

PHIL 3320 : *Contemporary Ethical Theory*  
Carleton University, Winter 2012

Meeting time: Mondays & Wednesdays, 4:05-5:25

Instructor: Gordon Davis  
Office: Paterson Hall, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, rm. 3A48 (in the Philosophy Dept.)  
Office hours: Thurs. 2:00-4:00, or by appointment  
Email: Please use the email function in WebCT (for PHIL 3220)  
WebCT: *WebCT access is required, and you're expected to check our WebCT site at least once a week.* (The best time to check is Friday evening or Saturday, as I'll be responding to messages/queries on Friday afternoons; since some responses, as well as other announcements, will concern everyone – e.g. regarding readings or assignments – it's important that you check this website regularly.)

REQUIRED READINGS (all available as ebooks at the Carleton library catalogue):

1. Mary Midgley, *The Essential Mary Midgley* (London: Routledge, 2005) – ch. 15
2. Michael Ruse, *Evolutionary Naturalism: Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 1995) – ch. 8
3. Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) – \*whole book
4. Jesse Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007) – chs. 4, 5
5. Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Camb. Univ. Press, 2001) – ch. 6
6. Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011) – ch. 3 & see Week 11

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

1. (For introductory overview:) J. Rachels, *Elements of Moral Philosophy* (on reserve) & C. Goodman, \* *Consequences of Compassion* (ebook - OUP, 2009), chapter 2 (*\*more concise*)
2. For most Essay 2 topics: Tim Mulgan, *Future People* (ebook - OUP, 2006).
3. For various Essay 2 topics: see course reserve list on library catalogue.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

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 cognitive science, semantics and epistemology), 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, with READINGS:

(N.B. the order and/or timing of topics may change – normally w/ advance notice.)

**Week 1** (Jan. 4): The scope of the moral, the ethical, and the normative (course overview)

**Week 2** (Jan. 9, 11): Challenge (I) to moral objectivity: Cultural Relativism (re. beliefs & actions)

Reading: Mary Midgley, “On Trying out one’s New Sword” (ch. 15 of Midgley 2005)

**Week 3** (Jan. 16, 18): Challenge (II) to moral objectivity: Evolutionary Psychology (& determinism)

Reading: Michael Ruse, “Evolution & Ethics... Sociobiological Approach”(p. 223-, Ruse‘95)

**Week 4** (Jan. 23, 25): Particularism, Virtues, Care Ethics: normative and meta-ethical directions

Reading: Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World*, ch. 1; J. Prinz, *Emotional Constr.* 151-158; Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1: ch. 3 (& optional: Goodman, ch. 2)

**Week 5** (Jan. 30, Feb. 1): Constraints and Desiderata for Moral Theories; Rule-Consequentialism

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

**Week 6** (Feb. 6, 8): Implications of Rule-Consequentialism in Practice: Duties and Human Rights

Reading: Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (“ “)

**Week 7** (Feb. 13, 15): **NOTE: In-class essay on Feb. 15**, on Hooker’s Rule-Consequentialism

Reading: Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (“ “)

**Week 8** (Feb. 27, 29): Other Options in Moral Theory: The Spectrum of Non-Consequentialisms

Reading: Hooker on *prioritarianism* (pp. 26-30; 59-65); Parfit and Mulgan (TBA)

**Week 9** (Mar. 5, 7): More Challenges from Cultural Relativism / the Real Challenge: ‘*Sunyata*’

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

**Week 10** (Mar. 12, 14): A New Challenge from Sociobiology (relativism, non-cog., error theory)

Reading: Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*, ch. 6 (“Morality and Evolution”)

**Week 11** (Mar. 19, 21): Moral Realism and the Prospects of Ethical Theory

Reading: D. Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 2: chs. 28, 30, 36 (optional: ch. 35 on Nietzsche)

**Week 12** (Mar. 26, 28): Review (deadline looms, **April 3: Essay # 2 due at midnight, via WebCT**)

**Week 13** (April 2 & optional class on April 4: preview of philosophy options, events, programs)

EVALUATION (weight of assignments shown as % of total mark):

Essay # 1 (in-class essay, Feb. 15)	30 %
Essay # 2 (final term paper, <b>due April 3</b> )	40 %
Short WebCT assignment 1 (deadline TBA)	10 %
Short WebCT assignment 2 (deadline TBA)	10 %
Participation	10 %

... \* Criteria for the evaluation of essays, and of participation, will be specified on WebCT.

Presentation of essays: Essays will be submitted electronically, so we reserve the right to change the format if necessary for readability; but it is best if you follow the norm of double-spacing, 1 inch margins, and an 11 or 12 font size. Length requirements will be specified on WebCT, in terms of words rather than pages. (Also see below.)

Consultations re. essays: Partly out of fairness to other students, I will not read pre-submission drafts of essays. I am, of course, willing to discuss your ideas on how to approach a particular essay – if you wish to consult with me – but only in person (i.e. not by email). If you feel you need help with structuring your draft(s), you can contact the university’s ‘Writing Tutorial Service’ (see [www.carleton.ca/wts](http://www.carleton.ca/wts)).

Collaboration with other students: An essay may not be submitted as the joint work of two or more students (or as a ‘group project’ of any kind). If you share ideas with others in the class, and/or proofread for one another, bear in mind that the same rules apply regarding plagiarism (see next page).

Extensions: Extensions will be granted only upon presentation of a medical certificate. Requests based on conflicts with other coursework will not be granted.

Submission of essays: Essays are to be submitted electronically via WebCT, in attachment(s), before midnight on the due date. Indicate your topic # in the email subject line, and please send two files, one in Word (or the equivalent) and one in RTF (rich text format).

Late submissions of essays: Late submissions will lose 10 % per day (*including weekend days*, since submissions can be sent via WebCT on weekends).

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies

### 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 in the lower right corner of the cover sheet:
  - student name
  - student number
  - course number and section
  - instructor's name
- The Philosophy Department does not accept assignments by FAX. You may send them by courier, if necessary.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- 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.

### Deferrals for Term Work:

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a final assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral of examination/assignment. For deferred examinations, you must apply within 5 working days after the scheduled date of your exam. To apply for deferral of a final assignment, you must apply within 5 working days of the last scheduled day of classes. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information.

### 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. (Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations, section 14.3, or <http://www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/regulations/acadre/suniv14.html#14.3>)

### Academic Accommodation:

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

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to me 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/accommodation/>

**Religious obligation:** write to me 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/accommodation/>

**Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations** in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD),

psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that I receive your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the deadlines published on the PMC website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

### Important Dates:

Sept. 8	Classes start (after Orientation events).
Sept. 21	Last day for registration and course changes in Fall term and two-term courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 7	University Day – no classes.
Oct. 10	Thanksgiving Day – university closed.
Nov. 21	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000 level before the Final Examination period.
Dec. 5	Last day of classes, Fall term. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
Dec. 5	Last day to withdraw from Fall term courses (academic purposes only).
Dec. 8-21	Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses.
Jan. 4	Winter term classes begin.
Jan. 17	Last day for registration and course changes in Winter term classes.
Jan. 31	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter courses or winter portion of two-term courses.
Feb. 20	Family Day – university closed
Feb. 20-24	Winter Break, classes suspended.
Mar. 22	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000 level before the Final Examination period.
Apr. 5	Last day of Fall/Winter and Winter term classes. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
Apr. 5	Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only).
Apr. 6	Good Friday – university closed.
Apr. 11-24	Final Examinations.

### Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A46 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
Student Academic Success Centre:	302 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/sasc">www.carleton.ca/sasc</a> 520-7850
Paul Menton Centre:	500 University Centre <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/pmc">www.carleton.ca/pmc</a> 520-6608
Writing Tutorial Service:	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/wts">www.carleton.ca/wts</a> 520-6632
MacOdrum Library	<a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a> 520-2735