

PHIL 449 Contemporary Meta-Ethics  
Fall Term 2019

Course Outline

MW 15:30 – 16.45 SA109

Instructor: John A. Baker

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When emailing please put “449” in the subject line of the email.

Office Hours: MW 13:30 – 14:30 and after class.

I am happy to meet outside those times, but it is best to first email me for an appointment rather than just “dropping in”.

**Course Description:**

Questions to be investigated in the course will include: (a) whether there *are* or indeed *could be* procedures for figuring out what moral rights, duties, obligations we have in various situations; (b) whether such procedures, if they can be found, could appropriately be counted rational and sound; (c) what exactly is being said when moral rights, duties, obligations, and values are claimed to exist; (d) what has to be the case if such claims are to be counted valid. In the course we will examine various approaches that are being taken in the literature to providing systematic answers to these metaethical questions.

**Prerequisites:**

*Two previous courses in Philosophy, at least one of which must be at the 300 level, or higher, and one of which must be [Philosophy 249](#) or [397](#). Phil 249 is described as follows: An introduction to philosophy through discussion of morality, virtue and the role of morality in society. Phil 397 is described as follows: An intensive study of selected topics in value theory.*

**Course Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course students

- should be aware of what issues are currently viewed as being fundamental to the discipline *Metaethics* as described above and should be able to state and critically engage with the arguments for and against the central theses of the various systematic approaches to the metaethical questions outlined above;
- should be familiar with, be able to use, and be aware of the limitations of the investigative tools currently being used in such metaethical inquiries;
- should have developed and refined their ability (i) to formulate explicit and precise analyses of the reasoning in academic papers in the field, such analyses setting out the *direction* of the reasoning, the steps in the reasoning, and the unstated but critical background assumptions of the reasoning in such papers, (ii) clearly and concisely to frame and state arguments both for and against philosophical theses, and (iii) to gain the kinds of skills in analysis, argumentation, and research that would be of value in law, government and business policy development and implementation.

### **Required/Recommended 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, all available either through D2L or online through the UofC library.

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 online (in D2L) an announcement about which article/chapters we will be discussing in class.

In addition, several articles in *The Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [<https://plato.stanford.edu/>] may be useful at various points in the course. For example:

- Geoff Sayre-McCord, 2012, "Metaethics".
- Geoff Sayre-McCord, 2015, "Moral Realism".
- Mark van Roojen, 2018, "Moral Cognitivism vs Non-Cognitivism".
- Richard Joyce, 2015 "Moral Anti-Realism vs Realism".
- Stephen Finlay & Mark Schroeder, 2012, "Reasons for Action: Internal vs. External".
- Connie Rosati, 2006, "Moral Motivation".
- Carla Bagnoli, 2017, "Constructivism in Metaethics", *Stanford University Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

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

#### ***Assignments:***

1. Weekly reading assignments will be set and announced ahead of time of D2L.
2. Four short essays (about 1000 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography) will be set. Details of what is wanted will be posted in D2L.
3. A term paper (about 1300 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography). Details of what is wanted will be posted in D2L.
4. Readings for the essays and for the term paper will significantly overlap with the readings mentioned in 1 and will for the most part have been discussed in class beforehand.
5. There will be two *in-class* tests. These tests will address the materials covered up to the time of the test. A list of questions from which the questions on the tests will be drawn will be distributed well in advance of the days of the tests. Details about the tests will be posted on D2L.
6. There will be no registrar-scheduled final examination.
7. Assignments are to be uploaded as MS-Word or rtf files (**not as pdf files**) to this course's digital drop box in D2L

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

- Short Essay 1: September 26
- Short Essay 2: October 10
- In-class test 1: October 16
- Short Essay 3: October 31
- Short Essay 4: November 21
- In-class test 2: December 4
- Term Paper: December 12

#### ***Grading***

1. *Ceteris paribus* each of the short essays will be worth 10% of the final grade.
2. *Ceteris paribus* the first in-class test will be worth 10% of the final grade and the second in-class test will be worth 15% of the final grade.
3. *Ceteris paribus*, the term paper will be worth 35%

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 essays and the term papers is submitted and each of the tests is taken.
5. Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier sin.
6. If an essay is submitted after the stated deadline, then it will receive at most a B and then only if submitted by 9am of the day after the due day: it will receive at most a C if submitted by 9am of the day after that, and so on.
7. Percentages will be computed using the numbers set by the University as equivalent to the letter grades.

## **IMPORTANT DEPARTMENTAL, FACULTY AND UNIVERSITY INFORMATION**

### **Academic Accommodations**

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures. The student accommodation policy can be found at [ucalgary.ca/access/accommodations/policy](http://ucalgary.ca/access/accommodations/policy).

Students needing an Accommodation because of a disability or medical condition should communicate this need to Student Accessibility Services in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: [ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/procedure-for-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf](http://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/procedure-for-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf). Students needing an Accommodation in relation to their coursework or to fulfil requirements for a graduate degree, based on a protected ground other than disability, should communicate this need, preferably in writing, to their instructor.

### **Absence or Missed Course Assessments**

Students who are absent from class assessments (tests, participation activities, or other assignments) should inform their instructors as soon as possible. Instructors may request that evidence in the form of documentation be provided. If the reason provided for the absence is acceptable, instructors may decide that any arrangements made can take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test. For information on possible forms of documentation, including statutory declarations, please see [ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html](http://ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html)

### **Student Support and Resources**

Full details and information about the following resources can be found at [ucalgary.ca/Registrar/registration/course-outlines](http://ucalgary.ca/Registrar/registration/course-outlines)

- Wellness and Mental Health Resources
- Student Success Centre
- Student Ombuds Office
- Student Union (SU) Information
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information
- Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points
- Safewalk

### **Academic Advising**

If you are a student in the Faculty of Arts, you can speak to an academic advisor in the Arts Students' Centre about course planning, course selection, registration, program progression and more. Visit the Faculty of Arts website at [arts.ucalgary.ca/advising](http://arts.ucalgary.ca/advising) for contact details and information regarding common academic concerns.

For questions specific to the philosophy program, please visit [phil.ucalgary.ca](http://phil.ucalgary.ca). Further academic guidance is available by contacting David Dick (Undergraduate Program Director [dgdick@ucalgary.ca](mailto:dgdick@ucalgary.ca)) or Jeremy Fantl (Honours Advisor [jfantl@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jfantl@ucalgary.ca)). If you have questions regarding registration, please email Rebecca Lesser (Undergraduate Program Administrator [phildept@ucalgary.ca](mailto:phildept@ucalgary.ca)).

### **Writing Assessment and Support**

The assessment of all written assignments—and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses—is based in part on writing skills. This includes correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.), as well as general clarity and organization. Research papers must include a thorough and accurate citation of sources. Students are also encouraged to use Writing Support Services for assistance (one-on-one appointments, drop-in support and writing workshops). For more information, and other services offered by the Student Success Centre, please visit [ucalgary.ca/ssc](http://ucalgary.ca/ssc).

### **Online Resources and Electronic Devices**

Important information and communication about this course may be posted on D2L (Desire2Learn), UCalgary's online learning management system. Visit [ucalgary.service-now.com/it](http://ucalgary.service-now.com/it) for how-to information and technical assistance.

The instructor reserves the right to establish specific course policies regarding the use of electronic devices. If permitted, the use of devices must be exclusively for instructional purposes, and without disruption to the instructor or fellow students. Devices should be set to silent mode during lectures. Audio or video recording of lectures is not permitted without the written permission of the instructor. Students violating this policy are subject to discipline under the University of Calgary's Non-Academic Misconduct policy.

### **Academic Misconduct/Honesty**

Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is as an extremely serious academic offense, the penalty for which will be an F on the assignment or an F in the course, and possibly a disciplinary sanction such as probation, suspension, or expulsion. For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at [ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html](http://ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html).

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 referencing, please consult your instructor.

### **University Policies**

The Instructor Intellectual Property Policy is available at [ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/Intellectual%20Property%20Policy.pdf](http://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/Intellectual%20Property%20Policy.pdf)

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act, as outlined at [ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip](http://ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip). The instructor (or TA) must return graded assignments *directly* to the student UNLESS written permission to do otherwise has been provided.

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright ([ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf](http://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf)) and requirements of the copyright act ([laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html](http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html)).