



FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

## PHIL 449 Lec 01 – “Contemporary Metaethics”

Fall Term 2015

*Course Outline*

Monday and Wednesday, 2.00-3.15, SA 243

**Instructor:** John A. Baker  
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**Phone:** 403-220-3167  
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**Office Hours:** Monday and Wednesday, 1.00-1.35 and after class

Outside those times, for a variety of reasons, it is not a good idea just to “drop in”, hoping to catch me in the office: it is much better to phone or email me for an appointment. I am happy to make such appointments, so do not hesitate to make them.

### Course Description

The academic discipline *ethics* (aka *moral philosophy*) can usefully be divided into three parts:

(i) **Applied ethics:** This addresses questions like “Do those suffering unremitting pain from a fatal illness have a *moral right* to seek medical help in terminating their life?” and “Do we have a *moral duty* to keep a promise when it is clear that doing so will cause someone great distress?”. Courses in applied ethics include PHIL 313 (Bioethics), PHIL 329 (Business Ethics), PHIL 345 (Issues in Environmental Ethics), PHIL 347 (Contemporary Moral Problems) amongst others.

(ii) **Normative ethical theory:** This addresses the question “By what test or tests are answers to questions in applied ethics to be judged to be *rational well grounded*?” Tests (normative ethical theories) include *divine voluntarism*, various versions of *natural law theory*, various versions of *ideal-rule-utilitarianism* (aka *ideal-rule-consequentialism*), and various versions of *ideal-rule-contractarianism*. Normative ethical theories are typically *introduced* in the courses in applied ethics and directly investigated in PHIL 451 (Contemporary Ethical Theories).

(iii) **Metaethical theory (metaethics)** may be taken to address as its core question the question “How can we rationally decide between the different and possibly incompatible normative ethical theories?” Answering this core question involves addressing various *ontological* questions about the existence conditions of rights, duties, and values, various *semantic* questions about how the concept of morality and concepts like those of a right, a duty, and a value are to be analyzed, and various *epistemological* questions about how, if at all, we can have moral knowledge. *Metaethical theories* are theories that attempt to provide systematic answers to the core question. Various such theories will be examined in the course but the central strategy of the inquiries in the course will be to ask about the *methods* by which the above core question can be addressed. In the course, four such methods (methods of metaethics) will be developed and assessed in detail:

(a) What I will call “the method of rejection”: This method is primarily negative in its import. The method uses one or more of several arguments for rejecting any normative ethical theory that treats duties, rights, and values as existing *objectively*, i.e., existing independently of beliefs *about* them and attitudes *to* them. Arguments of this kind include David Hume’s Guillotine argument (sometimes called

his ‘is-ought’ argument), G.E. Moore Open Question Argument (sometimes called his ‘refutation of naturalism’), and David Hume’s Motivating Influence Argument (nowadays often referred to as John Mackie’s ‘queerness argument’).

(b) What I will call “the method of analysis”: On this method one builds on analyses of concepts used in moral talking and reasoning to develop both an account of the ‘logic of moral reasoning’ and at least schematic answers to the ontological, logical, and epistemological questions which metaethics needs to address in assessing normative ethical theories. The most self-conscious users of the method have included the C.L. Stevenson, Richard Hare and Frank Jackson.

(c) What I will call “the method of rational reconstruction”: On this method (a) one begins from the reflective judgments (what some have called ‘intuitions’) of mature moral agents *both* on *substantive* moral issues *and* on the issue of what is *relevant* in decisions about what one ought to do, about what things are of moral value, and so on, and (b) one then tries to find a normative ethical theory which can be brought into “reflective equilibrium” with these two classes of reflective judgments, the normative theory offering at least schematic answers to the kinds of questions which metaethics needs to address in assessing normative ethical theories. The method is designed to *reconstruct* the morality/moralities of mature moral agents removing any metaphysical, empirical and logical errors and irrationalities. Self-conscious users of the method have included various kinds of ‘intuitionists’, various exponents of the so-called ‘moral point of view’ approach (notably Kurt Baier, Stephen Toulmin, and Kai Nielsen), and exponents of the called method of reflective equilibrium, notably John Rawls and David Richards.

(d) What I will call “the method of rational replacement”: On this method (a) one develops firstly an account of rational choice useable in interpersonal situations, situations in which cooperation may enable those involved in the situation to benefit more than they would benefit without cooperation, (b) one uses this account of rational choice to evaluate various principles and modes of cooperation, (c) one accepts as principles of morality those principles which survive such assessment. Importantly there is meant to be no reliance on preconceived views about what a correct morality might say: in this it differs from the method of rational reconstruction. Exponents of the method have included R. B. Braithwaite (*Theory of Games as a Tool for the Moral Philosopher*), David Gauthier (*Morals by Agreement*) and John Harsanyi (*Rational Behaviour and Bargaining Equilibrium in Games and Social Situations*).

### **Required Texts**

The basic structuring of the examination of the issues in the course will be provided by selections from my *Lectures in Metaethics*. As we go along, these selections will be posted on D2L.

The other readings for the course will consist of journal articles or book chapters, both available online. Instructions on how to access these will be posted in the Course Documents section of D2L.

Note that often in class we will be engaged in careful, line by line, examination of arguments found in the readings. As we go along, I will post on-line (in D2L) an announcement about which article/chapters we will be discussing in class. Please bring to class copies of the article/chapter to be discussed. Feel free in class to use an electronic copy on your laptop or pad if you wish: otherwise bring a hard copy.

### **Assignments, due dates, and grading**

#### *Assignments:*

1. Three brief “analysis-and-critique” assignments. The format for analysis-and-critique assignments and what they involve will be posted on D2L at the beginning of term and explained in class. Samples of ‘analyses-and-critiques’ will also be posted on D2L and discussed in class.
2. Two short essays (about 1200 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography). Details will be posted in D2L.
3. A term paper (about 1700 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography). Details will be posted in D2L.

The questions and readings for the essays and for the term paper will significantly overlap with the readings mentioned in 1.

### ***Due-dates:***

**Analysis-and-critique 1 and essay 1:** Details for both will be posted on D2L on Monday, September 9<sup>th</sup>. The completed analysis-and-critique assignment will be due on Wednesday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, at 9am, and the first essay will be due on Wednesday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, at 9am.

**Analysis-and-critique 2 and essay 2:** Details for both will be posted on D2L on Wednesday, October 7<sup>th</sup>. The completed second analysis-and-critique assignment will be due on Wednesday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, at 9am, and the second essay will be due on Wednesday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, at 9am.

**Analysis-and-critique 3 and term paper:** Details will be posted on D2L on Wednesday, November 4<sup>th</sup>. The completed analysis-and-critique assignment will be due on Wednesday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, at 9am, and the term paper will be due on Friday, December, 16<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Grading***

1. *Ceteris paribus*, the first analysis-and-critique will be worth 5% of the final grade, the second and third each will be worth 15%.
2. *Ceteris paribus*, the first essay will be worth 15% and the second worth 20% of the final grade.
3. *Ceteris paribus*, the term paper will be worth 30%
4. Except in very exceptional circumstances, and at the discretion of the instructor, a passing grade in the course will be received only if each of the three analyses, each of the two short essays, and the term paper are submitted.
5. Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier sin.
6. Fairness to those who submit their assignments on time demands that lateness in submission of an assignment be penalized. Accordingly, assignments handed in after the stated deadline will receive at most B and then only if submitted by 9am of the day after the due day: they will receive at most a C if submitted by 9am of the day after that, and so on, unless, of course, some sort of university recognized ground for delay — e.g. some sort of evidence of illness — is submitted.

**NOTE: If a student fails to submit her or his analysis-and-critique assignment before I hand out *my* analysis of that article, then clearly the requirement set out in point 4 above can only reasonably be satisfied in relation to analysis-and-critique assignment if the student submits an analysis of some *different* article from that originally assigned. If this situation arises then the student will need to approach me for a replacement assignment. Note that point 6 will still apply.**

### **Academic Honesty**

Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as an extremely serious academic offence, the penalty for which may be an F on the assignment, an F in the course, academic probation, or requirement to withdraw from the University. See the relevant sections on 'Academic Misconduct' in the current University Calendar. Intellectual honesty requires that your work include adequate referencing to sources. Plagiarism occurs when you do not acknowledge or correctly reference your sources. If you have questions about correct referencing, consult your instructor.

### **Academic Accommodation**

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services. SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For more information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>. Students who require accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their instructor. The full policy on student accommodations is available at [http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy\\_0.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy_0.pdf)

### **D2L Help**

Desire2Learn is the University of Calgary's online learning management system. Go to <http://www.ucalgary.ca/it/services/d2l> for help.

### **Student Advising and Information Resources**

- General Academic Concerns and Program Planning— Have a question but not sure where to start? The Arts Students' Centre is your information resource for everything in the Faculty of Arts. Drop in at SS102, call 403-220-3580, or email [ascarts@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ascarts@ucalgary.ca). Advisors in the ASC can also provide assistance and advice in planning your program through to graduation. Visit the Faculty of Arts website at <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate> for detailed information on common academic concerns.

- **Advice on Philosophy Courses** - You may find answers to your more specific questions about a philosophy degree on the Department of Philosophy's website <http://phil.ucalgary.ca> or contact one of Philosophy's current Undergraduate Advisors (see below)
- **Registration Overload/Prereq Waivers** – If you are seeking to register in a Philosophy course that is full or to get permission to waive the prereqs for a course, email the instructor of the course.

#### **Protection of Privacy**

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act. The Department of Philosophy ensures the student's right to privacy by requiring all graded assignments be returned to the student directly from the instructor or teaching assistant.

#### **Safewalk**

Call 403-220-5333 (24/7/365) for a Safewalk volunteer to accompany you safely to your destination on campus including parking lots, housing, and the LRT station or use a Campus Help Phone.

#### **PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT**

The Department of Philosophy is located on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of the Social Sciences Building and on the web at [www.phil.ucalgary.ca](http://www.phil.ucalgary.ca)

#### **PHILOSOPHY UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM ADVISORS FOR FALL 2015:**

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For assistance with registration issues in Philosophy courses, contact Merlette Schnell ([schnell@ucalgary.ca](mailto:schnell@ucalgary.ca))