

PHIL 230: Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Fall 2019 – M/W/F 12:35-1:25 pm
CMPUS1 101

Chris Howard
chris.howard@mcgill.ca

919 Leacock
Office Hours: W 1:45-3:45 pm

Overview

This course introduces and explores the core areas of moral philosophy. We start with a brief discussion of morality's *status*: Are there any universal moral truths? Or do facts about what's right and wrong always depend on the culture of which you're a part? We'll then analyze and evaluate some concrete moral *issues*, including, among others, abortion and our duties to non-human animals. Next, we'll canvass several major moral *theories*—theories that try to formulate basic moral principles that predict and explain our judgments about the kinds of concrete moral issues we've discussed. Finally, we'll end with a return to questions about morality's status, including the question of why we should be moral at all. The central aim of the course is to acquaint you with the many philosophical problems that populate the field of moral philosophy, along with the tools to tackle them. A side effect will be your improved ability to think critically and rigorously, and to communicate more effectively, about the kinds of things that matter most.

myCourses

This course has a myCourses site. All of the assigned readings can be found here. All announcements and assignments will also be posted here, and this is where you'll turn in your papers. This site is important. Make sure you familiarize yourself with it, and know how to use it, as soon as possible.

Assessment

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|--------------------|-----|-------------------------|
| Participation | 5% | |
| Conference Quizzes | 10% | |
| Paper 1 | 25% | (October 11, 11:59 pm) |
| Paper 2 | 30% | (November 15, 11:59 pm) |
| Final Exam | 30% | (TBD) |

Participation

McGill uses a web-based polling system called TurningPoint at no cost to students. This system allows you to use your own personal devices (laptop, tablet, or smartphone) to answer questions I pose in class. Polling will be used in this course to enhance engagement, increase interactivity, and, less excitingly, to determine your participation grade. Polling will be used in each meeting. If you respond to each question that I pose in a given meeting, you'll receive full participation credit for that meeting; otherwise, you'll receive none. This means that you should come to class ready to participate, and with your devices charged and connected to the Internet. For more information, please see the 'Polling Policy' section below.

Conference Quizzes

You must register for a conference for this course. Registration opens soon and conferences begin the second week of classes. At the beginning of each conference, you'll take a short quiz focused on the week's readings and lectures (starting the week of Sept. 15th). This means you must arrive at conferences on time. To put yourself in a position to perform well on the quizzes, please make sure you've done all the readings for the week and paid attention in lecture. Your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped. Your conference will be (expertly and brilliantly) led by one of the following TAs for this course:

Hugo Cossette-Lefebvre

hugo.cossette-lefebvre@mail.mcgill.ca

Office: LEA 934

Hours: Fri 11:00-12:00pm

Nikolas Hamm

nikolas.hamm@mail.mcgill.ca

Office: LEA 934

Hours: Mon 2:00-3:00pm

Éliot Litalien

eliot.litalien@mcgill.ca

Office: FERR 498

Hours: Mon 2:30-3:30pm

Papers*

You will write two 5 page (double-spaced) philosophical papers. Each will require you to explain, and develop a critical response to, some argument or theory we've covered in class. Writing prompts for the papers will be available early (on myCourses), so you'll have more than enough time to complete the assignments. Before writing an initial draft of your first paper, I ask that you please view the guidelines for writing a philosophy paper available on my website: www.chrismhoward.com/teaching.html.

Final Exam*

You will write a formal final exam for this course during the exam period (Dec. 5th-20th). The exam will be comprehensive (cumulative). It will contain a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. I will provide you with a study guide in advance of the exam to help you effectively prepare for it.

Special arrangements for the final exam. Please note that all formal final examinations at McGill are centrally scheduled and administered. This means that the instructor has no control over the date of the exam for his or her course, which will be set by the Examination Office. (A preliminary draft of the examination schedule is released in October.) Nor is it possible to arrange to sit the exam at an alternative time which is more convenient for you: as specified in section 3.6.2.1 of the Calendar, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams with individual students. Given these facts, all students must plan to be in Montreal and available to write final exams during the entire exam period.

*You must turn in all of these assignments to receive a passing grade in this course. If you do not turn in one of these assignments, then you will automatically receive an F for the course.

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted for any credit in this course unless you have a(n) (uncontroversially) serious excuse and can provide appropriate documentation for that excuse.

Email Policy

Please allow 24 hours for a response from me or your TA. If you don't hear back within 48 (business) hours, you can send a short follow up. Make sure to check this syllabus and the course site for answers to your questions before emailing to ask them—and please be professional in your correspondence.

Polling Policy

To participate in Polling sessions, you must first register for an account by clicking on 'Register Your Account' at www.mcgill.ca/polling and logging in with your McGill username and password. Follow the prompts to agree to the terms of use and create your account. For some helpful information about polling, please visit the 'Getting Started for Students' section at www.mcgill.ca/polling. For any technical problems with polling, please first contact the IT Service Desk: <http://www.mcgill.ca/it/get-started-it/need-help>. If you do not have a smartphone, tablet, or laptop to use to respond to polling questions, then please contact me immediately so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Electronic Devices Policy

Use of cell phones or any other electronic devices is not permitted during lectures (or conferences) for any purpose other than (1) taking notes or (2) responding to the polling questions I pose. Violators of this policy will be asked to leave class, and will receive no participation credit for the day.

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.

Academic Integrity

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 further information). *Special note:* Since polling records will be used to determine a portion of your overall grade for the course, responding as someone other than yourself is considered an academic offense. During class, using the credentials of another student will be interpreted as intent to commit an academic offense.

Topics and Schedule of Readings

Preliminaries

4 September Introduction & Overview

6 September *Relativism vs. Objectivism*
James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Moral Problems

9 September *Our Obligations to Others, Part 1*
Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

11 September *Our Obligations to Others, Part 2*
John Arthur, "World Hunger and Moral Obligation: The Case Against Singer"

- 16 September *Tradeoffs, Part 1*
 Philippa Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”
- 18 September *Tradeoffs, Part 2*
 Judith Thomson, “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”
- 23 September *Abortion, Part 1*
 Don Marquis, “Why Abortion Is Immoral”
- 25 September *Abortion, Part 2*
 Judith Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
- 30 September *Our Duties to Non-Human Animals*
 Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal”

Moral Theory

- 2 October *Consequentialism, Part 1*
 Russ Shafer-Landau, “Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions”
 Jeremy Bentham, “The Principle of Utility”
- 7 October *Consequentialism, Part 2*
 John Stuart Mill, “In Defense of Utilitarianism”
 Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”
- 9 October *Consequentialism, Part 3*
 Russ Shafer-Landau, “Consequentialism: Its Difficulties”
- 16 October *Kantian Ethics, Part 1*
 Immanuel Kant, “The Moral Law and the Autonomy of the Will”
- 21 October *Kantian Ethics, Part 2*
 Joshua Glasgow, “Kant’s Principle of Universal Law”
- 23 October *Kantian Ethics, Part 3*
 Onora O’Neill, “Kant on Treating People as Ends in Themselves”

- 28 October *Rossian Pluralism, Part 1*
W.D. Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?"
- 30 October *Rossian Pluralism, Part 2*
David McNaughton, "An Unconnected Heap of Duties?"
- 4 November *Virtue Ethics, Part 1*
Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* (selections)
- 6 November *Virtue Ethics, Part 2*
Rosalind Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics"
- 11 November *The Ethics of Care, Part 1*
Carol Gilligan, "In a Different Voice"
- 13 November *The Ethics of Care, Part 2*
Nel Noddings, "An Ethic of Caring"
- 18 November *Ubuntu*
Thaddeus Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory"
- 20 November *Ubuntu*
Thaddeus Metz and Joseph Gaie, "The African Ethic of *Ubuntu/Botho*"

Metaethics

- 25 November *The Status of Morality, Part 1*
J.L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"
- 27 November *The Status of Morality, Part 2*
David Enoch, "Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)"
- 2 December *Why Be Moral? Part 1*
Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"
- 3 December *Why Be Moral? Part 2*
Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints"