

DRAFT

Philosophy 237: Contemporary Moral Issues “Expanding the Moral Circle” (Summer 2018) MTWR, 11:05 AM - 1:25 PM (BURN 1B39)

Instructor: Nicholas Dunn

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Course description

This is an introductory course in moral philosophy. Instead of approaching moral issues theoretically (which is to say, by taking up questions of a rather abstract nature—such as, what is it that makes certain actions morally required or impermissible, what kinds of things in the world have intrinsic value, and the like), we will explore a set of current social and political issues with an eye towards the salient moral questions that emerge from them. Our focus will be on non-human entities (i.e., animals and the environment)—their total status, the kinds of moral relations we might stand in *with* them and the potential duties we have *to* them. We will begin with a consideration of animals (e.g., speciesism and rights-based arguments) and then turn to ecological and climate issues (e.g., anthropocentrism versus biocentrism/holism; individual responsibility). After this, we will consider these matters within two particular frameworks: feminism (both eco-feminism and care ethics) and indigenous perspectives. We will then turn to some global justice issues, such as climate refugees and future generations, as a way of seeing the interconnectedness of our duties to the human and non-human. We will conclude with some reflections on the normative questions and concerns that emerge throughout the course, such as: the intrinsic value of things like species and ecosystems and the importance of virtue.

Course objectives

1. Introduce you to the philosophical literature on ethical issues pertaining to animals, the environment, climate change, and global justice, as well as some feminist and indigenous perspectives on these topics;
2. Help sharpen your critical thinking skills, such as your ability to identify, evaluate, and formulate philosophical arguments;
3. Engage your ethical reasoning so that you can deepen and develop your views on these issues;
4. Express your ideas in a clear and precise way;
5. Learn how to debate and discuss controversial issues in a public setting and in a respectful manner.

DRAFT

Grading scheme

- Papers (2): **50%**

You will write two (2) papers, one short and one long. I will provide you with a list of topics from which to choose.

Paper 1 (2-2.5 pages): 15%

Due Thursday, 6/14

This paper is entirely expository, the purpose of which is to demonstrate your grasp of the structure of a philosophical argument. In other words, you will be explicating in your own words the central argument of a text we have read—*not* introducing your own arguments or any other evaluative claims.

Paper 2 (5-6 pages): 35%

First version: *Due Thursday, 6/28* Final version: *Due Thursday, 7/05*

You must take a position and defend it, making use only of the required or recommended texts from the course. If you would like to choose a paper topic other than one from the list I provide, you may ask my permission to do so.

- Participation: **25%**

Attendance: 5%

You are allowed two ‘free’ absences—i.e., no excuse needed. After this, your absences will negatively impact your mark. Additionally, perfect or near perfect attendance may positively impact border grades.

Reading questions (10): 10%

You must submit two (2) questions on one of the readings by 8 PM the night before the class for which we will discuss this reading. You will do this ten times throughout the course. There are no rules regarding which days you choose to submit; however, it is your responsibility to ensure that you submit questions for ten distinct class sessions (e.g., you may not double up because there are nine or fewer class sessions left).

Quiz: 5%

You will be given a quiz on the *Writing Philosophy* style guide some time during Week 2. It will cover chapters 3, 4, 6, and 7 (I will be lecturing on chapters 1 and 5).

Peer Review: 5%

Due Tuesday, 7/03

I will make available a form for providing commentary on two other students’ papers. You will be graded on how thorough you are in your feedback on others’ papers. The final version of *your* paper should include the two sets of feedback you received, as well as a brief paragraph about how you incorporated this feedback into your final version.

- Final exam (Thursday, 7/05): **25%**

The final exam is cumulative. It will consist of essay questions. You will receive a list of questions at the time of the exam, from which you will choose a subset to answer.

Course Materials

Required texts

1. I will make all of the philosophical texts available for you on MyCourses, as well as those I have listed as recommended. In the spirit of McGill's policies on sustainability, paper use, and other initiatives (and because this course deals with environmental ethics!), I am encouraging you to refrain from printing the readings and instead use an electronic device.
2. You will be required to purchase the following style guide. Copies will be available at The Word bookstore (469 Milton Street). Note: you must pay in cash; the store does not accept cards.
Lewis Vaughn and Jillian Scott McIntosh, *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students*, Second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Recommended

The following are texts in applied ethics, which contain units (i.e., collections of papers) on the topics we are considering in this course. If you are interested in bringing in additional sources for your second paper, these would be a helpful starting point. I am also available to consult on outside sources.

1. *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp and R.G. Frey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
2. *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, Edited by Stephen M. Gardiner and Allen Thomson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

The following are single/co-authored manuscripts; at times, my lectures will make use of content from these.

1. Lori Gruen, *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2011).
2. Angus Taylor, *Animals & Ethics: An Overview of the Philosophical Debate*, 3rd Edition (Toronto: Broadview, 2009).
3. John Broome, *Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2011).
4. Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, 25th Anniversary Edition. With a new foreword by Dale Jamieson (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011).
5. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, Second edition. With a foreword by Ariel Salleh (New York and London: Zed Books, 2014).
6. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Within each unit on the course schedule, I also list texts that are specific to the issue we are addressing.

DRAFT

Documentaries and Films (optional): There will be several optional film screenings related to topics we are covering in the course. They will take place on Wednesday evenings at 6 PM in Leacock 927, and followed by a brief discussion.

6/06: *At the Fork* (2016), 89 minutes

6/13: *Before the Flood* (2016), 96 minutes

6/20: *Princess Mononoke* (1997), 134 minutes

6/27: *Climate Refugees* (2010), 89 minutes

Policies

Emails: I will do my best to reply to emails with 24 hours, during weekdays. I cannot promise to answer emails over the weekend.

Attendance and Participation: Because the content of this course is condensed, it is extremely important that you attend all class sessions. Arriving late can be very disruptive, so please be on time. It is also important that you come prepared, having done the readings for the day and are prepared to discuss them.

Late Penalty and Extensions: The late penalty on written assignments (i.e., papers) shall be 1/3 of a letter grade per day, including weekends. The penalty for not submitting a set of reading questions on time is that you will receive no credit. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, and will require the presence of documentation (e.g., a medical note).

Electronic devices: Laptops, tablets, etc., may be used *only* to access course material, which is to say, the readings. I reserve the right at any point to restrict the use of such devices if I feel that they are being misused and/or becoming a distraction.

As the instructor of this course I endeavour to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and/or the Office for Students with Disabilities (514-398-6009).

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).

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.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.