

**PHIL 488 / 594 – Current Research /
Selected Problems in Philosophy**

‘Intuitions, Conceptual Engineering, and Experimental Philosophy’

Fall Term 2024

Tue, Thu 12:30–1:50 pm, [Assiniboia Hall 2-02A](#)

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A. Course overview

This metaphilosophy seminar deals with two basic topics. The first pertains to what the proper *methods* of philosophy are. Here we have traditional armchair methods such as the use of intuitions in opposition to gathering questionnaire data as done in experimental philosophy, which is a prominent approach that arose one and a half decades ago. The second topic pertains to what the primary *aims* of philosophy are. Conceptual analysis is the view that philosophy consists in analyzing ordinary concepts, which we already possess but whose definition needs to be properly articulated (e.g., ‘knowledge’, ‘causation’, ‘intention’, or ‘morally wrong’). In contrast, in the last few years the approach of conceptual engineering (aka conceptual ethics) has arisen, which argues that rather than spelling out concepts as they currently are, the philosophical aim should be to improve philosophical concepts, which may require the revision of current concepts (e.g., ‘gender’, ‘race’, or ‘truth’), the abandoning of flawed concepts, or the creation new concepts. An obvious connection between our two main topics of methods and aims of philosophy is that the use of armchair intuitions (about how a concept applies to various imagined situations) would be a suitable method for the aim of conceptual analysis.

We will begin with intuitions and the agenda of conceptual analysis. We scrutinize in detail two-dimensional semantics, which puts forward an account of conceptual content that promises to underwrite the project of conceptual analysis, among other things by evading traditional hurdles, such as the tenet that meanings are not inside the head. Then we turn to the quite different agenda of conceptual engineering. Here we focus on discussions on how to put forward revised, improved accounts of the concepts of gender and race (including an argument that several different concepts of gender are needed).

Afterwards, we investigate experimental philosophy. We take a look at experimental philosophy studies that have implications for traditional issues in philosophy of action, ethics, metaphysics, and philosophy of language. But we also discuss how experimental philosophy has been used to argue against the reliability of intuitions altogether. We conclude with recent defenses of the use of intuitions that also respond to the challenge from experimental philosophy.

B. Course objective and expected learning outcomes

The objective of this course is to expose students to several core issues in contemporary metaphilosophy. Students will learn to identify key concepts, to analyze philosophical arguments, and to articulate complex ideas. They will also acquire the skills to adjudicate philosophical debates, also with reference to empirical considerations where appropriate. The course seeks to increase student's knowledge, oral communication skills, and critical writing abilities.

C. Prerequisites

To take the class as an undergraduate (PHIL 488), you must have previously completed two philosophy classes (including one class at the 200-level or higher) or obtain my permission.

D. Required texts

The required readings consist of journal articles and book chapters, and are listed below in Section M. A substantial part of the readings can be accessed online via our course website.

E. Course requirements

	PHIL 488	PHIL 594
○ Oral presentation	15%	n/a
○ Four brief responses	20%	20%
○ Shorter essay	20%	20%
○ Term paper outline	5%	10%
○ Term paper (final version)	30%	35%
○ Participation	10%	15%

Oral presentation (15%, PHIL 488 only): Every student in PHIL 488 has to give one oral presentation. Your task as a presenter is to briefly summarize this meeting's readings (highlighting points that you find particularly relevant) but primarily to start the discussion by having prepared some questions (e.g. about problematic issues in the readings). I ask you to prepare a short handout (including discussion questions) and email me a draft in advance so that I can provide comments. Contact me to sign up for a presentation on a particular class date (it is first come, first serve), where you find the schedule of presentations and still open slots on eClass.

Graduate students in PHIL 594 can volunteer to give an oral presentation, in which case this counts towards participation.

Participation (10% in 488, 15% in 594): Attendance and active participation is important for this class. It is the responsibility of each student to come to class prepared to actively engage in discussion. Each of you will probably have picked up different points from the readings or have questions or objections, so please share them! You can also obtain participation credit by starting topics and replying to posts at the discussion forum on eClass (including by briefly reporting on non-assigned literature from the folder with additional literature).

Four brief critical responses (5% each): You have to submit four brief critical responses, two by October 1, and two by October 31. A critical response is about 300 words in length, and should not just summarize the readings. Instead, it should identify an issue that was not fully clarified in the reading or raises further issues and/or your critical response to one point from the reading.

A brief response has to be submitted by the beginning of the class where the reading is assigned, and if several readings are assigned for that date, the brief response can focus on one of them.

Shorter essay (20%): You have to write a shorter essay, which is due on Tuesday, November 12 at noon. Feel free to consult with me about the topic you want to discuss before starting with the writing of the essay, and to send me a draft of your essay to receive comments.

Approximate length of the shorter essay paper: 1200–1600 words if you are an undergraduate student (registered in PHIL 488); 2000–2400 words if you are a graduate student (registered in PHIL 594).

Term paper (outline 5%, final version 30% in 488, and outline 10%, final version 35% in 594): You have to write a term paper, the final version of which is due on Friday, December 20 at noon. An outline that at least lists the issues and the literature to be discussed (but may also be a full-length term paper draft), is due on Tuesday, December 5 at noon. I will assign a grade to this draft and provide comments relevant for you to write the final version. The term paper should critically discuss an issue from our class, ideally using some of the assigned readings or some of the additional literature that I make available, where of course you are free to find and discuss further relevant literature. You are encouraged to discuss term paper topics and ideas with me before starting with the writing of the term paper outline.

Approximate length of the final version of the term paper: 1600–2400 words if you are an undergraduate student (registered in PHIL 488); 2800–4000 words if you are a graduate student (registered in PHIL 594).

F. Schedule of classes

Sep 3	Introduction. Nado, “Conceptual engineering, truth, and efficacy,” Section 1
Sep 5	Intuitions 1. Bealer, “A priori knowledge and the scope of philosophy,” Intro and Sections 1–3 Gettier, “Is justified true belief knowledge?”
Sep 10	Intuitions 2. Hintikka, “The emperor’s new intuitions”
Sep 12	Classical hurdles for conceptual analysis 1. Quine, “Two dogmas of empiricism”
Sep 17	Classical hurdles for conceptual analysis 2. Putnam, “The meaning of ‘meaning,’” pp. 215–35, 242–43, 249–51, and 268–71
Sep 19	Conceptual analysis 1. Jackson, <i>From Metaphysics to Ethics</i> , Chapter 2, pp. 28–52
Sep 24	Conceptual analysis 2. Chalmers, “The components of content,” Sections 1–7 and Section 10
Sep 26	Conceptual analysis 3. Chalmers, <i>The Conscious Mind</i> , Ch. 3, Sections 1–4
Oct 1	Conceptual analysis 4. Brigandt, “A critique of David Chalmers’ and Frank Jackson’s account of concepts” Last opportunity to submit brief response #2
Oct 3	Conceptual engineering 1. Burgess and Plunkett, “Conceptual ethics I” and “Conceptual ethics II”

Oct 8	Conceptual engineering 2. Haslanger, “Gender and race: (What) Are they? (What) Do we want them to be?”
Oct 10	Conceptual engineering 3. Saul, “Gender and race,” Intro and Sections 4.3 and V Plunkett and Sundell, “Disagreement and the semantics of normative and evaluative terms,” Intro, §3.2, and page 18
Oct 15	Conceptual engineering 4. Mallon, “‘Race’: normative, not metaphysical or semantic”
Oct 17	Conceptual engineering 5. Jenkins, “Amelioration and inclusion: gender identity and the concept of woman,” pp. 394–419
Oct 22	Conceptual engineering 6. Ritchie, “Essentializing language and the prospects for ameliorative projects”
Oct 24	Conceptual engineering 7. Ludlow, “Norms of word meaning litigation”
Oct 29	Conceptual engineering 8. Nado, “Conceptual engineering, truth, and efficacy”
Oct 31	Experimental philosophy 1. Knobe and Nichols, “An experimental philosophy manifesto” Nadelhoffer, “Bad acts, blameworthy agents, and intentional actions,” Sections 1–2 and 4–5 Last opportunity to submit brief response #4
Nov 5	Experimental philosophy 2. Sarkissian et al., “Folk moral relativism”
Nov 7	Experimental philosophy 3. Livengood and Machery, “The folk probably don’t think what you think they think: experiments on causation by absence”

Fall term reading week

Shorter essay due on Nov 12 at noon

Nov 19	Experimental philosophy 4. Mallon et al., “Against arguments from reference”
Nov 21	Experimental philosophy 5. Buckwalter and Stich, “Gender and philosophical intuition,” Intro, Sections 1, 4, and 5 Nado, “Philosophical expertise”
Nov 26	Intuitions 3. Kauppinen, “The rise and fall of experimental philosophy” Knobe, “Experimental philosophy and philosophical significance”
Nov 28	Intuitions 4. Nado, “The role of intuition,” Sections 1–7
Dec 3	Intuitions 5. Sosa, “A defense of the use of intuitions in philosophy” Stich, “Reply to Sosa”
Dec 5	Concluding discussion Term paper outline due at noon

Dec 20 Term paper (final version) due at noon

G. Course website

The course has a website at <https://eclass.srv.ualberta.ca>. A good deal of our assigned readings can be accessed from this site, and I use it to post presentation handouts and additional material. The site also contains a discussion board. Let me know if you audit the class (or upon login at <https://eclass.srv.ualberta.ca> do not see PHIL 488 / 594 under 'My Courses'), so that I can add you to the list of online participants.

H. Academic integrity, plagiarism, and AI tools

The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards and to uphold the policies of the university in this respect. Students are urged to familiarize themselves with the [Code of Student Behaviour](#) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the university.

The Code of Student Behaviour defines plagiarism as follows ([summary](#)):

No Student shall submit the words, ideas, images or data of another person as the Student's own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, project, assignment, presentation or poster in a course or program of study.

Students should consult the information provided by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) regarding avoiding cheating and plagiarism in particular and academic dishonesty in general. If in doubt about what is permitted in this class, ask the instructor. An instructor or coordinator who is convinced that a student has handed in work that he or she could not possibly reproduce without outside assistance is obliged, out of consideration of fairness to other students, to report the case to the Associate Dean of the Faculty (see the [Academic Discipline Process](#)).

The library also has [information on avoiding plagiarism](#).

In this course, our primary focus is to cultivate an equitable, inclusive, and accessible learning community that emphasizes individual critical thinking and problem-solving skills. To ensure a fair and consistent learning experience for all students, the use of advanced AI tools such as ChatGPT or Dall-E 2 is strictly prohibited for all academic (written/coding/creative/etc.) work, assignments, and assessments in this course. Each student is expected to complete all tasks without substantive assistance from others, including AI tools.

Any use of AI tool in your academic work may result in academic penalties and be considered an act of cheating and a violation as outlined in the relevant sections of the University of Alberta [Code of Student Behaviour](#).

I. Sexual Violence Policy

It is the policy of the University of Alberta that sexual violence committed by any member of the University community is prohibited and constitutes misconduct. Resources and more information can be found at <https://www.ualberta.ca/campus-life/sexual-violence>.

J. Student Services

The university provides various services, including [Student Accessibility Resources](#) (exam and classroom accommodations for students with a disability, chronic health condition, or anxiety disorders), the [Academic Success Centre](#) (e.g., note-taking and writing skills), [Writing Services](#) (writing support), [Health and Wellness Support](#) (including [Counselling & Clinical Services](#), the [Sexual Assault Centre](#), and the [First Peoples' House](#)), and the [Office of the Student Ombuds](#) (advice and support to students facing academic, discipline, interpersonal and financial difficulties).

K. Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components

Regular attendance is essential for optimal performance in any course. In cases of potentially excusable absences due to illness or domestic affliction, notify your instructor by e-mail within two days. Regarding absences that may be excusable and procedures for addressing course components missed as a result, consult the "[Attendance](#)" and "[Examinations](#)" sections of the Academic Regulations of the University Calendar. Be aware that unexcused absences will result in partial or total loss of the grade for the "attendance and participation" component(s) of a course, as well as for any assignments that are not handed in or completed as a result.

L. Recording of lectures

Audio or video recording of lectures, labs, seminars, or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Recorded material is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the instructor.

M. Bibliography of readings

- Bealer, George (1996) "A priori knowledge and the scope of philosophy." *Philosophical Studies* 81: 121–142.
- Brigandt, Ingo (2013) "A critique of David Chalmers' and Frank Jackson's account of concepts." *ProtoSociology* 30: 63–88.
- Buckwalter, Wesley and Stephen Stich (2014) "Gender and philosophical intuition." In J. Knobe and S. Nichols (eds.), *Experimental Philosophy, Volume 2*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 307–346.
- Burgess, Alexis, and David Plunkett (2013) "Conceptual ethics I." *Philosophy Compass* 8: 1091–1101.
- Burgess, Alexis, and David Plunkett (2013) "Conceptual ethics II." *Philosophy Compass* 8: 1092–1110.
- Chalmers, David J. (1996) *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2002) "The components of content." In D. Chalmers (ed.), *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 608–633.
- Gettier, Edmund L. (1963) "Is justified true belief knowledge?" *Analysis* 23: 121–123

- Haslanger, Sally (2000) “Gender and race: (What) Are they? (What) Do we want them to be?” *Noûs* 34: 31–55.
- Hintikka, Jaakko (1999) “The emperor’s new intuitions.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 96: 127–147.
- Jackson, Frank (1998) *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defense of Conceptual Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, Katharine (2016) “Amelioration and inclusion: gender identity and the concept of woman.” *Ethics* 126: 394–421.
- Kauppinen, Antti (2007) “The rise and fall of experimental philosophy.” *Philosophical Explorations* 10: 95–118.
- Knobe, Joshua (2007) “Experimental philosophy and philosophical significance.” *Philosophical Explorations* 10: 119–121.
- Knobe, Joshua, and Shaun Nichols (2008) “An experimental philosophy manifesto.” In J. Knobe and S. Nichols (eds.), *Experimental Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3–14.
- Livengood, Jonathan, and Edouard Machery (2007) “The folk probably don’t think what you think they think: experiments on causation by absence.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 31: 107–127.
- Ludlow, Peter (2014) “Norms of word meaning litigation.” *Protosociology* 31: 88–112.
- Machery, Edouard (2008) “The folk concept of intentional action: philosophical and experimental issues.” *Mind and Language* 23: 165–189.
- Mallon, Ron (2006) “‘Race’: normative, not metaphysical or semantic.” *Ethics* 116: 525–551.
- Mallon, Ron, Edouard Machery, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich (2009) “Against arguments from reference.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 79: 332–356.
- Nadelhoffer, Thomas (2006) “Bad acts, blameworthy agents, and intentional actions.” *Philosophical Explorations* 9: 203–219.
- Nado, Jennifer (2014) “Philosophical expertise.” *Philosophy Compass* 9: 631–641.
- (2014) “The role of intuition.” In J. Sytsma (ed.), *Advances in Experimental Philosophy of Mind*, London: Bloomsbury, 11–43.
- (2019) “Conceptual engineering, truth, and efficacy.” *Synthese*. doi:10.1007/s11229-019-02096-x
- Plunkett, David, and Tim Sundell (2013) “Disagreement and the semantics of normative and evaluative terms.” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 13: 23.
- Putnam, Hilary (1975) “The meaning of ‘meaning’.” In H. Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 2*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 215–271.
- Quine, Willard Van Orman (1953) “Two dogmas of empiricism.” *Philosophical Review* 60: 20–43.
- Ritchie, Katherine (2021) “Essentializing language and the prospects for ameliorative projects.” *Ethics* 131: 460–488.
- Sarkissian, Hagop, John Park, David Tien, Jennifer Cole Wright and Joshua Knobe (2011) “Folk moral relativism.” *Mind & Language* 26: 482–505.
- Saul, Jennifer (2006) “Gender and race.” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 80: 119–143.
- Sosa, Ernest (2005) “A defense of the use of intuitions in philosophy.” In D. Murphy and M. Bishop (eds.), *Stich and His Critics*, Malden: Blackwell, 101–112.
- Stich, Stephen (2005) “Reply to Sosa.” In D. Murphy and M. Bishop (eds.), *Stich and His Critics*, Malden: Blackwell, 228–237.

The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

Policy about course outlines can be found in [Course Requirements](#), [Evaluation Procedures and Grading](#) of the University Calendar.