Department of Philosophy
Visiting Speaker Series 2012-2013

Fall term:

September 13th (Thursday)	Ram Neta, Chapel Hill	"The Epistemic 'Ought'"

Given how you are currently situated, there are some propositions that you ought to accept, other propositions that you ought to deny, and still other propositions concerning which you ought to suspend judgment. Furthermore, you ought to be more confident of the truth of some propositions than of others, and you ought to be just as confident of the truth of some propositions as of others. In short, in your judgments, suspensions of judgment, and degrees of confidence, you are subject to epistemic oughts. But does your subjection to these epistemic oughts imply that you can comply with these oughts? In epistemology, does "ought" imply "can"? A number of philosophers have recently argued that it does not. While I believe that much of what they say is right, I argue that each of their views contains an explanatory gap. I develop an account of the epistemic "ought" that fills these explanatory gaps. But it has the consequence that, in epistemology, "ought" does imply "can".

Note: This talk with be held in DSB, AB103.

September 21st	Patricia Marino, University of Waterloo	"Sexual Use, Sexual Autonomy, and Adaptive Preferences"

In previous work I argued that sexual objectification is ethically benign when done in accordance with respect for autonomy. One can, in a sense, choose to be used, and as long as autonomy and consent are respected, there is nothing inherently wrong with treating persons as bodies, treating them as interchangeable with others, and so on. It follows that as long as participation is chosen, pornography, prostitution, and commodified casual sex are not morally problematic in virtue of objectifying persons. This answer is intended to contrast with those such as Nussbaum's, that focus on the relationship between the participants or the reciprocity and mutuality of the encounter. My focus on autonomy raises several obvious questions. How do background social conditions impact on the autonomy of a choice? What kind of autonomy matters? What factors come into play in determining whether a choice is autonomous? How does the autonomy view avoid an uncritical stance toward choices? In this paper I aim toward addressing these.

September 28th	Thomas Hurka, University of Toronto	"Permissions to do less than the best: A moving band"

This paper discusses two topics: the basis of agent-relative permissions to produce less than the best outcome, and the relation between them and the partialist view that you have stronger duties to promote the good of those who are closer to you. The paper's first part argues against the common view that agent-relative permissions result from a conflict between two types of reason, prudential and impartial; instead, their basis is two underivative prima facie permissions, one to pursue your own good and another not to pursue it. When these permissions are weighed against a prima facie duty to promote the good of all people impartially, the result is a band of permissions within which you may permissibly promote your own lesser rather than another's greater good (up to a limit) or his lesser rather than your greater good (again up to a limit). The paper's second part argues that the location of this band is not constant but moves down as the person you can benefit becomes closer to you. With a stranger the band's location is quite high, so you are permitted a considerable degree of agent-favouring but not much agent-sacrifice; with a friend or even more so a spouse the band is lower, so you are

permitted less agent-favouring and more agent-sacrifice. And the reason the band moves is that prima facie permissions of constant strength are weighed against a duty to promote another's good that, given a partialist view, is stronger when the other is closer to you. The paper's last claims are illustrated with especially attractive graphs.

October 5th	Jordan Burks, McMaster	"Typology, Essentialism, Species, and Being Human"

A major difficulty in making a case for human nature is that there is a well-established tradition, at least in philosophy of biology, of associating the phrase with three philosophical positions imagined to contradict not only evolutionary principles, but also our best knowledge of the term 'species,' and what is deemed necessary for membership in a particular species. These three positions are a) typological thinking; b) classical essentialism; and c) species or organic property fixity (TES). Treating each of these positions as distinct may seem unusual as many academics see all three positions, or any pair of them, as basically synonymous. However, one aspect of the argument that follows is that this is a mistake. Certainly, as critics tend to represent them, these positions, or any combination of them, are incommensurate with 'evolutionary thinking.' But, the important question, really, is whether or not there is more than meets the eye on this issue. In this presentation, I will show that a viable concept of human nature is, in fact, compatible with very qualified versions of all three positions—even species fixity—while also being consistent with our best biological and taxonomic knowledge. The centerpiece of my argument is that there are, in fact, features of organisms that do not significantly change.

October 12th	Doug Walton, University of Windsor	"Legal Reasoning and Argumentation".

This paper analyzes some forms of evidential reasoning used in legal argumentation using argumentation methods. The following forms of reasoning are discussed: practical reasoning, value-based practical reasoning, reasoning from lack of evidence, abductive reasoning, argument from perception, argument from witness testimony and argument from expert opinion. It is argued that the structure of reasoning exhibited in these forms of argument is that of defeasible logic. It is shown how the notion of proof, including the notions of standard of proof and burden of proof, need to be defined within a procedural context of argumentation that has three main stages.

October 19th	John Thorp, UWO	"Aristotelian Fundamentalism: Taking the *Categories* too seriously"

Aristotle's *Categories* is clearly a pilot study, a probing and provisional work; moreover it is a work that must be dated very early in Aristotle's productive career: some of its central themes do not recur in later works, and some ideas that are otherwise omnipresent in the Corpus are absent here. It is strange, then, that the *Categories* came to be treated with almost religious reverence, the *ipsissima verba* being chewed over and commented on extensively, and its doctines taken as the foundation of metaphysics.

In this paper I argue that too literal a reading of some passages in the *Categories* led to the elaboration of a scholastic metaphysical system in which the notion of *substance* became strangely ghostly, drained of content. Such an idea of substance seems remote from Aristotle's intentions. And it is an idea that ultimately underlay several centuries of theological acrimony, leading even to violence and bloodshed.

October 23rd (Tuesday)	Veronica Rodriguez-Blanco, School of Law, University of	"Reasons in Action v. Triggering-Reasons: A Reply to Enoch on Reason-Giving and Legal Normativity"

	Birmingham, UK	

The central problem of the 'normativity of law' concerns how legal rules or directives give us reasons for actions. The core of this question is how something that is external to the agent, such as legal rules or directives, can be 'part of the agent', and how they can guide the agent in performing complex actions (such as legal rule-following) that persist over time. David Enoch has denied that the normativity of law poses any interesting challenge to theories of law. He argues that law provides reasons for actions in terms of what he calls triggering-reasons and he advances the view that because there are many circumstances in which reasons are triggered, law does not pose a special challenge.

According to Enoch, once we understand the way that triggering reasons operate, we can understand how legal rules and directives provide us with reasons for actions. In §2 of this paper, I set the stage for the debate and establish a set of principles that emerge from a common sense view of reasons for actions and argue that any theory of reasons for action should provide a coherent explanation of these key principles. I focus on the idea that a satisfactory account of reasons for action should also explain reasons in actions. In §I explain briefly the different theories of reasons for action and locate Enoch's conception of reasons for action as triggering-reasons within this theoretical framework. In §4 I show that Enoch's conception of reasons for actions does not explain some of the key features or principles that emerge from our common sense view of reasons for action and nor does it explain reasons in actions.

Note: This talk with be held in CNH, 106.

October 26th	Chris Norris, Cardiff School of English, Communication and Philosophy	"What's Left Of (Philosophical) Postmodernism?"

Note: This talk with be held in CNH, B107.

November 2nd	Karl Laderoute, McMaster	"Nietzsche's Perspectivism"

In Nietzsche's works, we often find claims that all consciousness refers only to errors, or that there is no such thing as truth (the 'falsification thesis'). But throughout these same works Nietzsche also makes claims to truth, presenting us with an interpretive puzzle. Maudemarie Clark has argued that while Nietzsche initially embraced the falsification thesis, this was a mistake which he abandoned in his later philosophy. However, since her initial 1990 interpretation, she has altered the date for this shift in his epistemological views.

To shed light on this issue, I consider the role played by Nietzsche's reading of Roger Boscovich, from whom he takes a force-point ontology. This ontology gives rise to a form of nominalism, which stands in the background of Nietzsche's falsificationist claims. However, Nietzsche's perspectivism provides an epistemological apparatus in which claims can still be considered true. This apparatus incorporates elements from correspondence, pragmatist, and coherence theories of truth, and results in a form of contextualism. Together, Nietzsche's nominalism and perspectivism explains why he can both make truth claims and falsificationist claims throughout his works without saddling him with blatant contradiction or deeply mistaken views.

November 9th	Josh Zaslow, McMaster	"The Given and The Taken: Pragmatism and the Foundations of Empirical Knowledge"

In "Pragmatism, Experience, and the Given", Scott Aikin argues that, contrary to widespread opinion, pragmatist accounts of knowledge, notably that of John Dewey, are committed to upholding an important role for The Given in their accounts of empirical knowledge. While I agree with Aikin's claim that a kind of givenness is involved in knowledge, I argue that his discussion is equivocal and places a mistaken emphasis on the role of givenness in pragmatist accounts of the role of experience in knowledge and inquiry.

While pragmatist discussions of knowledge can comfortably talk about given experiences having certain brute qualities, the issue at stake regards the role that this suchness plays in justifying empirical claims. I argue that identifying givenness as demanding basic epistemic commitments (givenism) misconstrues its importance: we should rather talk about basic 'takings'. This is to say that it is sufficient for the purposes of inquiry and the development of knowledge that we take our experiences to be thus-and-so. This, however, does not imply that we need any notion of basic beliefs nor a more than a trivial account of "nondoxasic epistemic support".

November 16th	Henrik Lagerlund, UWO	"The Changing Face of Empiricism: Nominalism and Substance in the Later Middle Ages"

Modern Empiricism developed out of the 14th century. The re-introduction of nominalism as a metaphysical doctrine by William Ockham in the early 14th century had a profound influence on the history of philosophy. I will in this talk outline the implications it had on the the concept of substance and how this changed epistemology. I will in particular look at Albert of Saxony. His way of solving some of the epistemological problems emerging at this time puts later medieval empiricism in line with the British empiricists and John Locke in particular.

November 23rd	Natalie Oman, Ontario Institute of Technology	"Am I My Brother's Keeper?": The Ethics of Claiming A Moral Basis for Humanitarian Intervention

This paper takes Onora O'Neill's provocative work on the moral standing of geographically and temporally distant strangers as its starting point in an effort to sketch an interculturally legitimizable account of moral obligation.

The crystallizing principle of international law dubbed the 'responsibility to protect' is routinely described as possessing a moral aspect -- a dimension which is generally asserted without explication. I draw here on O'Neill's discussions of the logical necessity of attributing both moral standing and its corollary, responsibility, to both those distant others whom we unreflectively treat as possessing the characteristics of moral agents in our everyday practices, and of course, to ourselves. I suggest that the attribution of such a responsibility to individuals, rather than solely to states, is necessary in order for the argument ascribing a moral dimension to the responsibility to protectto be plausible.

November 30th	Heather Kuiper, McMaster	"Raz, Exclusive Positivism and Pre-emptive Reasons for Action"

Raz believes that law necessarily claims authority. Since this is a necessary feature of law, any theory of law which is incompatible with it, must be incorrect. Raz argues that both Dworkin's theory and inclusive legal positivism are incompatible with law's claim of authority. Rather than arguing that inclusive legal positivism is in fact compatible with law's claim of authority (which has already been admirably done by several inclusive legal positivists such as Kramer, and Waluchow), I will be examining how Raz's understanding of authority and law's claiming of authority affect exclusive legal positivism, Raz's own preferred legal theory.

December 7th	Jeffrey Brand-Ballard, George Washington University	"Could Empirical Evidence About Us Debunk Our Moral Intuitions?"

Some philosophers (Joshua Greene, Peter Singer, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong) argue that research on the empirical underpinnings of our moral beliefs supports either skepticism or error theory concerning some of our moral intuitions, such as the widespread intuition that it's wrong to push the big man off the footbridge in a variation of the trolley problem. I review some of these "debunking arguments" and examine the most prominent rebuttal in the literature: moral constructivism (Neil Levy, Sharon Street, Hallvard Lillehammer, Guy Kahane). Taking T. M. Scanlon as a paradigm constructivist, I agree that constructivism blocks empirical challenges, but I argue that constructivism actually facilitates a different way of empirically debunking some of our moral intuitions, including ones that support deontology. Empirical research can provide clues to what rules would be rejected by reasonable people with evolutionary histories different from ours. Constructivists should recognize that such empirical evidence bears on the credibility of our moral intuitions.

Winter term (2012-2013):

January 13th	Haixia Zhong, McMaster	"Diagonalization and Truth Gap Theory"

After Tarski, Kripke's truth gap theory probably is the most influential theory in the analysis of 'truth' and the Liar Paradox. Briefly, Kripke's idea is that though the majority of declarative sentences in a language (e.g. English) can receive a truth value ('true' or 'false'), the Liar sentence as well as other similar pathological sentences cannot. Such kind of sentences suffer from so-called 'truth gaps', thus are 'undefined' or 'ungrounded'. Despite the elegant formal construction and precise definitions, the philosophical interpretation of the nature of those 'gaps' in Kripke's theory is still an open question. As a result, there are many criticisms for this approach, especially about the expressive power of the language he constructed and the problem called 'the revenge of the Liar'. In this paper, I will first examine several important interpretations in literature as well as their problems, and then put forward my own interpretation which is based on the notion 'diagonalization' and argue how it could modify Kripke's truth gap theory so that it can respond to those important criticisms.

January 20th	Polly Winsor, Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, University of Toronto	"Evidence from the Experts: Darwin's Dependence upon the Essential Characters of Linnaeus"

"No one regards the external resemblance of a mouse to a shrew, of a dugong to a whale, of a whale to a fish, as of any importance. These resemblances, though so intimately connected to the whole life of the being, are ranked as merely 'adaptive or analogical characters;'...." (Origin of Species, p. 414).
Victorian taxonomists, including the anatomist who defined analogy and homology, strove to distinguish "essential" from non-essential characters. What they meant by that term owed very little to Plato or Aristotle but a great deal to the character essentialis of Linnaeus. Darwin acknowledged that he owed the Swedish founder of taxonomy an enormous debt, which he took steps to repay. Yet the role of Linnaean taxonomy as evidence for evolution was misconstrued by some of his closest supporters, and has been distorted or neglected ever since.

January 27th	Rachel Barney, University of Toronto	Practical Reason and the Art of Living

An exploration of the thesis, common to many of the leading ancient philosophical systems, that moral excellence is itself

a craft or form of expertise.		

February 3rd	Owen Thornton, McMaster	"How and Why We Tolerate Weakness of Will"

In this paper I argue that we embrace, rather than spurn, weakness of the will. We do so in order to hide from our own psychological features that prevent us from accepting and identifying what Bransen calls "the normatively significant features of the world". There is a great deal of difference from what we should want, if we are to behave with good character, than what we really want so that we can embrace weakenss of the will.

February 10th	Christopher Tindale, University of Windsor	"Expert Arguments and Rhetorical Proofs"

Expert arguments and their reception continue to mystify theorists. Consideration of cases like the Andrew Wakefield case (the vaccination and autism controversy), where belief persists in spite of discredited expertise, suggest it can be more than the arguments themselves that makes a difference for lay audiences. Approaching matters from an audience perspective shifts the focus from looking at experts solely as repositories of knowledge and viewing them also as communicators. And this brings rhetorical issues into the discussion. As part of a general consideration of what rhetorical features bring to the study of argumentation, I am interested in how expert testimony is received. And to assess that I go back to Aristotle's basic "proofs" for rhetorical argument and consider their role in the communication and reception of expert arguments, using the Wakefield case for illustration.

February 17th	No Speaker	

February 24th	READING WEEK: No Speaker	

March 2nd	James Ingram, Political Science, McMaster	"The New Universalism"

After being at the center of controversies of the 1980s and 90s - from communitarianism to postmodernism to human rights - universalism seems to have drifted out of the center of philosophical attention in the new millennium. This may have been partly a matter of argumentative exhaustion, as debates hardened into impasses, and partly the result of a political conjuncture in which what many saw a new imperialism borrowed the clothes of older universalisms. In my view this ending came too soon. At the end of the nineties, a new approach to universalism was taking shape that promised to address many of the defects of earlier versions. Promoted not only by philosophers and political theorists but also importantly by historians and anthropologists, this new universalism avoided the question of whether there are transcultural universals and what they might be, and focused instead on how ostensible universals are theorized, refined, and improved. In a move that could be called pragmatist or left-Hegelian, it shifted the question from theory to practice, from epistemology to politics, from what universals are to how they work. In this paper, I draw on a number of theorists, especially Judith Butler and Etienne Balibar, to develop an ideal-typical reconstruction of this new way of thinking universalism.

March 9th	Cressida Heyes, Hooker Distinguished Visiting Professor, University of Alberta	"Anaesthetic Ethics? On the Philosophical Significance of Checking Out"

This event will be held in Hamilton Hall 302 at 3:30pm.
The sovereign subject of neoliberal capitalism is required to exercise his autonomy iteratively, expressing his individuality

qua capacity to choose in an interminable series of self-determining moments. When presented in the language of political philosophy we can lose sight of the lived experience of this subjectivity: it can be exhausting, ego-driven, obsessed with irrelevant choices, and abusively self-disciplining, committed to the fantasy of organizing and rationalizing a life of freedom in political contexts where freedom is systemically denied. This talk examines the phenomenological significance and political potential of anaesthesia, both literal and metaphorical, arguing that the lived experience of the loss of sensibility may have a political importance in modulating demands for a perpetually self-creating individual. It contrasts Michel Foucault's description of "an aesthetics of existence" with "anaesthetics of existence"--those routine, habitual strategies of pain-relief that we use to cope with the trials of everyday life. I suggest that "checking out" can be understood as both a necessary response to sensory crisis and a latent form of political resistance.

March 16th	**Günther Zöller, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität, Munich**	**"Homo homini civis. The Modernity of Classical German Political Philosophy"**

The paper focuses on the specifically political conception of the human individual in the moral, social and political philosophy of Kant and the German idealists, placing their political thinking into the larger historical context of modern accounts of the relation between the citizen and the state. In particular, I propose to draw on Kant, Fichte and Hegel for extracting a conception of selfhood that is mindful of the worth of the individual and attentive to its supra- and inter-individual existence in general and its existence in political or civil society and the state in particular.

March 23rd	**Nancy Doubleday, McMaster**	**"Peace and Health: Ways of Knowing, Opportunities and Challenges"**

The difficulties inherent in the construction of ideals, or universals, such as concepts of "peace" and "health" (and others such as "sustainability") mirror in some senses the histories, biases, preferences and other factors that can be understood to constitute "culture". However, the pursuit of peace and health as universals can seem discouraging and fruitless. Putting ideas into practice, or attempting to "be the change" in the language of Gandhi, offers access to reflexivity, and allows for creating opportunities to understand ourselves in relation to the processes by which social, cultural and ecological determinants of peace and health, as co-dependent conditions, emerge and can be nurtured. The complexity of social-ecological systems, and the competing truths evident from points within and beyond, and indeed the difficulties for determining what constitutes knowledge and truth in a moment, particularly where contrasting world-views exist, create challenges in understanding and communicating processes of change. Drawing from a caribou case study over a thirty-year period, I hope to pose a useful and challenging example for purposes of considering connections amongst ways of knowing, the role of power and orthodoxy, and the processes by which social-cultural-ecological determinants of peace and health are nurtured - or not. A brief consideration of the implications of clarifying interrelationships in this way, and of the opportunities and challenges flowing from it, will open discussion.

March 30th	**Dr. Nikolay Milkov, Russell Professor, McMaster**	**"The Joint Philosophical Program of Russell and Wittgenstein and Its Demise"**

Between April and November 1912, Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein were engaged in a joint philosophical program. Wittgenstein's meeting with Gottlob Frege in December 1912 led, however, to the dissolution of his 'intellectual honeymoon' with Russell–their joint program was abandoned. The talk will outline the key points of that program, identifying specifically what Russell and Wittgenstein each contributed to it. It will also determine precisely those features of their collaborative work that Frege criticized. Finally, it will recast along previously undeveloped lines the defining elements of Wittgenstein's early philosophy. I shall conclude with an overview of Wittgenstein's logical-philosophical discoveries in the two years following his encounter with Frege in 1912.