

PHIL 334
Winter 2018
TuTh 2:30-4
Strathcona Anatomy 1/12

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office hours: Th. 12:30-1:30

Ethical Theory

Prerequisite: one of PHIL 230 (Introduction to Moral Philosophy), PHIL 237 (Contemporary Moral Issues), PHIL 242 (Introduction to Feminist Theory), PHIL 343 (Biomedical Ethics); or written permission of the instructor (if you have preparation which I deem equivalent).

This is a *second* course in ethics, intended for students with prior university coursework in moral philosophy. One of the above-listed prerequisites is *mandatory*; if you lack the prerequisite you may not take the course without my written permission.

This course offers an introduction to contemporary moral theory through study of some prominent strands in the analytic moral philosophy literature. The readings—which average 55 pages a week—consist of articles from philosophical journals and selections from important books, most dating from the last thirty years or so. We begin with contemporary *consequentialism*, which holds that the right action in any given situation is the one with the best consequences. Consequentialist theories are to be contrasted with *deontological* moral views, which maintain that actions are right or wrong not in virtue of their consequences but simply because of their intrinsic features—simply because of the *kinds* of acts they are. *Pluralist* moral theories propose a plurality of moral duties or morally relevant properties which must be weighed against each other in individual cases. *Virtue ethics* comprises ethical theories which approach the central moral categories via the idea of a virtuous agent, rather than in terms of free-standing rules of conduct. We will end with a brief look at *moral particularism*, the view that there are no general truths in ethics at all.

We will examine defences of and objections to all the types of theory just mentioned in the course of the term. Our primary aim will be to investigate the merits and failings of different moral theories (in their contemporary guises), but we will also pay some attention to the *methodology* of moral theorizing.

Required Texts

Most of the required readings are available on line via the McGill library catalogue (hyperlinks to these will be provided). Readings that are not available in electronic format will be posted on the myCourses page. There is also one required textbook for this course: *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, by Mark Timmons, 2nd edition (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013). It is available for purchase at Paragraph Books; on reserve at the Humanities and Social Sciences Library; and available as an e-book via the McGill library catalogue. Do not use the first edition. *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students*, ed. Vaughn and McIntosh, 2nd edition (OUP Canada, 2013), is a useful supplement.

Group Discussion

Group discussion will be an important component of the course. The class will be divided up into small groups of five for the weekly Thursday in-class group discussions and will proceed to discuss two questions on the week's readings posted by the instructor. A class-wide exchange of views from the different groups will follow. There will be ten of these sessions during the term, and attendance at them is mandatory. Each group will select a "secretary/ spokesperson" each week to take notes on the group's discussion and to speak for the group in the class-wide exchange. That person will later turn in a paper of approximately two double-spaced pages based on the discussion. A separate information sheet with further details of the group discussions and the papers based on them will be distributed to guide you; its specifications should be considered as part of this syllabus.

Course Requirements

In order to pass the course, you must satisfactorily complete all of the following course requirements:

- i) a midterm paper of approx. six double-spaced pages, worth 30% of your final mark;
- ii) a final paper of approx. ten double-spaced pages, worth 50% of your final mark; and
- iii) two group discussion papers, each of two to two-and-a-half (2 to 2½) double-spaced pages and written according to the specifications on the separate Group Discussions sheet; each worth 10% of your final mark

If your course mark is borderline, your attendance at and participation in the group discussions will be used as a deciding factor.

Course Policies

Technology policy. It is forbidden to use, hold, or touch any electronic device (such as a computer, cell phone, or tablet), or to use earbuds or headphones, in class. Students who are seen to be violating this policy will be asked to leave the room. If you feel you require an accommodation from this policy for learning-related reasons, come and see me in my office to discuss the possibility of an exemption.

Late papers policy. Late papers will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a grade per 24-hour period (e.g., from a B to a B- if submitted between one minute and 24 hours after the deadline). No extensions on the papers will be granted, save for the following case: requests for extensions will be *considered* (but not automatically granted) when requested at least one business day before the paper is due and substantiated at the time of request by a medical note documenting illness.

Use of instructor-generated materials. Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., transparencies, handouts, outlines, summaries, paper topics, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied

or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. No student may record a lecture or class without the express permission of the instructor.

Communications with Prof. Stroud. Please be advised that as a matter of pedagogical principle I conduct all my student contact in person, not over e-mail. For any question requiring a response from me, therefore, please come and talk to me in person.

The University requires that the following notices appear on every syllabus:

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.

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