

PHIL 3320: *Contemporary Ethical Theory*  
 Winter 2020  
 Carleton University

Meeting time: Tuesdays, 6:05 pm

Instructor: Gordon Davis  
 Office: Paterson Hall, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, rm. 3A51 (in the Philosophy Dept.)  
 Office hours: Thursdays 2:00-3:00, or by appointment  
 Email: Gordon.Davis@carleton.ca (\* Please email me from your 'cmail' or 'carleton.ca' address.)  
 CuLearn: Regular visits to the course website – on Carleton's CuLearn – may be required (TBA).

REQUIRED READINGS

1. J.L. Mackie, excerpt handout, from *Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1977), "The Subjectivity of Values"
2. Mary Midgley, "Trying out one's New Sword" (also to be handed out in class)
3. Brad Hooker, "Rule-Consequentialism" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (free online)
4. A selection of other entries from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (TBA)
5. Jesse Prinz, excerpt from *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (OUP 2007), online @ CU Libr.
6. Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (OUP 2000), online @ CU Library
7. Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* (OUP 2011), online @ CU Library (excerpts TBA)

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

1. Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* (esp. ch. 2), online @ CU Library
2. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (available @ library reserves)
3. Tim Mulgan, *Future People* (OUP 2006), online @ CU Library
4. Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (OUP 2001) @ Library

\* Depending on which essay topic(s) you choose, other specific readings may also be required.

COURSE DESCRIPTION and COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course examines recent work in ethical theory – in the widest sense of 'ethical theory', which includes both the study of highly general normative theories such as deontology and utilitarianism and the study of ethical discourse as a linguistic and psychological phenomenon. The latter can potentially be treated more scientifically than normative ethics, but it remains at least as philosophical. The study of ethical discourse is what is known as *meta-ethics*. This field not only studies the concepts and methods of moral understanding (via, e.g., semantics, epistemology and cognitive science), but also the question of what, if anything, moral claims refer to in some ontological realm that might make true moral claims true – and this requires metaphysics. In fact, we will need to consider metaphysics, if only to describe what some moral claims purport to refer to (even if it turns out that they fail to refer to anything, perhaps just expressing non-cognitive states of mind). In this way, meta-ethics requires us to draw on all the major areas of philosophical reflection.

We will discuss meta-ethics at both the beginning and end of the course. By discussing it at the beginning, we will sensibly be asking whether ethics is a subject like others, i.e. whether it makes sense to pursue *theoretical* inquiry into normative ethics. In discussing it again in the last few weeks of the course, we will tackle its debates with a greater arsenal of tools, arguments and examples. In both cases – at the beginning and end – we will consider whether evidence from other disciplines (e.g. anthropology, with respect to cultural variation; and evolutionary psychology, with respect to sociobiological explanations of morality) subverts or vindicates moral discourse. In between, we will discuss a theory of right action (a 'normative'

theory) which has created some excitement in recent years as a new model of moral assessment – called *rule-consequentialism*.

The course is not only about morality. While rule-consequentialism is a moral theory, we will also discuss ethics in a broader sense: as it relates not only to duties to others, but as it relates to the relative value of personal goals and personal choices. If we widen this further, to include how we should *feel* (with respect to personal experiences or aesthetic experiences), and how we should *think* (in judging anything, including scientific claims), we are then discussing *normativity* in general. Meta-ethics helps us to survey the whole field of normativity, and hence much more than morality.

#### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS:

(Please note that the order and/or timing of topics or readings may change – though with as much advance notice as possible. So long as no changes have been announced, the readings indicated below should be done *prior* to the date under which they appear; they will be discussed that day.)

Week 1 (January 7) Introduction to ethical theories, new and old / The roles of history and theory

Week 2 (January 14) The Challenges of Moral and Cultural Relativism / the notion of ‘anti-realism’

Readings: Prinz (*Emotional Construction*), pp. 183-195; and Hooker (“Rule-Consequentialism”)

Week 3 (January 21) Moral and Cultural Relativism (continued) / (vs) anti-realism without relativism

Readings: M. Midgley, “Trying out one’s New Sword”(handout) + J.L. Mackie, *Ethics*, chapter 1

Week 4 (January 28) Util. + midterm essay-date announced + **topic for Feb. 4 in-class essay announced**

Readings: Mackie, “Subjectivity of Values” (cont’d) and ch. 1 of Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World*

Week 5 (**February 4**) Utilitarianism vs. Rule-Consequentialism + **IN-CLASS ESSAY**

Readings: Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (chapters TBA); **NB: Mackie crucial for next essay**

Week 6 (February 11) Rule-Consequentialism vs. other moral theories (deontology & contract’sm)

Reading: Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (chapters TBA) & SEP articles TBA

#### **READING WEEK BREAK: \*\*\* no class on Feb. 18**

Week 7 (February 25) Rule-Consequentialism vs. other moral theories (virtue, care ethics, particularism)

Reading: Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (chapters TBA)

Week 8 (March 3) Implications of Rule-Consequentialism in Practice: Duties and Rights

Reading: Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (chapters TBA)

Week 9 (March 10) Other Options in Moral Theory: The Spectrum of Non-Consequentialisms

Reading: Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (chapters TBA)

Week 10 (March 17) More Challenges from Cultural Relativism (and the role of religious traditions)

Reading: Jesse Prinz, *Emotional Construction of Morals*, chs 5 & 8; (optional: Goodman ch. 6)

Week 11 (March 24) Other sources of moral skepticism (non-cognitivism, reductionism, internalism)

Reading: SEP material (TBA) & Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* (excerpts TBA)

Week 12 (March 31) Moral realism and the Prospects of Ethical Theory / Presentations

Reading: SEP material (TBA) & Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* (excerpts TBA)

Week 13 (April 7) Connections with other spheres of philosophical inquiry (**NB:** deadline this week...)

**April 10 – Final Essay due by midnight (via email)**

EVALUATION (w/ weight of assignments as percentage of total mark):

Attendance	10 % (based on weeks 3-12; requires presence from start to end of class)
In-class essay	20 % Topic announced one week prior (prior to test date=Feb. 4)
Midterm essay	30 % Due date TBA (after reading week); topic related to Mackie rdg.
Final essay (OR*)	40 % (*alternative: presentation, with followup annotated bibliography)

Essay instructions will specify a minimum and maximum length. Essays that are significantly beyond the word limit will not be marked and will have to be resubmitted within a specified period of time. **It's your responsibility to check Carleton email, each day following your submission, for replies about that, or perhaps about the formatting you've used, in case it needs correcting.**

The main components of evaluation concern the following: clarity of thesis statement (and other 'signposting'), logical and effective use of argument, due consideration of objections (with effective replies), balanced essay structure, effective use of relevant readings (with full and consistent citations), sensitive interpretation of primary texts, effective writing style (including basics such as grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as clarity in wording and phrasing), and originality in thesis and/or arguments.

More will be said in class about these expectations and their role in how we evaluate the essays. A point to be emphasized here, though, concerns 'originality'. There are two different senses in which essays should be 'original'. In one sense, 'originality' involves coming up with ideas and arguments that are novel (or outside the norm for this level); this can be quite difficult, and those earning the highest marks generally do well on this score, while good essays may show only a modest degree of originality in this sense. In another sense, an essay is 'original' when it is entirely a student's own work, and any ideas in it that derive from the work of others are duly credited in citations of these sources. In this sense, 'originality' is not a component of the mark, but is simply an absolute minimum requirement. If any part of an essay – apart from explicit quotations – is not original *in this sense*, the student has committed the serious offence of *plagiarism*.

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON PLAGIARISM:

According to the Undergraduate Calendar's definition (in section 14 of "University Regulations"), it constitutes *plagiarism* "to use and pass off as one's own idea or product work of another without expressly giving credit to another." It is the responsibility of each student to understand this definition, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding/abetting plagiarism by other students. Penalties for plagiarism are decided by the Dean's office, and can range from an automatic zero on the assignment to suspension or expulsion from the university.

**OTHER POLICIES:**

Submission of essays: Essays should be attached & sent to **Gordon.Davis@carleton.ca**. Your essay must arrive before midnight on the due date, to be on time. **You are also responsible for sending a reformatted document within 24 hours in case I contact you about a problem with your file or format (which means: \*\*\* you're required to check for any email from me within 48 hours of submission, in case there is any such problem, or else a late penalty may apply).**

Presentation / formatting of essays: Save your document, (a) with a doc. title indicating your name and your topic, (b) in a format compatible with Word, which includes most formats *except 'odt'*. Begin p. 1 with a title, *but not a title page*; and include your name on p. 1. Re. methods of citation: MLA, APA or Chicago all accepted, provided you stick to one of these; however, I may add some requirements of my own, which you must observe regardless of which style you use.

Extensions: Extensions will be granted only upon presentation of a medical certificate, or other documented emergency or crisis. *It is essential that I have documents that have been signed by a professional whose contact info. is well indicated.* Requests based on conflicts with other coursework will not be granted.

Late essays: **Late submissions will lose 5 % per day.** (See below for other dept./univ. policies...)

**Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2019-20)**

**Assignments:**

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- Must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips.
- Must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box).
- Must include the following on the first page: student name and number; course name and number; instructor's name.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates below.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

**Evaluation:**

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

**Deferrals for Final Exams:**

If you miss a final examination (formally scheduled or take-home) because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral. You must apply within 3 working days after the scheduled date of your formally scheduled exam or within 3 working days after the due date of a take-home exam. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information:

<http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv2/#2.5>

**Plagiarism:**

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students.

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

**Academic Accommodation:**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. [carleton.ca/pmc](http://carleton.ca/pmc)

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Religious obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Survivors of Sexual Violence:** as a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and is survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: [carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support](http://carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support)

**Accommodation for Student Activities:** Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: [students.carleton.ca/course-outline](https://students.carleton.ca/course-outline)

**Important Dates:**

Jan. 6	Classes begin.
Jan. 17	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 17	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 17-21	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 24	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 7	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 10	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 13-25	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 25	All take-home examinations are due on this day.

**Addresses:**

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a> 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a> 520-3500
Academic Advising Centre:	302 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising">www.carleton.ca/academicadvising</a> 520-7850
Writing Services:	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/">http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/</a> 520-3822
MacOdrum Library	<a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a> 520-2735