

PHIL 237: Contemporary Moral Issues Winter 2018

Instructor: Mathieu Baril
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Office: TBA
Office hours: Wed. 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm

1. Course Description

This course is an introduction to debates in contemporary applied ethics and to the methods of ethics. In the first part of the course, we will familiarize ourselves with the two predominant approaches in ethics, namely consequentialism and deontological ethics. The rest of the course is an overview of different topics including animal ethics, euthanasia, abortion and infanticide, pornography, prostitution, punishment, and the death penalty.

2. Schedule

Lectures and conferences follow a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule. During the first week, there are 3 lectures. During the rest of the semester, lectures will be on Mondays and Wednesdays only. The last day of class is April 16.

3. Conferences

There is one conference per week, which will replace the Friday lecture (except during the first week). Conferences start on week 2, the week of 18 January. Sign up on Minerva.

Note: there is no conferences the week of 26 March (Good Friday).

Conference attendance is mandatory. To pass the course, you must attend at least 8 conferences. This means that you may miss 3 conferences without penalty. You are encouraged, however, to attend all conferences. **It is your responsibility to ensure that you inform your TA of your conference attendance.**

If you miss four or more conferences, for whatever reason, you will be required to submit a 500 word exercise to compensate for each conference (above three) missed. The topic of the essay will be a topic from a conference that you have missed. The topic has to be decided in consultation with your TA.

Conferences will provide an opportunity to discuss and reinforce what you have learned in lectures. Please come to conferences prepared, having read the required reading, and prepared to ask questions and participate in discussion. Your TA may require that you *actively* participate in

conferences by requesting e.g. that you take a turn to lead the discussion, take a turn to present the reading, take a turn to raise a question on the reading, etc.

4. Teaching assistants

- Thomas Colbourne: thomas.colbourne@mail.mcgill.ca
- David Collins: david.collins3@mail.mcgill.ca
- Hugo Cossette-Lefebvre: hugo.cossette-lefebvre@mail.mcgill.ca
- Nikolas Hamm: nikolas.hamm@mail.mcgill.ca
- Sebastian Rodriguez Duque: sebastian.rodriguezduque@mail.mcgill.ca.

5. Readings

All required and recommended readings will be posted on myCourses.

6. Email policy

Due to the size of this class, I have to impose a strict email policy. If you have any question concerning the material of the course, please do not email me. There are different ways to have further clarification on the material: you can meet me or your TA during office hours, or you can also ask your question in class or in conference. Similarly, if you want comments on the outline of your paper, please meet me or your TA during office hours. Besides, **requests for extensions must be directed to your TA** (not the instructor).

7. Evaluations

There will be 2 writing exercises (30% each) and one final exam (40%).

I. The first writing exercise (1000 words) is worth 30%. A hard copy should be submitted in class on week 7. Topics will be announced a few days before.

II. The second writing exercise (1000 words) is worth 30% as well. A hard copy should be submitted in class on week 11. Topics will be announced a few days before.

III. Finally, there will be a formal final 3-hour examination, worth 40%. The exam will be closed book. The date for the final exam will be set and published by the university later in the semester. Please make sure that you are aware of the date, time and location of the final exam.

8. Late Submissions

Late papers should be uploaded on myCourses. In the absence of an extension, late penalties will be applied as follows: 3 percentage points will be deducted for each day of lateness.

9. Extensions

These will be granted only in exceptional circumstances like serious illness or family emergency and documentation will be required. To apply for an extension, **you must contact your TA.**

10. Language policy

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.

11. Statement of academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all instructors and students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/> for more information).

Course outline

Introduction

- Week 1 (Jan. 8): Introduction; What is applied ethics?

Recommended readings:

- Driver, J. (2007). "Introduction," in *Ethics: the Fundamentals*, Blackwell publishing.
- "Trolley Madness": <http://existentialcomics.com/comic/106>.

Section 1: Theoretical Foundations

- Week 1 (Jan. 10-12): Classic utilitarianism and contemporary consequentialism

Required readings:

- Bentham, J. (1780). "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," printed in A. Bailey (ed.) (2016), *Utilitarianism*, Broadview press. (excerpts)
- Mill, J. S. (1861). "Utilitarianism," printed in A. Bailey (ed.) (2016), *Utilitarianism*, Broadview press. (excerpts)

Recommended reading:

- Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (2015). "Consequentialism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/consequentialism/>.

- Week 2 (Jan. 15-17): Deontological ethics

Required reading:

- Kant, I. (1785). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, printed in L. Denis (ed.) (2005), Broadview Press. (excerpts)

Section 2: Non-Human Animals

- Week 3 (Jan. 22-24): The Moral Status of animals

Required readings:

- Singer, P. (1974). "All Animals Are Equal," *Philosophical Exchange*, Vol. 5(1).
- Korsgaard, C. (2004). "Fellow creatures: Kantian ethics and our duties to animals," *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 24: 77- 110.

Recommended reading:

- Gruen, L. (2017). "The Moral Status of Animals," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/moral-animal/>.

- Week 4 (Jan. 29-31): Vegetarianism

Required readings:

- Rachels, J. (1997), "The Moral Argument for Vegetarianism," in *Can Ethics Provide Answers?*, Lanham, MD: Rowmann and Littlefield, pp. 99-107
- Frey, R. G. (1983), "Moral Vegetarianism and the Argument from Pain and Suffering," in *Rights, Killing, and Suffering*, Blackwell Publishers, pp.

Section 3: Life and Death: Euthanasia and Abortion

- Week 6 (Feb. 5-7): Killing and letting die

Required readings:

- Rachels, J. (1975), "Active and Passive Euthanasia," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 292, pp. 78-80.
- Nesbitt, W. (1995), "Is Killing No Worse Than Letting Die?," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 101-106.

- Week 7 (Feb. 12-14): The slippery-slope argument

Required readings:

- Kass, L. R. (1989). "Neither for Love nor Money: Why Doctors Must not Kill," *Public interest*, vol. 94, pp. 25-46.
- Brock, D. (1992). "Voluntary Active Euthanasia," *The Hastings Center Report*, Vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 10-22.

- Week 8 (Feb. 19-21): Fetuses, personhood, and infanticide

Required readings:

- Warren, M. A. (1973). "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," *The Monist*, vol. 57, no. 4.
- Schwartz, S. D. (1990). "Personhood Begins at Conception," in *The Moral Question of Abortion*, Chicago: Loyola University Press.

Recommended reading:

- Singer, P. (1979), "Taking Life: Abortion," in *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge University Press.

- Week 8 (Feb. 26-28): The self-defense argument

Required readings:

- Thomson, J. J. (1971). "A defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 1.
- Beckwitt, F. J. (1992). "Personal Bodily Rights, Abortion, and Unplugging the Violinist," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 125.

Section 4: The Sex Industry

- Week 9 (March 12-14): Pornography and freedom of expression

Required readings:

- Scanlon, T. (1972). "A Theory of Freedom of Expression," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 2014-226.
- Langton, R. (1993). "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 293-330.

Recommended reading:

- Shrager, L. (2016). "Feminist Perspectives on Sex Markets," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/feminist-sex-markets/>.

- Week 10 (March 19-21): Sexual objectification

Required readings:

- Langton, R. (1995). "Sexual Solipsism," *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 23, no. 2.
- Nussbaum, M. (1995). "Objectification," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 24, no. 4.

- Week 11 (March 26-28): Prostitution

Required readings:

- Pateman, C. (1999). "What's Wrong with Prostitution?", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 1/2, pp. 53-64.
- Nussbaum, M. (1998). "Whether from Reason or Prejudice: Taking Money for Bodily Services," *Journal of Legal Studies*, vol. 27.

Section 5: Punishment

- Week 12 (April 4) and Week 13 (April 9): The moral justification of punishment

Required readings: TBA

- Week 13 (April 11) and Week 14 (April 16): The death penalty

Required readings: TBA