UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF ARTS
Department of Philosophy

PHIL 649 Topics in Ethics: Rationality & Morality

Winter Term 2020

Course Outline

MW 15:30 – 16.45 Classes online using Zoom

Instructor: John A. Baker
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  When emailing please put "**649**" in the subject line of the email.
Office Hours: By phone conversation – email me to arrange it.

Course Description:

At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that moral philosophy (aka ethics) falls into three possibly interconnected parts:
  (A) *normative metaethical theorizing* about the possibility (or otherwise) of providing grounding (metaphysical or otherwise) **(i)** for the belief that at least some moral truths exist and **(ii)** for claims about the role, if any, of such truths in reasoning about what morally is to be done;
  (B) *normative ethical theorizing* which aims to provide well-grounded tests by which moral truths, if such exist, can be identified (familiar examples of such tests include various forms of utilitarianism and various forms of Kantianism); and *in the meantime*
  (C) *normative metaethical theorizing about the nature of deliberation and the nature of moral reasoning*, and specifically theorizing about how *rationally* to go about figuring out what choices of actions and of norms *pro tanto* ought morally to be made in specified situations and about how to justify such choices as *reasonable* choices to make in the circumstances.

The aims of this course are **(1)** to outline a provisional philosophically strategic positioning of the third part of moral philosophy in relation to the other two parts and **(2)** to examine current thinking on the following issues that arise in relation to this third part of moral philosophy: **(i)** Can grounds be provided for at least a provisional (i.e., defeasible) *classification* of certain considerations as in some sense *morally relevant considerations* (the so-called *problem of moral relevance*) and relatedly the *classification* of certain norms as in some sense *moral norms* (the so-called *problem of the definition of morality*)? **(ii)** Can rational sense can be made of any felt need in choices of actions or endorsement of norms to take into account considerations classified (as above) as morally relevant and to comply with norms that are at least provisionally to be classified (as above) as in some sense moral norms (the so-called *problem of moral motivation*)? **(iii)** Are there are grounds for treating moral reasoning as inextricably *defeasible* reasoning (the so-called *problem of the "logic" of moral reasoning*)? And **(iv)** Are there canons of rationality that might govern such defeasible reasoning and if so which canons (the so-called *problem of the rationality of morality*).

Prerequisites:

Two previous courses in Philosophy, one of which must be Philosophy 249 [Morality, Virtue, and Society], Philosophy 397 [Value Theory], 425 [Philosophy of Law], 449 [Contemporary Metaethics] or 453 [Social and Political Philosophy] and at least one of which must be a 400 level or higher; or consent of the Department.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students
- should be able to position the study of moral deliberation and of moral reasoning in relation to classic normative metaethical and normative ethical inquiries;
- should be able to explain the different roles in choice of actions and of norms of *moral deliberation* and *moral reasoning*;
- should able to articulate reasons for viewing practical and moral reasoning as *defeasible* reasoning;
- should be able to explain how certain canons of rationality might apply to practical and moral reasoning;
- 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 philosophical 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.

Required/Recommended Texts:

The readings for the course will consist of journal articles or book chapters, all available either through D2L.

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

For example:

- Henry Richardson, 2018, "Moral Reasoning".
- R. Jay Wallace, 2014, "Practical Reason".
- Bernard Gert and Joshua Gert, 2016, "The Definition of Morality"
- Nico Kolodny and John Brunero, 2018, "Instrumental Rationality".
- Connie Rosati, 2016, "Moral Motivation".
- R. A. Briggs, 2019, "Normative Theories of Rational Choice: Expected Utility"
- Stephen Finlay & Mark Schroeder, 2016, "Reasons for Action: Internal vs. External".

Other articles in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* that may provide useful background include

- Carla Bagnoli, 2017, "Constructivism in Metaethics".
- Mark van Roojen, 2018, "Moral Cognitivism vs Non-Cognitivism".
- Geoff Sayre-McCord, 2012, "Metaethics".
- Geoff Sayre-McCord, 2015, "Moral Realism".
- Richard Joyce, 2015 "Moral Anti-Realism vs Realism".

Assignments, due dates, and grading

Assignments – details of what is wanted will be posted on D2L:

1. Weekly reading assignments will be set and announced ahead of time on D2L.
2. **Two short essays** (about 1000 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography).
3. **A term paper** (about 1300 words maximum, excluding footnotes and bibliography).
4. An eight minute "Speed Lecture" summarizing the main thesis of the term paper.
5. The readings for the essays and for the term paper will significantly overlap with the readings mentioned in 1 and will for the most part have been discussed in class before the due date.
6. There will be no registrar-scheduled final examination.
7. Assignments are to be uploaded as MS-Word or rtf files (***not* as pdf files)** to this course's digital drop box in D2L

Due-dates:

- Short Essay 1: Sunday, February 2nd.
- Short Essay 2: Sunday, March 8th.
- Speed Lecture: Wednesday, April 8th or April 15th – the schedule will be announced on April 1st.
- Term Paper: Friday, April 24th.

Grading

1. *Ceteris paribus* each of the short essays will be worth 20% of the final grade.
2. *Ceteris paribus*, the "speed lecture" will be worth 15% of the final grade.
3. *Ceteris paribus* the term paper will be worth 45% 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 essays and the term paper is submitted and the "Speed Lecture" is delivered.
5. Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier sin.
6. If an essay is submitted after the stated deadline, then it will receive at most a B and then only if submitted by 9am of the day after the due day: it will receive at most a C if submitted by 9am of the day after that, and so on.
7. Percentages will be computed using the numbers set by the University as equivalent to the letter grades.

IMPORTANT DEPARTMENTAL, FACULTY AND UNIVERSITY INFORMATION

Academic Accommodations

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/access/accommodations/policy.

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/policies/files/policies/procedure-for-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities.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. Instructors may request that evidence in the form of documentation be provided. 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. For information on possible forms of documentation, including statutory declarations, please see ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html

Student Support and Resources

Full details and information about the following resources can be found at ucalgary.ca/Registrar/registration/course-outlines

- 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 arts.ucalgary.ca/advising for contact details and information regarding common academic concerns.

For questions specific to the philosophy program, please visit phil.ucalgary.ca. Further academic guidance is available by contacting David Dick (Undergraduate Program Director dgdick@ucalgary.ca) or Jeremy Fantl (Honours Advisor jfantl@ucalgary.ca). If you have questions regarding registration, please email Rebecca Lesser (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 (one-on-one appointments, drop-in support and writing workshops). For more information, and other services offered by the Student Success Centre, please visit ucalgary.ca/ssc.

Online Resources and Electronic Devices
Important information and communication about this course may be posted on D2L (Desire2Learn), UCalgary's online learning management system. Visit ucalgary.service-now.com/it for how-to information and technical assistance.

The instructor reserves the right to establish specific course policies regarding the use of electronic devices. If permitted, the use of devices must be exclusively for instructional purposes, and without disruption to the instructor or fellow students. Devices should be set to silent mode during lectures. Audio or video recording of lectures is not permitted without the written permission of the instructor. Students violating this policy are subject to discipline under the University of Calgary's Non-Academic Misconduct policy.

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/policies/files/policies/Intellectual%20Property%20Policy.pdf

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act, as outlined at ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip. 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 (ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-
copyright.pdf) and requirements of the copyright act (laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html).