

# PHIL 334: Ethical Theory

Winter 2020 – M/W 4:05-5:25 pm  
ENGMC 11

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## Overview

This course introduces and explores contemporary moral theory via an examination of current debates surrounding perhaps the most popular and resilient moral theory in the history of moral theorizing: *consequentialism*. Consequentialism claims that what it is for an action to be right is for it to produce the best overall outcome, relative to the alternative actions available to you. So for consequentialists, the only factor that can be relevant to an act's *rightness* is the relative amount of *goodness* that the act will produce. Nonconsequentialists deny this. They claim that factors irrelevant to the goodness of an action's outcome can be relevant to whether the action is right. This course charts the evolution of the debate between consequentialism and nonconsequentialism from the early twentieth century to the present day, cataloguing the most important developments on both sides, and isolating the core points of disagreement among the theories' most ardent proponents. Students can expect to gain a deep and cutting-edge understanding of contemporary moral theory along with the methodology used to adjudicate its disputes.

## 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 permission from the instructor.

## 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 written work. This site is important. Please make sure you familiarize yourself with it, and know how to use it, as soon as possible.

## Assessment

Participation	10%	
Reading Responses	15%	
Midterm Paper	30%	(February 7, 11:59 pm)
Final Paper Outline	5%	(March 25, 11:59 pm)
Final Paper	40%	(April 14, 11:59 pm)

## 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

help determine your participation grade. Polling will be used in each meeting. You will receive credit for attending a meeting if and only if you respond to each polling question that I pose in that meeting. Your participation grade will be a function of your attendance and the extent to which you participate in class discussions and group activities. You may miss *two* classes without your participation grade being affected. If you miss more than two, you'll lose points, unless you have a serious excuse and can provide appropriate documentation for that excuse. For more on polling at McGill, please see the 'Polling Policy' section below.

### **Anonymous Grading**

All written work will be graded anonymously in this course. To facilitate this policy, please include only your student ID number – *and not your name* – at the top of the first page of any piece of written work that you submit for assessment. Also, please observe the following naming convention for any file you submit that contains an assessment item: “*Student ID\_Assessment Item*”. So, for example, when you submit your midterm paper, please name the file that you submit “[Your student ID]\_Midterm Paper” and when you submit your first reading response, please name your file “[Your student ID]\_Reading Response 1.”

### **Reading Responses**

Each week you will write a short, critical response to one of the readings for the week. These responses should be 200-300 words, and they should be *critical*: To receive full credit, your response must highlight an argument or claim made by the author with whom you're engaged and raise either a criticism of, or critical question about, that argument or claim. These responses are due each Friday, by 11:59 pm, and should be submitted to the appropriate folder under the 'Assignments' tab on myCourses. When submitting these, please respect the file naming convention laid out above under 'Anonymous Grading'. Your first reading response will be due on **January 24**, the first Friday following the add/drop deadline.

### **Midterm Paper\***

You will write a 5 page (double-spaced) philosophical paper. This paper will require you to explain, and develop a critical response to, some argument or theory that we've covered in class. A writing prompt for this paper will be available early (on myCourses), so you'll have more than enough time to complete the assignment. 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 personal website: [www.chrismhoward.com/teaching.html](http://www.chrismhoward.com/teaching.html).

### **Final Paper and Final Paper Outline\***

You will write an 8 page (double-spaced) philosophical paper. A writing prompt for this paper will be available on myCourses, though you'll also have the option to write on a topic of your choosing. Prior to starting the paper, you'll write a detailed outline. Details concerning the structure of this outline will be given in class. After reviewing your outline, I'll either green-light the proposal immediately or schedule a meeting with you to discuss it. Once your outline's been approved, you'll write your paper based on it.

\*You must turn in all of these written 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 reading responses will not be accepted. Late papers will be penalized at the rate of 5 points per 24-hour period (for example, you'll go from a 90 to an 85 if the paper is submitted between 1 minute and

24 hours after the deadline). I will consider, but not automatically grant, requests for extensions for papers only if the request is made at least one business day prior to the due date. If you anticipate that you'll need an extension, notify me as soon as possible so that we can determine an alternative deadline.

### **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](http://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](http://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/](http://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**

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|-----------|---|
| 6 January | Introduction & Overview   |
| 8 January | Kagan, <i>Normative Ethics</i> ch. 1, pp. 1-19 (up until last para.) + ch. 2, pp. 25-29<br>Zimmerman, "Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value" (through first two paras. of § 2) |

## Consequentialism

13 January Shaw, "The Consequentialist Perspective," pp. 5-12 + 15-top 17  
Moore, *Principia Ethica* ch. 1, § 17 + ch. 5, §§ 88-89

15 January Ross, *The Right and the Good* ch. 2

## Options

20 January Scheffler, Introduction to *Consequentialism and its Critics*, up to last para on p. 5  
Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," §§ 2-5

22 January Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* ch. 9, §§ 1-3  
Shaw, "The Consequentialist Perspective," pp. 17-19  
Scheffler, Introduction to *Consequentialism and its Critics*, pp. 5-8

27 January Jackson, "Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection"

29 January Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"

## Constraints

3 February Kagan, *Normative Ethics* ch. 3, §1  
Nagel, "War and Massacre"  
Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* ch. 9, §§ 4-5

5 February Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"

10 February Scheffler, Introduction to *Consequentialism and its Critics*, p. 9 to end  
Nozick, "The Rationality of Side Constraints"  
Foot, "Utilitarianism and the Virtues"  
Scheffler, "Agent-Centered Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues"

12 February Hare, *The Limits of Kindness* ch. 6

17 February Brooks, "Agency and Morality"

19 February Kamm, *Morality, Mortality Volume II: Rights, Duties, and Status* ch. 9, up to § 4

## Consequentializing

24 February Dreier, "The Structure of Normative Theories"

- 26 February Portmore, "Combining Teleological Ethics with Evaluator Relativism"
- 9 March Schroeder, "Teleology, Agent-Relative Value, and 'Good'"
- 11 March Portmore, "Consequentializing Moral Theories," up to § 4  
 Smith, "Two Kinds of Consequentialism"  
*Optional:* Portmore, "Consequentializing"
- 16 March Dougherty, "Agent Neutral Deontology"
- 18 March Setiya, "Must Consequentialists Kill?"
- 23 March Howard, "Consequentialism and Constraints"
- 25 March Catchup & Discussion

### **Action as Production**

- 30 March Schapiro, "Three Conceptions of Action in Moral Theory"
- 1 April Muñoz, "The Paradox of Consequentialism"

### **Should the Numbers Count?**

- 6 April Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?"  
 Anscombe, "Who is Wronged?"
- 8 April Parfit, "Innumerate Ethics"