Mandatory requirements

There are no mandatory requirements for PHIL 312.

## Workload:

In accordance with Faculty Guidelines, this course has been constructed on the assumption that students will devote 200 hours to PHIL 312 throughout the trimester. This includes weekly attendance at lectures, completion of all set weekly readings, and research and writing for set assessment tasks.

## Assessment

Assessment Item	Weighting	CLOs	Due Date
Essay, 2500 words	50%	1,2,3,4	5 May, 5.00 pm
Essay, 2500 words	50%	1,2,3,4	6 June, 5.00 pm

PHIL 312 is assessed on the basis of two essays, worth 50% of the final grade each.

First essay topics will be handed out shortly after the course begins. Second essay topics will be posted on Blackboard before 17 April.

## Submission and return of work

You must submit two copies of your essay. Submit one electronically via Blackboard (please consult Blackboard for instructions) which will be sent to turnitin.com, an anti-plagiarism website. Also submit an identical hard copy of your essay to the Philosophy Programme office (Murphy 518), together with completed cover sheets available on Blackboard or from the School office.

Essays will be returned at times to be advised. If students fail to attend these times, they may collect their essay from the School Office, Room 518, Murphy Building between the hours of 2.00 and 3.00 pm from Monday to Friday and must show their Student ID card before collection.

## Extensions and penalties

### Extensions

Extensions can be granted only with the prior approval of the course coordinator, and only in exceptional circumstances. Having lots of other assignments due around the same time is no excuse; plan ahead. If granted an extension, students must agree to a new due date. Contact Richard as soon as a problem emerges.

### Penalties

Philosophy Programme policy stipulates that late submission of essays is penalised. For PHIL 312, for each week or part thereof of lateness, a late assignment gets a 5 point penalty, up to three weeks, after which the assignment will get a zero mark (i.e., 1-7 days late = a loss of 5%; 8-14 days late = a loss of 10%; 15-21 days late = a loss of 15%, and after that a zero mark).

## Set texts

Much of the course quite closely follows the material presented in *Foundations of Ethics*, edited by Shafer-Landau and Cuneo (Blackwell, 2007), so it is essential that each student has access to these readings throughout the term. Available from VicBooks. Customers can order online at [www.vicbooks.co.nz](http://www.vicbooks.co.nz) or can email an order or enquiry to [enquiries@vicbooks.co.nz](mailto:enquiries@vicbooks.co.nz). Books can be couriered to customers or they can be picked up from nominated collection points at each campus. Customers will be contacted when they are available. Vicbooks is found on the Ground Floor Easterfield Building, Kelburn Parade. Phone: 463 5515.

This book has been used in PHIL 312 in previous years, so there may be second-hand copies knocking about for sale. Note, however, that most of the papers gathered in this collection were first published elsewhere, so each will generally be available on-line through the University library catalogue (i.e., it is not strictly necessary to purchase the book).

Additional readings for PHIL 312 will be posted on Blackboard.

## Class representative

The class representative provides a useful way to communicate feedback to the teaching staff during the course. A class representative will be selected at the first lecture of the course. Students may like to write the Class Rep's name and details in this box:

Class Rep name and contact details:
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## Student feedback

Enhancements made to this course, based on the feedback of previous students, will be covered during the course. Student feedback on University courses may be found at [www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/feedback/feedback\\_display.php](http://www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/feedback/feedback_display.php).

## Other important information:

The information above is specific to this course. There is other important information that students must familiarise themselves with, including:

- Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/integrity-plagiarism](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/integrity-plagiarism)
- Aegrotats: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats)
- Academic Progress: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/academic-progress](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/academic-progress) (including restrictions and non-engagement)
- Dates and deadlines: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/dates](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/dates)
- FHSS Student and Academic Services Office: [www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/student-admin](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/student-admin)
- Grades: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/grades](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/grades)
- Resolving academic issues: [www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications)
- Special passes: [www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications)
- Statutes and policies including the Student Conduct Statute: [www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/strategy](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/strategy)
- Student support: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/support](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/support)
- Students with disabilities: [www.victoria.ac.nz/st\\_services/disability](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/disability)
- Student Charter: [www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/student-charter](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/student-charter)
- Student Contract: [www.victoria.ac.nz/study/apply-enrol/terms-conditions/student-contract](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/study/apply-enrol/terms-conditions/student-contract)
- Subject Librarians: <http://library.victoria.ac.nz/library/resources/subjectcontacts.html>
- Turnitin: [www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/wiki/index.php/Turnitin](http://www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/wiki/index.php/Turnitin)
- University structure: [www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/structure](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/structure)
- VUWSA: [www.vuwsa.org.nz](http://www.vuwsa.org.nz)