



FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 649 Lec 01 – Topics in Ethics
Topic 4: “Failure in Moral Philosophy”

Fall Term 2011

Course Outline

Lectures: Thursdays, 15:30-18:20 in SS 010

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30pm-2:30pm, and by appointment

Course Description

This course will investigate the ways failure and the possibility of failure figure into moral philosophy. This will include, but will not be limited to both the idea that the possibility of failure is required for moral responsibility and the claim that the possibility of error is required for the normative force of a moral rule. The majority of the sources for the course will come out of moral philosophy, but it will also consider sources from other subfields of philosophy that deal with similar normative issues, such as the philosophy of language, mind, and epistemology.

Required Texts

Philosophical Investigations

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Wiley-Blackwell; 4th edition
ISBN-13: 978-1405159289

Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition

Kripke, Saul A., Harvard University Press
ISBN-13: 978-0674954014

Error: On Our Predicament When Things Go Wrong

Nicholas Rescher, University of Pittsburgh Press
ISBN-13: 978-0822960119

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals

Kant, Immanuel (Mary Gregor, ed.), Cambridge University Press
ISBN-13: 978-0521626958

Additional materials will be indicated via the Blackboard site for this class.

Available at: <https://blackboard.ucalgary.ca/webapps/login/>

Evaluation

Weekly Questions:	10%	
Presentation:	10%	
Short Paper:	30%	Due: Thursday, November 3rd
Long Paper:	50%	Due: Wednesday, December 14th

This course has no Registrar administered final exam.

With the exception of the credit earned for the presentation, the entire mark will involve being graded on written work. Naturally, standards for essays prepared outside class will be much higher than those for weekly assignments.

The final grade will be based on the credit accumulated from the various assignments, so it is mathematically possible to pass the course without turning in any particular assignment. But this strategy is not recommended.

Presentations:

Graduate students enrolled in this class will be expected to give a 10-15 minute presentation, where they present an issue from the reading and then lead the discussion that follows.

The sooner the better on this, so get in touch with me as soon as you can to pick a topic and schedule a date for your presentation.

Weekly Questions:

Each week, I'd like you to submit a question based on the week's reading. The question you write should convince me that you've read the week's reading, at least well enough to be confused by it. Confusion is a philosophical heuristic, it either helps you identify a place where you don't understand, or where the argument doesn't make sense. Either one of these counts as philosophical progress.

These questions and their explanations need not be any longer than about half a page. (I'll post an example of what I mean to Blackboard.)

Questions are due to me, via email, no later than the Wednesday before class at 1 pm. This is to give me enough time to read them and let them help structure our discussion the next day.

Late questions will be read for philosophical content, but will receive no credit.

There are 10 sessions beyond the initial one, but I'll only be asking for 9 weekly questions from you this semester. It's entirely up to you which day you'd like to pass on.

Papers:

I will not be distributing paper topics for this class, since to get into it you have to be fairly far along in your philosophical education, and it is time for you to get some practice in identifying what makes for a promising paper topic. (The weekly questions are a good tool for scaring up such ideas.)

Instead, you've got to propose your paper idea to me before you write it and have me sign off on it. I think the most productive way to do this will be in person, but I'd like us to finalize the deal by email, so we both have record of our agreement.

The short paper should be about 10-12 pages (i.e. conference-submission length).

The long paper should be about 20-25 pages (i.e. writing-sample length).

I'll be perfectly delighted if your long paper is an expansion and refinement of the topic you started investigating in your short paper.

Grading Method

All evaluated material will be graded on a scale from A+ to F. To weight assignments and calculate the final grade, these letter grades will be converted into the standard 4.0 scale:

4.3 - A+	3.3 - B+	2.3 - C+	1.3 - D+	0.0 - F
4.0 - A	3.0 - B	2.0 - C	1.0 - D	
3.7 - A-	2.7 - B-	1.7 - C-		

The arithmetic that will calculate your final grade will follow this formula:

$$\frac{(W. Questions).10 + (Presentation).10 + (Short Paper).30 + (Long Paper).50}{Final Grade}$$

Policy on Late Assignments

Weekly questions are to be submitted in class and will not be accepted late.

Late term papers are accepted, with a penalty of one full grade per 24-hour period late. So, an A- paper submitted between 24 and 48 hours after it was due would receive a C-. Once a paper is late, it should be submitted via email (to me at dgdick@ucalgary.ca) as soon as it is ready.