

Phil 491, Philosophy Majors Seminar
Term 1 2025-26
W 2pm-4.30pm

Instructor
Matthew S. Bedke matt.bedke@ubc.ca Office: Buchanan Block E, room 361 Office Hrs: in person Wednesdays, noon-1pm; Zoom by appointment.

Required Learning Materials

Papers posted on Canvas or LOCR.

Draft manuscript, *Putting Things in Perspective*

Course Description and Aims

This course will cover central issues in metaethics. The primary reading material will be a draft book from the instructor, “Putting Things in Perspective”, supplemented by key articles in the field. The book develops and defends a subjectivist theory of normative thought and language.

The aims in this course are 1) to familiarize you with this content, 2) to hone your thinking, conversational, and writing skills, and 3) to write term papers suitable for applications to graduate programs.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will

- have a broad appreciation of the questions and concerns surrounding metaethics.
- be able to explain philosophical texts and positions accurately, to identify and apply philosophical research methods consistently, to articulate and defend precise philosophical positions, and to anticipate and rebut objections to those positions.
- acquire the content, synthesize it, summarize it, analyze it, criticize it, and communicate it.
- produce a term paper.

Learning Expectations

Students are expected to do the readings in advance, attend class, stay focused and undistracted during the lecture portions of the class, and to actively participate in classroom discussions. Students are also required to submit all assignments on time.

Piazza

We will be using Piazza for class discussion. Rather than emailing questions to the teaching staff, I encourage you to post your questions on Piazza. If you have any problems or feedback for the developers, email team@piazza.com.

Find our class signup link at:

Assessments of Learning

Your final mark will be determined by

- 1) 25% weekly written responses (posted on Piazza)

- 3) 20% term paper draft material and feedback
- 4) 55% term paper

- 1) Weekly written responses. Each week, students should prepare a brief (250-500 word) written response to the readings that will be discussed in the coming week. These will be posted on the class Piazza site by midnight each Sunday night. You can discuss the material with other students, but please do not use AI to help you. There is not a fixed assignment question for these responses; appropriate topics include:
 - Summarizing the main point of a reading
 - Clarifying a particularly interesting argument in the reading
 - Raising an objection to a reading
 - Drawing connections between the ideas in the reading to broader themes
- 2) Term paper draft material and feedback. Students are required to prepare roughly 1000 words of rough draft material for the term paper. This will be submitted on Canvas where I will grade it and one of your peers will be assigned to read it and give you constructive criticism. That criticism will also be assessed. No AI help for this except to proof read. Deadlines TBD.
- 3) Term paper. Students will produce a term paper engaging a major theme of the course. Students are encouraged to discuss topics with me in advance, or gather feedback on Piazza. I expect papers to be between 4000 and 6000 words, and there is an 8000 word upper limit. This is a philosophy research paper. It should advance an original argument. No research outside of the readings is required, but for most topics it is encouraged. No AI help for this except to proof read. The deadline for the paper is TBD.

I will not accept late work except with a valid excuse from Arts Advising. Any request to re-grade work must be submitted in writing, detailing reasons for awarding a higher grade and indicating the new grade being requested.

Relationship between percentages and letter grades:

90-100% A+	85-89% A	80-84% A-
76-79% B+	72-75% B	68-71% B-
64-67% C+	60-63% C	55-59% C-
50-54% D	0-49% F	

A Range: Exceptional Performance. Mastery of the subject matter; strong evidence of original thinking; good organization in written work; impressive capacity to analyze; insightful critical evaluations.

B Range: Competent Performance. Evidence of grasp of subject matter; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues.

C Range: Adequate Performance. Understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material; acceptable but uninspired work; not seriously faulty but lacking style and vigour.

D Range: Problematic Performance. Some incomplete understanding of the subject matter; limited evidence of critical and analytical skills; lack of original thinking.

F Range: Inadequate Performance. Little or no evidence of understanding of the subject matter; little or no evidence of critical and analytical skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.

Electronic Devices in the Class

I allow the use of computers and electronic devices but only to take notes and access class-related material. Above all, do not use your electronic devices in ways that might disturb other students. If you, as a student, are disturbed by another's use of electronic devices, please let me know. Violation of this policy can lead me to revise it.

University Policies

Academic Concession

[UBC's academic concession policy](#) "articulates the University's commitment to support students in their academic pursuits through the application of academic concessions in the event that students experience unanticipated events or circumstances that interfere with their ability to accomplish academic work." An academic concession may be granted for a student when an unexpected situation or circumstance prevents them from completing graded work or exams.

Students may request an academic concession for the following three reasons:

- Unanticipated changes in personal responsibilities that create a conflict
- Medical circumstances
- Compassionate grounds

If students have a disability or ongoing medical condition that affects their studies for more than one term, they may request an [academic accommodation](#).

Requests should be made as early as reasonably possible. Normally, the academic advising office will manage student's request.

Academic Integrity

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences. A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University's policies and procedures, may be found under [Discipline for Academic Misconduct](#) in the Academic Calendar.

Resources to Support Student Success

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on the UBC Senate

website: <https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success>

Learning Resources

Some learning resources are available on the Canvas website, such as links to helpful information about writing philosophy papers. I also want to bring your attention to the Philosophy Essay Clinic: <https://philosophy.ubc.ca/undergraduate/philosophy-essay-clinic/>

Copyright

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Reading Schedule

Please do the assigned readings before class and come prepared to discuss them. **The schedule is subject to change.**

Week	Date	Readings/Assignments
1	03-Sep-25	Mackie, "Inventing Right and Wrong"
2	10-Sep-25	Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"; Bedke, "Might All Normativity Be Queer?"
3	17-Sep-25	Ch. 1
4	24-Sep-25	Something on relativism
5	01-Oct-25	Ch. 2
6	08-Oct-25	Something on realism
7	15-Oct-25	Ch. 3
8	22-Oct-25	Something on the just too different intuition
9	29-Oct-25	Ch. 4
10	05-Nov-25	Something on motivational internalism
11	12-Nov-25	Midterm break, no class
12	19-Nov-25	Ch. 5
13	26-Nov-25	Something on supervenience
14	03-Dec-25	Ch. 6