FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 449, lecture section 01: "Contemporary Meta-Ethics"

Winter Term 2011

Course Outline

Lectures: Monday and Wednesday, 3.00-4.15pm., Education Building, C255

Instructor:	**Dr. John A. Baker**
Office:	**SS1222**
Phone:	**403-220-3167**
Email:	**baker@ucalgary.ca**
Office Hours :	**Monday and Wednesday for the hour before class and the hour after:**

Outside those times, for a variety of reasons, it is not a good idea just to "drop in", hoping to catch me in the office: it is much better to phone or email me for an appointment. I am happy to make such appointments, so do not hesitate to make them.

Administratively Important dates:

Jan 10, Monday: Lectures begin

Jan 21, Friday: Last day to drop Winter Term half courses.

Jan 24, Monday: Last day to add or swap Winter Term half courses and -Last day to change registration from audit to credit or credit to audit.

Feb 20-27, Sunday to Sunday, : Reading Week. No lectures.

> **NB 1: the university is open all week except on Albert Family Day which is on Monday Feb 21).**

> **NB 2: the Mackimmie Library is open all week, *including* Alberta Family Day.**

Apr 15, Friday: Last day of lectures and last day to withdraw with permission.

For dates on which assignments, etc., are due, see the section on assignments below.

TOPICS

Official Course Description: "A study of recent theories about the meaning of moral terms, the nature of moral reasoning, and the relations between facts and values. Theories to be studied may include naturalism, intuitionism, emotivism, prescriptivism, and nihilism". Prerequisite(s): Two previous courses in Philosophy, at least one of which must be a 300 or higher level course, and one of which must be Philosophy 249 or 397; or consent of the Department

In greater detail: It would be best to think of the discipline "meta-ethics" as being addressed to four kinds of questions:

1. **Semantic questions**, that is, questions about the *analysis* of what have usually been thought to be morally central concepts. I will discuss at various stages *both* so-called "thin concepts" like those expressed by words and phrases like "…is good", "… is intrinsically valuable", "… has a right to do …", "… has an obligation to ….", "… has a duty to …", and "… ought to …" *and* so-called "thick concepts" like those expressed by words and phrases like "… is a *just* distribution of benefits and burdens", "… is a *loyal* employee", "… is *worthy of respect*", etc. Such analyses are addressed both

to questions about the *meanings* of the terms used in expressing these concepts and questions about the conditions (if any) under which claims made with such claims can be *true* and/or *acceptable* [see further 3 below].

2. **Metaphysical questions**, that is, questions about the ontological status of moral facts and moral "entities" like rights, duties, obligations, values, and so on. For example, do such facts/entities *exist* and, if so, what does a claim that they exist come to, and, if not, what does that mean for morality's authority? And so on.

3. **Epistemological questions**, that is, questions about how, if at all, we can validate, warrant, establish [one of the issues here is the question *which* of these (and other) terms is the appropriate one] moral claims as true, as acceptable, as rational, as reasonable, etc. [again one of the issues here is the question which of *these* (and other) terms is the appropriate one].

4. **Logical questions** about the nature of sound or valid moral reasoning — *if* such is possible, of course.

Meta-ethical *theories* are theories about how systematically to answer such questions and these theories can be very roughly (and provisionally) be classified as either "moral realist" (objectivist) or "moral anti-realist":

(a) *Moral realist/objectivist theories* (sometimes called 'cogntivist' theories) postulate moral entities (rights, obligations, values, etc.) and claim that such entities *both* exist independently of human beliefs about them or attitudes towards them *and* (yet) give reasons to people to act or abstain from acting *or even* (though must less plausibly) have the power to 'motivate' (cause) people to behave in certain ways;

(b) *Moral anti-realist theories* (sometimes called 'irrealist' theories) deny that such entities exist in the above sense and then either (i) adopt a so-called *nihilist* or *error-theory* stance in relation to morality and (all) moralities or (b) adopt a so-called *non-cognitivist* stance of some kind or other.

The *moral realist theories* which will be considered include both **naturalistic** and **non-naturalist** variants. Naturalistic theories examined will include both classic "natural law" and modern evolutionary ethical variants. Non-naturalist theories examined will include both classic 'intuitionist' theories and some modern variants.

Moral anti-realist theories examined will focus on non-cognitivist versions, including both irrationalist emotivist theories (like that of the early A.J. Ayer) and various theories (for example the 'prescriptivism' of R.M. Hare, the 'expressivism' of Alan Gibbard, and various 'constructivist' theories like those of Rawls) which attempt in various ways to 'recover' some at least of the rationality of morality and, in some 'quasi-realist' versions, to suggest that many or most of the features (and strengths) of moral realism can be to a large extent be 'recovered' or 'replicated'.

It is worth noting even here, firstly, that the above classification of theories is far from ideal (and in the class they will be subjected to critical examination); secondly, that, in illustration of this point, some philosophers argue that to recover the rationality of morality is all that is possible and all that is needed if we are establish morality as existing 'objectively' in the only intelligible sense of that adverb.

Please note:

(i) that *each* of the metaethical theories to be examined has semantic, metaphysical, epistemological and logical components;

(ii) that these theories will be examined with varying degrees of detail, and some of them will be treated more as illustrations of certain kinds of error than anything else,

(iii) that particular attention will be paid to the evidential status of so-called "commonsense" moral beliefs in the development of such meta-ethical theories, to the role of rationality, and to the facts of cultural diversity and the possibility of pluralism and

(iv) that early in the course we will give close examination of some modern variants and refinements of three different arguments which some philosophers have felt are fundamental in structuring any

discussion of such theories, specifically Moore's *Open Question Argument*, *Hume's Guillotine*, and *Hume's Motivating Influence Argument*.

By far the deepest questions in meta-ethical theory are questions about what patterns of reasoning are useable in arguments for or against the kinds of meta-ethical theories just outlined. Three "methods of meta-ethics", as I will call them, i.e., methods by which these deeper methodological questions can be addressed will be developed and discussed — the following names are not standard in the literature, but are, I think, useful:

(i) What I will call "the method of analysis": according to this method one begins from careful analysis of the concepts ('thin' and 'thick) used in moral talking and reasoning and from those analyses one develops both an account of the so-called 'logic of moral reasoning' and at least schematic answers to the ontological, epistemological questions which meta-ethical theories are meant to answer — famous exponents of this approach included the classic emotivists, the English philosopher Richard Hare, and most recently the Australian philosopher Frank Jackson, but the method in one form or another is used to some extent by pretty well all people working on issues in meta-ethics;

(ii) What I will call "the method of rational reconstruction": according to this method (a) one begins from the reflective judgments (what some have called 'intuitions') of mature moral agents *both* on *substantive* moral issues *and* on the issue of what is *relevant* in decisions about what one ought to do, about what things are of moral value, and so on, and (b) one then tries to find a meta-ethical theory which can be brought into "reflective equilibrium" with these two classes of reflective judgments, the theory offering at least schematic answers to the four classes of questions (listed above) which meta-ethical theories are meant to address. Since the reflective judgments of the two classes are given epistemic privilege, it is clear that this method of meta-ethics is designed to *reconstruct* the morality/moralities of the mature moral agents; and since the judgments of the two kinds are 'reflective' and since being "reflective" involves in some sense being subject to rational (and typically empirical) assessment designed to root out superstitions and erroneous metaphysical, empirical and logical mistakes, it is felt appropriate to refer to it as "*rational*" reconstruction. Famous examples of exponents of this method in one form or other include the British 'intuitionists', W.D. Ross and H.A. Prichard, and the Americans, John Rawls, D.A. Richards, and Norman Daniels, but again the method is used to some extent in one form or other by pretty well all people working on issues in meta-ethics.

(iii) What I will call "the method of rational replacement": according to this method (a) one develops firstly an account of rational choice useable in interpersonal situations, situations moreover in which cooperation may enable those involved in the situation to benefit more than they would benefit without cooperation, and then (b) one uses this account of rational to evaluate various principles and modes of cooperation, (c) accepting those principles and modes of cooperation which survive such assessment. It is important that in developing the account of rationality in (a) one does not in any way rely on views (reflective judgments) about what a correct morality might say on anything: in this the method of rational replacement differs radically from the method of rational reconstruction — hence it is not unreasonable to call the method a method of "rational replacement". This said, however, the account of rational choice can, according to the method of radical replacement, serve as a tool by which we can assess principles and modes of interaction which common moralities (the moralities found accepted in various societies) have espoused: the idea is not only that we can call the principles and modes of interaction which survive the assessment rational, but also that we can call it a "rational morality" because it does address issues *any* morality is meant to address, that is, issues about how people "ought" or "rationally" to relate to one another. Famous examples of exponents of this method include the English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (in his *Utilitarianism* though not in some of his other writings) and more recently the Canadian David Gauthier and the American John Harsanyi.

I will be concerned to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of these three "method of meta-ethics".

TEXTS:

The basic structuring of the examination of the issues in the course will be provided by selections from my *Lectures in Metaethics*. These selections will be posted in one form or another on Blackboard as we go along.

The other readings for the course will consist of journal articles available through the University Library on-line or book chapters also available online. Instructions on how to access these are posted in the Course Documents section of Blackboard.

Note that often in class we will be engaged in careful, line by line, examination of arguments found in the readings. As we go along, I will post on-line (in Blackboard) an announcement about *which* article/chapters we will be discussing in class. Students should ensure that they bring to class copies of the article/chapter to be discussed. Feel free in class t   o use an electronic copy on your laptop if you wish: otherwise bring a hard copy.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMINATIONS:

1. Weekly reading assignments will be set. Except in the weeks when essays are actually due to be submitted (see 3 below), I will on the average set about two articles/chapters per week. ***Sometimes I will simply assume that an article or chapter has been read*** and the class will proceed on that assumption. It is the duty of any students who miss classes to find out what readings have been set.

2.   Students will be asked to prepare three brief (point form) analyses-and-critiques. What an "analysis" involves will be posted on Blackboard at the beginning of term and explained in class. Details will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

    Due-dates for analyses/critiques: The first analysis/critique will be announced in class on the first day of classes and will be due on Thursday, January 20th, at 4pm. The second will be announced in class on Monday January 24th and will be due on Thursday, February 3rd, at 4pm. The third will be announced in class on Monday, March 14th, and due on March 24th. See point 6 below about deadlines.

3. One shortish (about 1200 words) essay and one longer (about 1500) essay will be set. The readings for the essays will significantly overlap with, or be identical to, the readings mentioned in 1 and 2. Details will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

    Due-dates for essays: The first essay will be due on Thursday, 17th February, at 4pm. The second essay will be due on Thursday, April 7th, at 4pm.

4. There will be an in-class 'mid-term' test. This test will address the materials covered up to the time of the test. Details about the test will be posted on Blackboard

    Date of the mid-term test: Wednesday, March 10$^{th..}$

5. There will be a two hour closed book registrar scheduled Final Examination. This examination will cover the material studied throughout the course: a set of *possible* essay questions will be posted on Blackboard fairly early in the term. The final two classes in the term will be devoted to a review of the course material.

GRADING:

1. *Ceteris paribus*, the first analysis (see 2 above) will be worth 5% of the final grade and each of the second and third analyses will be worth 10%.
2. *Ceteris paribus*, the first short essay mentioned in 3 above will be worth 10% and the second worth 20% of the final grade.

3. *Ceteris paribus* the midterm test will be worth 10% of the final grade.
4. *Ceteris paribus* the registrar scheduled final examination will be worth 35% 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 (a) each of the three analyses, each of the two short essays, and the final examination are submitted ***and*** (b) the final examination receives a passing grade.
5. Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier sin.
6. Fairness to those who submit their assignments on time demands that lateness in submission of assignments be penalised. Accordingly, assignments handed in after the stated deadline will receive at most B if submitted by 3.00 pm of the day after the due day and C if submitted by 3.00 pm of the day after that, and so on, unless, of course, some sort of university recognised ground for delay — e.g. some sort of evidence of illness — is submitted.

NOTE: If a student fails to submit her or his analysis of an article before I hand out *my* analysis of that article, then clearly the requirement set out in point 4 above can only reasonably be satisfied in relation to analyses if the student submits an analysis of some different article from that originally assigned. If this situation arises then the student will need to approach me for a replacement assignment. Note that point 6 will still apply.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contribution of others be acknowledged. As a result, cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as **an extremely serious academic offence**, the penalty for which may be an F on the assignment and possibly also an F in the course, academic probation, or requirement to withdraw. The University Calendar states that plagiarism exists when:

- *the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test;*
- *parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author;*
- *the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source; and/or*
- *a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.*

While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted. Plagiarism occurs not only when direct quotations are taken from a source without specific acknowledgement, but also when original ideas or data from the source are not acknowledged. A bibliography is insufficient to establish which portions of the student's work are taken from external sources; footnotes or other recognized forms of citation must be used for this purpose.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodation. If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course.

STUDENTS' UNION REPRESENTATIVES

The Faculty of Arts Representatives are Laura Golebiowski (arts1@su.ucalgary.ca), Bhuvana Sankaranarayanan (arts2@su.ucalgary.ca), Lara Schmitz (arts3@su.ucalgary.ca), and Vincent St. Pierre (arts4@su.ucalgary.ca) .

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY (FOIP) ACT

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial FOIP Act in all aspects of its operations as a publicly funded institution. The Department of Philosophy ensures the student's right to privacy by requiring all graded assignments be returned to the student directly from the instructor unless other arrangements have been made in writing and filed with the Department Administrator.

SAFEWALK: PROMOTING CAMPUS SAFETY AND AWARENESS

Twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, Safewalk volunteers walk people safely to their destination on campus. This service is free and available to students, staff, and campus visitors. Safewalks are done in male/female pairs. The volunteers walk anywhere on campus (including McMahon Stadium, Health Sciences, Student Family Housing, the Alberta Children's Hospital and the University LRT station). To request a Safewalk volunteer to walk with you, call 403-220-5333 (24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year) or use one of the Help Phones located across campus (they are not just for emergencies).