



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 549.04 Lec 1 Advanced Topics in Ethics: Rationality & Morality

Winter Term 2015

Course Outline

Monday and Wednesday, 3.30-4.45, SS 1253

Instructor: John A. Baker

Office: SS1222

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 2.15-3.15 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

Central to philosophical thinking about the nature of justificatory (aka normative) reasons for actions (and *a fortiori* about what counts as rational action) has been the Humean thesis that since the late 1970s has been called 'reason internalism'. In the literature various rather different formulations of this thesis have been argued for, but at the core is always the claim that whether a certain fact (or purported fact) to count as a reason for a certain person to act in a certain way ineliminably depends on whether that prospective agent has (or would under certain circumstances) have certain "relevant" desires or attitudes – this has been referred to as 'the subjectivist core' of this account of reasons for actions. *Reason* internalism is a thesis about the nature of justificatory reasons for actions generally, but many philosophers have concluded that, if reason internalism is combined with certain other plausible seeming theses, then we are forced to adopt some sort of 'subjectivist' ('anti-realist') views about the power of moral rights, duties, and values to ground justificatory reasons to respond to these moral rights, duties and values in relevant ways, the only question then being *which* 'subjectivist' views and how 'subjectivist' these views need to be.

Reason internalism has been implicitly assumed correct by many philosophers (notably by John Mackie in his 1977 *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*). It has also always had its critics (for example, Thomas Nagel in his 1970 *The Possibility of Altruism*) as well as its explicit defenders (notably, Bernard Williams in his 1979 "Internal and external reasons" and most recently Mark Schroeder in his 2010 *Slaves of the Passions*). But in recent years it has been argued (notably and most recently by Derek Parfit in his 2011 *One What Matters* and Thomas Scanlon in his 2014 *Being Realistic about Reasons*) that reason internalism and hence the purportedly consequential views about moral rights, duties and values are in certain fundamental ways in need of radical rethinking and indeed that it is necessary to look to the possibility of developing 'reason *externalist*'

('objectivist' – a seriously problematic term) accounts of justificatory reasons and indeed of rational choice, and consequently of the nature of moral choice.

The aim of the course is to examine in detail the most persuasive arguments for and against reason internalism in its more plausible formulations and to investigate the possibility of developing an 'objectivist'/'externalist' account of justificatory reasons, that examination paying particular attention to the fact that clearly any account of *rational* action which places acting for reasons at its core will need to be supplemented with a correlative account of *weights* of reasons.

Required Texts

It is my intention to examine in some detail Mark Schroeder's much admired defence of reason internalism in his 2010 *Slaves of the Passions*, Thomas Scanlon's attempt to develop what he calls a 'cognitivist' account of reasons for action in his 2014 *Being Realistic about Reasons* (a refreshingly slim volume) and Derek Parfit's attack on reason internalism in section I and part of section VII of his 2011 *On What Matters*.

Both Scanlon's and Schroeder's books are available online from Oxford Scholarship Online through the UofC library. But since some students prefer to use hard copies I have asked the UofC bookstore to bring in copies.

I did not ask the UofC bookstore to bring in copies of Derek Parfit's monumental (and very expensive) two volume *On What Matters* because we will only be examining section I and part of section VII and the whole two volume work is available for \$19.74 in the Kindle edition – to read the Kindle edition it is not necessary to own a Kindle since you can read Kindle formatted books on both PCs and Macs (both laptops and iPads) using the free downloadable Kindle application.

Other readings are available online through the UofC library.

Assignments and due dates

Assignments:

1. Two 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).
3. A term paper (about 1700 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography).
4. A presentation and defence of the core ideas argued for in the term paper.

The questions and readings for the essays and for the term paper will significantly overlap with the readings mentioned in 1. Details of the topics and readings will be announced in class and posted on D2L.

There will not be a Registrar-scheduled final exam in this course.

Due-dates:

Analysis-and-critique 1: Details of the assignment will be posted on D2L on Wednesday, January 14th. The completed assignment will be due on Thursday, January 29th, at 9am.

Essay 1: The question for the first essay will be posted on D2L on Wednesday, January 14th. The deadline for submission of the essay will be Thursday, February 12th, at 9am.

Analysis-and-critique 2: Details will be posted on D2L on Thursday, February 12th. The completed assignment will be due on Thursday, February 26th, at 9am.

Essay 2: Details will be posted on D2L on Thursday, February 26th. The completed assignment will be due on Thursday, March 12th, at 9am.

Term paper: The question for the term paper will be posted on D2L on Thursday, March 12th. The completed paper will be due on Wednesday, April 8th, at 9am.

Presentations: Presentations will be made in the last two classes of term (April 13th and 15th) and on a schedule to be assigned.

Grading

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

1. *Ceteris paribus*, the first analysis-and-critique will be worth 10% of the final grade and second worth 15%.
2. *Ceteris paribus*, the first essay will be worth 15% and the second essay will be worth 20%
3. *Ceteris paribus*, the term paper will be worth 35%.
4. *Ceteris paribus*, the presentation and defence will be worth 5%.
5. Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier sin.
6. 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 assignments listed above is submitted and receives a passing grade.
7. Fairness to those who submit their assignments on time demands that lateness in submission of assignments be penalized. Accordingly, assignments handed in after the stated deadline will receive at most B if submitted by 3.00 pm of the day after the due day and C if submitted by 3.00 pm 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 of an article before I hand out my analysis of that article, then clearly the requirement set out in point 6 above can only reasonably be satisfied in relation to analyses 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

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodation. If you are a student with a permanent disability or temporary impairment who may require academic accommodation, you must first register with the Student Accessibility Resource Office located in MacEwan Student Centre 452; phone 403-220-8237; email access@ucalgary.ca. Students who have not registered with the Student Accessibility Office are not eligible for academic accommodation. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course. Go to <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/> for further information.

D2L Help

Desire2Learn is the University of Calgary's learning management system which has now replaced BlackBoard. Go to <http://www.elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/> for help in using Desire2Learn.

Student Advising and Information Resources

- General Academic Concerns and Program Planning– Have a question but not sure where to start? The Arts Students' Centre (ASC) is your information resource for everything in the Faculty of Arts. Drop in at SS110, call 403-220-3580, or email artsads@ucalgary.ca. Advisors in the ASC can also provide assistance and advice in planning your program through to graduation. You can visit the Faculty of Arts website at <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate/> for more 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.

Student Ombudsperson and Students' Union Representatives

The Student Ombuds Office provides independent, impartial, and confidential support for students who require assistance or advice in addressing issues and concerns related to their academic careers. For more information, see www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds. For the Students' Union Faculty of Arts rep: arts1@ucalgary.ca.

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 12th floor of the Social Sciences Building and on the web at www.phil.ucalgary.ca

PHILOSOPHY UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM ADVISORS FOR WINTER 2015:

Chris Framarin (Undergrad Director) chris.framarin@ucalgary.ca

Reid Buchanan buchanar@ucalgary.ca

Mark Migotti (Honours Program Advisor) migotti@ucalgary.ca

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