



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 649.09 Topics in Ethics: Moral and Reason Internalism

Winter Term 2016
Course Outline

Monday and Wednesday, 3.30-4.45, SA 123

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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

The problem of normativity has been characterized in the literature in a variety of ways. Recently it has been found useful to frame it as the problem of explicating what makes it the case that certain facts or putative facts can in certain circumstances *ground* or (differently) *serve as* reasons for certain agents to act or feel in certain ways and do so with a certain "relative strength". The working hypothesis of the course will be that this is a useful way of framing the main issues in this area.

A variety of theories about how to address the problem of normativity are under consideration in the current literature. *Internalist* theories argue that facts can only ground or serve as reasons for an agent to respond in certain ways if the mental state of that agent is configured in certain ways (e.g., s/he has certain desires) or if the agent *does* certain things (e.g., endorses certain principles of choice). The former is sometimes called reason internalism and the latter constructivism: the latter is also sometimes called voluntarism. *Externalist* theories argue that certain facts and putative facts can ground or serve as reasons for certain agents to respond to them in certain ways because of the "very nature" of the facts – their capacity to ground or serve as reasons is somehow "essential to" the nature of these particular facts and in some sense independent of the mental state and the mental acts of the agents for which they are reasons to respond in these ways. There has, of course, been much discussion of whether, for example, putative moral facts can so serve. *Hybrid and mixed (or eclectic)* versions of these theories have also been suggested.

The first couple of weeks of the course will provide a systematic overview of these theories and their more obvious strengths and weaknesses. The rest of the term will address in depth some of the deeper (and more complex) issues for certain of the theories especially in relation to questions about the possibility of developing an account of a reason-based morality. Some of these kinds of problems arise

for both of the above mentioned internalist theories and some of them for both internalist and externalist theories. Problems to be considered can be illustrated as follows:

Firstly, as part of our examination of constructivism we will need address what might be called the *paradox of constructivism*. Classic (Kantian) constructivist approaches to the problem of normativity argue that an agent has a reason to respond in a certain way to certain facts or putative facts only if that agent *endorses* some principle which requires this response to these facts or putative facts. But now we may ask whether this endorsing is subject to certain norms (e.g., norms of rationality). If we say not, then it is hard to see why the endorsement is not just arbitrary (“without reason”) and hence not adequate to explain why indeed the agent does have a reason to respond to the facts in this way; but if say that the endorsement must be subject to certain norms of rationality, we seemingly need to ask where *these* norm come from if we espouse constructivism and if we respond by saying that they are binding on us because and in so far as we endorse them, then we might seem to face an infinite regress. Sorting out this paradox will force an examination of the possibility of developing various *kinds* of constructivism.

A related problem is this. Most philosophers who are tempted by constructivist approaches to the *general* problem of normativity are tempted by a hypotheticalist approach to the task of developing an account of how (rationally) we may identify which *moral* norms are “worth” endorsing or perhaps “ought” to be endorsed, where the hypotheticalist approach says that a moral norm ought to be endorsed just in case agents who count as *competent* judges (on certain specified criteria) with information that counts as *appropriate* (on certain specified criteria) *would endorse* that norm under certain *specified conditions*. But then we must ask why it is that the fact that persons who count as competent judges on those criteria with what counts as appropriate information on those criteria would under those conditions specified in that way endorse the choice of a certain norm gives *us* reason to endorse that norm.

A third problem (or rather family of problems) that is in effect a generalization of the last one is this. For most familiar accounts of how a rational morality is to be developed or identified there will seemingly be the question that any agent can ask, the question “What is that to me? Why should I care unless I serendipitously happen already to care or happen to care for instrumental reasons?” and it is not clear how that question can be answered rationally for all people. This family of problems include the so-called ‘free-rider’ problem and the problem of the “amoralist”.

Required Texts

Most of the readings for the course will be journal articles downloadable through the University library. The other readings are available on-line or will be posted in the Course Contents section of D2L.

At various stages of the course the following readings from the *Stanford University Encyclopedia of Philosophy* will be useful background reading (in this order):

- James Lenman, 2009, “Reasons for Action – Justification vs. Explanation”, *Stanford University Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasons-just-vs-expl/>
- Stephen Finlay & Mark Schroeder, 2012, “Reasons for Action: Internal vs. External”, *Stanford University Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasons-internal-external/>
- Carla Bagnoli, 2011, “Constructivism in Metaethics”, *Stanford University Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/constructivism-metaethics/>
- James Lenman, 2009, “Reasons for Action – Justification vs. Explanation”, *Stanford University Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasons-just-vs-expl/>
- Connie Rosati, 2006, “Moral Motivation”, *Stanford University Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-motivation/>

Assignments and due dates

1. **Two “analysis-and-critique” assignments:** These will be due at 11am on Friday, January 29th, and Friday, February 26th, respectively. What is involved in analysis-and-critique assignments will be posted on D2L at the beginning of term and explained in class. Examples will be posted on D2L and used as the basis for some class discussions.
2. **One short essay** (about 1500 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography): Topic and readings will be posted on D2L at 9am on Monday, February 29th, and the assignment will be due at 9am on Friday, March 18th.
3. **A term paper** (about 2200 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography): Topic and readings will be posted on D2L on Friday, March 18th. The completed paper will be due on Friday, April 22nd, at 9am.
4. **A presentation and defence of the core ideas to be argued for in the term paper:** A description of what is wanted will be posted on D2L on Friday, March 18th. Draft texts of presentations will be due Thursday, April 7th, at 4pm. Presentations will be made in the last two classes of term (April 11th and 13th) on a schedule to be assigned.
5. **The quality of contributions to class discussion throughout the term and during the presentations in the final week will be factored in to the assignment of the final grade.**

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 20%.
2. *Ceteris paribus*, the 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 10%.
5. *Ceteris paribus*, class participation will be worth 5%.
6. Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier ‘sin’.
7. 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.
8. 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

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services. SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For more information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>. Students who require accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their instructor. The full policy on student accommodations is available at http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy_0.pdf

D2L Help

Desire2Learn is UCalgary's online learning management system. Go to <http://www.ucalgary.ca/it/services/d2l> for help.

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 or teaching assistant.

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.