

**Phil 634 – Seminar in Ethics:
Reasons for Action and Attitudes**

Spatiotemporal location: Tuesdays 10:35am-12:25pm

Professor: Stephanie Leary (stephanie.leary@mcgill.ca)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30-3:30 pm, LEA942

Course Description: Contemporary ethics, metaethics, and even epistemology is rife with talk of *reasons*, which are often taken to play a central (if not fundamental) role in normative theorizing. In this seminar, we'll cover a wide variety of debates concerning reasons for action and attitudes. We'll begin by discussing how so-called *objective normative reasons* differ from other nearby notions, and then we'll go on to discuss general debates about objective normative reasons for action and attitudes: do they somehow depend on our motivational states, how do they relate to facts about value, fittingness, and what we ought to do? Then we will discuss a handful of questions about practical vs. epistemic reasons: what is the difference between practical and epistemic reasons, are there practical reasons for belief or only epistemic ones, how could practical and epistemic reasons weigh against one another, and are there epistemic reasons for action and other attitudes?

Requirements and Grades:

- (1) Participation (10%): The success of our seminar depends on everyone participating in an active and respectful discussion. You are expected to attend every class, complete all required readings beforehand, and come prepared with questions or comments.
- (2) Conference-Style Presentation (15%): Each student will give a 10-15 minute presentation that includes (a) a concise summary of one of the main arguments from the week's reading and (b) a focused critique (i.e. raise *one* to *three* questions/objections). You should have a clear, concise handout for everyone to follow your presentation, and you must email me by the Friday before your presentation to let me know what your focus will be.
- (3) One short paper (20%) around 2,000 words on a topic of your choice due by Tuesday, October 29th. This can be a stand-alone short paper, or you may use it as a starting point for your term paper.
- (4) One term paper (45%) around 4,000-6,000 words on a topic of your choice due on Friday, December 20th (via email). You *must* meet with me to discuss your term paper topic and ideas before classes end on Nov 26th. I'm happy to give you reading suggestions and comments on outlines. If you email me and don't get a response within 2 days, email me again! You are never bothering me by asking me for things - *it's my job!*
- (5) Comments on a peer's term paper (10%): On the last day of class (Nov 26th), you'll be paired up with another student to swap rough drafts of your term papers. You must email your partner (and CC me!) your rough draft by Friday, Dec 13th. You then must email your partner your comments on their draft (and CC me again!) by Monday, December 16th. You must provide substantive philosophical comments in a respectful way to receive full points.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Topic	Date	Question of the week	Required Reading	<i>Recommended Reading</i>	Due
Introduction to reasons	03-Sep	<i>How many different ways can you use the term 'reason'? (Spoiler: LOTS)</i>	Chapter 1 of Mark Schroeder's <i>Slaves of the Passions</i>		
Motivating reasons	10-Sep	<i>What are motivating reasons?</i>	(1) Donald Davidson's "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", (2) Keshav Singh's "Acting and Believing Under the Guise of Normative Reasons"	Daniel Fogal's "Deflationary Pluralism About Motivating Reasons"	
Subjective normative reasons	17-Sep	<i>What is it to have a reason?</i>	(1) Mark Schoeder's "Having Reasons", (2) Errol Lord's "Having Reasons and the Factoring Account"	Kurt Sylvan's "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be"	
Internalist theories of objective normative reasons	24-Sep	<i>Do the objective normative reasons depend on our motivational states?</i>	(1) Bernard Williams's "Internal and External Reasons", (2) Julia Markovits's "Internal Reasons and the Motivating Intuition"	Julia Markovits's "Why Be An Internalist About Reasons?"	
	01-Oct	<i>Do the objective normative reasons depend on our motivational states?</i>	Chapters 5 and 6 of Mark Schroeder's <i>Slaves of the Passions</i>	Mark Schroeder's "The Humean Theory of Reasons", Eden Lin's "Prudence, Morality, and the Humean Theory of Reasons"	
Externalist theories of objective normative reasons	08-Oct	<i>Are objective normative reasons fundamental or explained by facts about value?</i>	(1) Tim Scanlon's <i>Being Realistic About Reasons</i> , Chapter 2, (2) Barry Maguire's "The Value-Based Theory of Reasons"	Daniel Wodak's "Why realists must reject normative quietism"	
Reasons' place in the normative hierarchy	15-Oct	<i>Or are facts about value explained by reasons or vice versa?</i>	(1) Jussi Sukainen's "Reasons and Value - In Defence of the Buck-Passing Account", (2) Rabinowicz & Ronnow-Rasmussen's "The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-attitudes and Value"	Zoe Johnson King's "We Can Have Our Buck and Pass it Too", Jussi Sukainen's "Buckpassing Accounts of Value", Mark Schroeder's "Value and the Right Kind of Reason"	

	22-Oct	<i>How does fittingness fit in?</i>	(1) Chris Howard's "Fittingness", (2) Chris Howard's "The Fundamentality of Fit"	McHugh & Way's "Fittingness First", Richard Rowland's "Reasons or Fittingness First?", Daniel Wodak's "Who's on First?"	
	29-Oct	<i>How do reasons relate to oughts?</i>	(1) Kearns & Star's "Reasons: Explanations or Evidence?", (2) Daniel Wodak's "Redundant Reasons"	Broome's "Reasons", Laura and Francois Schroeter's "Reasons as Right-Makers"	Short Papers Due
Practical vs. Epistemic Reasons	05-Nov	<i>Are there practical reasons for belief, or only epistemic reasons?</i>	(1) Nishi Shah's "New Argument for Evidentialism", (2) Susanna Rinard's "Believing for Practical Reasons"	Stephanie Leary's "In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief", Sarah Stroud's "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"	
	12-Nov	<i>How would practical and epistemic reasons weigh against one another?</i>	(1) Selim Berker's "A Combinatorial Argument Against Practical Reasons for Belief", (2) Chris Howard's "Weighing Epistemic and Practical Reasons for Belief"	Andrew Reisner's "Weighing Pragmatic and Evidential Reasons for Belief"	
	19-Nov	<i>What distinguishes practical and epistemic reasons?</i>	(1) Stephanie Leary's "Grounding the Domains of Reasons", (2) Maguire and Woods's "The Game of Belief"	Susanna Rinard's "Equal Treatment for Belief", Selim Berker's "Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions", Sylvan's "An Epistemic Non-Consequentialism"	
	26-Nov	<i>Are there epistemic reasons for action, or only for belief?</i>	(1) Stephanie Leary's "A Puzzle for Reasons Pluralists", (2) Daniel Singer and Sara Aronowitz's "What Epistemic Reasons Are For: Against the Belief-Sandwich Distinction"		
	Fri Dec 13				Rough Draft Peer Swap
	Mon Dec 16				Peer Comments Due
	Fri Dec 20				Final Term Papers Due

Language Policy

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Academic Integrity Policy

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).