PHIL 334 Ethical Theory
Fall 2011. MW 8.35 – 9.55 Leacock 232

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Prerequisite
One of PHIL 230 (Introduction to Moral Philosophy), PHIL 237 (Contemporary Moral Issues), PHIL 242
(Introduction to Feminist Theory), or PHIL 343 (Biomedical Ethics); or written permission of the instructor.
This is a second course in ethics, intended for students with prior university coursework in moral philosophy.
We will assume the elementary level of writing and analytical skills in philosophy.

Course Description
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 30-40 pages a week –- consist of
articles from philosophical journals and selections from recent books, almost all dating from the last thirty
years or so. We begin with consequentialism: it holds that the right action in any given situation is the one that
brings about 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 that must be weighed against each other in individual cases. They
can thus be seen as pointing toward virtue ethics, a family of theories which, rather than proposing free-
standing rules of conduct, seek instead to understand the central moral categories in terms of the idea of a
virtuous agent. 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 defenses 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.

Readings and Required Texts
Required books (available for purchase at McGill Book Store, and on reserve at Redpath Library)
- Mark Timmons. *Moral Theory: An Introduction* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
- Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.). *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 2007).
Recommended books
- Vaughn and McIntosh. *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students* (OUP Canada, 2009)
- Julia Driver. *Ethics: The Fundamentals* (Blackwell, 2007). [More accessible than Timmons (2007)]
- Shelly Kagan. *Normative Ethics* (West View, 1998). [More advanced than Timmons (2007), but highly
  recommended]

Course Requirements and Method of Assessment
1. First in-class exam: 25% of the final mark for the course
2. Second in-class exam: 25%
3. Final exam: 50%

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

Tentative Schedule (ET indicates Shafer-Landau's *Ethical Theory*)

Sep 5: [Labour day, no class]
Sep 7: What is normative ethics?

SECTION I: Consequentialism (Teleological Moral Theories)
Sep 12: Mill "Hedonism" (ET-29) & Nozick "Experience Machine" (ET-30)
Sep 14: Sen "Development as capability expansion" (Web CT)

Sep 19: Singer "All animals are equal" (ET-43) & "Famine, affluence and morality" (ET-53)
Sep 20: Smart "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism" (ET-50) & Hare "What is Wrong with Slavery" (ET-52)

Sep 26: Brad Hooker "Rule-Consequentialism" (ET-51) & Harris "Survival lottery" (ET-54)
Sep 28: Parfit "Equality and priority" (Web CT)

Oct 3: Revision
Oct 5: First in-class exam

SECTION II: Deontological Moral Theories
Oct 10: No class [Thanksgiving day]
Oct 12: Foot "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double-Effect" (ET-60) & Thomson "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem" (ET-61)

Oct 17: Williams "Consequentialism and integrity" (Web CT)
Oct 19: Timmons, Moral Theory, ch. 7

Oct 24: Christine Korsgaad "Kant's Formula of Universal Law" (ET-56)
Oct 26: O'Neill "Kantian Approaches to some famine problems" (ET-57)

Oct 21: Nozick "The Rationality of Side Constraints" (ET-58) & Rawls "A theory of justice" (ET-64)
Nov 2: Scanlon "Contractualism and Utilitarianism" (ET-65)

Nov 7: Revision
Nov 9: Second in-class exam

SECTION III: Alternative Moral Theories
Nov 14: Nussbaum "Non-relative virtues" (ET-68)
Nov 16: Hursthouse "Normative Virtue Ethics" (ET-68) & Swanton "A Virtue Ethical Account of Right Action" (ET-70)

Nov 21: Ross "What Makes Right Acts Right?" (ET-72) & McNaughton "An Unconnected Heap of Duties?" (ET-73)
Nov 23: Dancy "An unprincipled morality" (ET-74) & McKeever/Ridge "What does holism have to do with moral particularism?" (Web CT)

Nov 28: Taurek "Should Numbers Count?" (Web CT)
Nov 30: Lawlor "Taurek, numbers and probabilities" (Web CT)

Dec 5: Comparing ethical theories
Dec 6: Revision