



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

**PHIL 649.08 Topics in Ethics:
Reasons, Rationality, & Morality**

Winter Term 2014

Course Outline

Monday and Wednesday, 3.30-4.45, SS 1253

Instructor: John A. Baker
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Email: baker@ucalgary.ca
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

The posted course description says:

A study of some recent work on the analysis of normative reasons that has been taken to suggest the need for a re-examination of standard views about their structure and about the implications those views for standard views about rationality and the possibility of rational assessment of moral claims.

In greater detail:

Throughout the 20th and into the 21st century a dominant philosophical view about justificatory reasons (sometimes called 'normative' reason) for actions and attitudes was a view (or rather a family of views) that came to be called 'reason internalism'. Many (most) philosophers thought that reason internalism (in various of its incarnations) entails certain further 'subjectivist' (a seriously problematic term) views, not only (i) about *practical* reasoning (both one person and n-person) and *rationality*, but also (ii) about *moral* reasoning, and correspondingly yet further views (iii) about the nature of moral rights, duties, and values, at least if such moral considerations are to be counted worth paying attention to in choices about how to behave.

Despite the plausibility of at least some versions of reason internalism and sophistication of the developments of views taken to be consequent on its adoption, in recent years it has been argued that reason internalism and hence the purportedly consequential views 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' – again a seriously problematic term) accounts of justificatory reasons and indeed of rational choice, and consequently of the nature of moral choice and in the end of moral rights, duties and values.

The course will begin by spending a couple of weeks (i) reviewing the standard formulations of the thesis of reason internalism and (ii) of the standard arguments for the various versions of the thesis.

The rest of the term will then be devoted (iii) to a detailed examination of some arguments that purport to raise serious problems for reason internalism, (iv) to a detailed presentation and critique of various recent attempts to provide a replacement 'externalist' ('objectivist') account of justificatory reasons.

Required Texts

The basic *structuring* of the examination of the issues in the course will be provided by Parts One (in Volume One) and Six (in Volume Two) of Derek Parfit's (2011) monumental *On What Matters*. Note that, despite its size (and the price of the hard back version which the last time I looked was \$160 or so – I think it costs a little less recently), *On What Matters* is available for \$20.62 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.

Most of the other readings for the course will consist of journal articles available on-line through the University Library or book chapters also available online. Instructions on how to access these will be posted in the Course Documents section of Blackboard.

We will begin our review of the various versions of reason internalism by reviewing some of the classic literature, but in the first instance using Mark Schroeder's 2007 *Slaves of the Passions* (Oxford University Press). Since 2008 this has been available through the UofC library from Oxford Scholarship Online.

The following *Stanford University Online Encyclopedia* articles may be useful introductions to some of the issues:

- (i) Stephen Finlay and Mark Schroeder's 2008 (substantially revised 2011) article "Reasons for Action – Internal vs. External" (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasons-internal-external/>) – this gives a useful survey of views and argument;
- (ii) James Lenman's 2009 "Reasons for Action: Justification vs. Explanation" (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasons-just-vs-expl/>) – this gives a useful survey of distinctions and relations between justificatory (normative) reasons and explanatory (motivational) reasons.
- (iii) Niko Kolodny and John Brunero's 2013 "Instrumental Rationality" (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rationality-instrumental/>) – this is a useful survey of some of the issues about how to conceive of rationality)

Also useful, though less directly, might be

- (iv) Connie S. Rosati's 2006 "Moral Motivation" (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-motivation/>) – this in effect surveys some views which have sometimes been called "moral internalism" (that is *moral* versus *reason* internalism).

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 Blackboard) an announcement about which article/chapters we will be discussing in class. Students should ensure that they 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 and due dates

Assignments:

1. **Weekly reading assignments** will be set. Except in the weeks when essays are actually due to be submitted (see 3 below), I will on the average set the equivalent of about two articles/chapters per week. ***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 any students who miss classes to find out what readings have been set. As I said above, students should ensure that they bring to class copies of the article/chapter to be discussed.
2. Students will be asked to prepare four brief (point form) ***analyses-and-critiques***. The format for analysis-and-critique assignments and what they involve will be posted on Blackboard at the beginning of term and explained in class. Samples of 'analyses-and-critiques' will be posted on Blackboard and discussed in class.

3. One short essay (about 1500 words excluding footnotes and bibliography maximum) and one substantial term paper (about 2000 words excluding footnotes and bibliography maximum) will be set. The topics and readings for the essay and the paper will significantly overlap with the readings mentioned in 1 and 2. Details of topics and readings will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

Due-dates:

Note the following:

- (i) that on the days listed below the description of the listed assignment will be posted in the Assignments Section of Blackboard,
- (ii) that all completed assignment should be submitted to the Blackboard Digital Drop Box (if you have difficulty using the Digital Drop Box send the completed assignment to me by email), and
- (iii) that marked assignments will be returned by email.

Analysis-and-critique 1: Details will be posted on Wednesday, January 8th. The completed assignment will be due on Wednesday, January 22th, at 9am.

Analysis-and-critique 2: Details will be posted on Wednesday, January 22nd. The completed assignment will be due on Wednesday, February 19th, at 9am. Note that reading week is from 16th February to 23rd February.

Essay 1: The description of what I want in the first essay will be posted on Wednesday, February 12th. The completed essay will be due on March 5th.

Analysis-and-critique 3: Details will be posted on Wednesday, March 5th. The completed assignment will be due on Wednesday, March 19th, at 9am.

Analysis-and-critique 4: Details will be posted on Wednesday, March 19th. The completed assignment will be due on Wednesday, April 2nd, at 9am.

Essay 2: The details about the term will be posted on Monday, March 31st. The completed paper will be due on Wednesday, April 21st.

Grading

1. *Ceteris paribus*, the first analysis-and-critique will be worth 5% of the final grade and each of the second, third and fourth analyses-and-critiques will be worth 10%.
2. *Ceteris paribus*, the first essay will be worth 30% and the second worth 35% of the final grade.
3. 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 four analyses and both the two essays are submitted and receive passing grades.
4. Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier sin.
5. 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 5 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 5 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.

Blackboard Help

Go to <http://www.ucalgary.ca/computersupport/onlineservices/blackboard> for Student Help and FAQs about Blackboard. Troubleshooting tips and a tutorial are available at <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/blackboard/students>.

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.

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.