



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF ARTS
Department of Philosophy

PHIL 449 Lec 01
Contemporary Meta-Ethics
Fall, 2021
Monday and Wednesday, 3:30-4:45, SS 010

COURSE OUTLINE

Instructor: John A. Baker

Email: baker@ucalgary.ca

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

Office: SS 1222

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 4:45 to 5:30

I am happy to hold zoom office hours outside these times. Please email me for an appointment.

Office Phone: 403-220-3167S

Course Information

Meta-ethical *investigations* aim to provide well-grounded answers to at least four kinds of question about moral values, duties, and rights:

1. *metaphysical* questions about their *ontological status* – do they exist objectively (in the sense that they and their contents exist independently of people’s beliefs *about* them and attitudes *to* them) *or* are they, e.g., the expression of people’s attitudes (perhaps “projected” on the world) *or* are they “invented” as part of an attempt to frame and then address practical questions, e.g., about how to enable human flourishing?
2. *semantic* questions about the *analysis* of concepts used in claims about moral values, duties, and rights– such analyses addressing both questions about the *meanings* of the terms expressing the concepts used in talking and thinking about them and questions about the conditions under which claims made with such concepts can be *true, acceptable, rational, reasonable*, and so on.
3. *epistemological* questions about how, if at all, we can validate or justify claims about moral values, duties, and rights;
4. *logical* questions about the nature of reasoning to or deliberation about the existence and nature of moral values, duties, and rights.

Answers to these questions are interdependent – how the first two questions are answered will affect how the third and fourth questions are to be answered. Meta-ethical *theories* are theories about how to frame *systematic* answers such questions.

Meta-ethical theories can be very roughly (and provisionally) be classified as either “moral cognitivist” or “moral non-cognitivist”:

- (a) **Moral cognitivist theories** claim (i) that moral values, duties and rights exist with the contents they have independently of human beliefs *about* them and their contents and of human attitudes *to* them and their contents, (ii) that their existence and contents can be discovered and known, (iii) that they ground reasons for people to act or abstain from acting or feeling in certain (relevant) ways *and even* (iv) that awareness of their existence and contents can itself ‘motivate’ people to behave in certain (relevant) ways.
- (b) **Moral non-cognitivist theories** either (i) simply and baldly deny that moral values, duties and rights exist in any sense (such a view is called a *nihilist* view) *or* (ii) affirm that, though moral values, duties and rights do **not exist in the ways that moral cognitivists claim they exist**, they nevertheless can appropriately, reasonably, and even rationally be cited in justifying decisions about what is morally worth doing or feeling, ought to be done or felt, or is permitted to be or felt (theories of this type can take various forms and depending on the form taken have been called ‘expressivist’ or ‘constructivist’ theories).

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 Objectives/Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students

- should be aware of what issues are currently viewed as being fundamental to the discipline *meta-ethics* 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 meta-ethical questions outlined above;
- should be familiar with and be aware of the limitations of the investigative tools currently being used in assessing such meta-ethical 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 such meta-ethical 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.

Readings and Materials

Readings for the course will consist of class handouts, journal articles and book chapters, all of which will be available through *Leganto*: *Leganto* is accessible through the “My tools” section of D2L.

The basic structuring of the course will be provided by selections from the revised edition of my *Lectures in Metaethics*. As we go along, these selections will be posted in the Content section of D2L.

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

Course Assessment and Evaluation

NB: Weekly reading assignments will be set. *Sometimes I will simply assume that an article or chapter has been read* and the class will proceed on that assumption. It is the duty of anyone who miss a class to find out what readings have been set.

Assignments and due-dates:

1. Two brief “analysis-and-critique” assignments due on September 24th and October 22nd respectively. These should be submitted using the D2L dropbox.

The format for such 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 closed-book in-class examinations, one on October 6th and the other on December 8th.

Notes on the format of examinations and lists of questions from which the questions on the examinations will be chosen will be posted ahead of time on d2l.

3. A term paper (about 1200 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography). Details will be posted in D2L. This will be due on November 26. This should be submitted using the D2L dropbox.

4. There will be no registrar-scheduled examination.

Grading

1. *Ceteris paribus*, the first analysis-and-critique will be worth 15% of the final grade and the second will be worth 20%.

2. *Ceteris paribus*, each of the in-class examinations will be worth 15% of the final grade.

3. *Ceteris paribus*, the term paper will be worth 35% of the final grade.

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 analysis-and-critique assignments, each of the two in-class examinations, 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. Submissions submitted after that will receive an F.

7. Percentages will be computed using the numbers set by the University as equivalent to the letter grades.

IMPORTANT DEPARTMENTAL, FACULTY AND UNIVERSITY INFORMATION

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/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Student-Accommodation-Policy.pdf.

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/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Accommodation-for-Students-with-Disabilities-Procedure.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. 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.

Student Support and Resources

Full details and information about the following resources can be found at ucalgary.ca/current-students/student-services

- 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 <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/current-students/undergraduate/academic-advising> for contact details and information regarding common academic concerns.

For questions specific to the philosophy program, please visit arts.ucalgary.ca/philosophy. Further academic guidance is available by contacting Jeremy Fantl (Undergraduate Program Director jfantl@ucalgary.ca) or David Dick (Honours Advisor dgdick@ucalgary.ca). If you have questions regarding registration, please email Courtenay Canivet (Undergraduate Program Administrator 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. For more information, and other services offered by the Student Success Centre, please visit ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success.

Required Technology

In order to successfully engage in their learning experiences at the University of Calgary, students taking online, remote, and blended courses are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security, and malware updates;
- A current and updated web browser;
- Webcam (built-in or external);
- Microphone and speaker (built-in or external), or headset with microphone;
- Current antivirus and/or firewall software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection.

Most current laptops will have a built-in webcam, speaker and microphone.

Responsible Use of D2L

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

All users of D2L are bound by the guidelines on the responsible use of D2L posted here: <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/commitment-to-the-responsible-use-of-d2l/>. The instructor may establish additional specific course policies for D2L, Zoom, and any other technologies used to support remote learning. Instructional materials, including audio or video recordings of lectures, may not be posted outside of the course D2L site. Students violating this policy are subject to discipline under the [University of Calgary's Non-Academic Misconduct policy](#).

Media Recording

Please refer to the following statement on media recording of students: https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Media-Recording-in-Learning-Environments-OSP_FINAL.pdf

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.

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/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Intellectual-Property-Policy.pdf

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act, as outlined at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/access-information-privacy>. 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 (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Acceptable-Use-of-Material-Protected-by-Copyright-Policy.pdf>) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>).