

Philosophy 334: Ethical Theory
Dr. Daniel Silvermint

Period: Winter 2013, January 07 – April 16
Classroom: Rutherford Physics Bldg., 112
Class Time: TR 2:35 to 3:55

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Hours: TR 1:00 to 2:15 or appt.

TA: Joey Van Weelden

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Prerequisites: This is a second sequence course in ethics, intended for students with prior coursework in moral philosophy. Absent my written permission, having completed one of the following is required: Introduction to Moral Philosophy (Phil 230), Contemporary Moral Issues (Phil 237), Introduction to Feminist Theory (Phil 242), or Biomedical Ethics (Phil 343).

Course Description: This course serves as an introduction to some of the dominant strands in contemporary moral theory, drawn from the last thirty or so years of the analytic tradition. We will primarily be concerned with questions about the nature of the good and the right, and with the kinds of considerations that contribute to moral rightness and wrongness. We will begin with *consequentialism*, or the idea that the right thing to do is whatever produces the best consequences. *Deontological* theories, in contrast, judge conduct to be right or wrong independently of its consequences; some actions must be taken—and some should never be—simply because of the kinds of actions that they are. While both consequentialist and deontological theories attempt to provide a unified understanding of the right thing to do, *pluralist* moral theories take there to be a range of relevant values and duties that bear on a given situation. These values and duties are sometimes in genuine conflict with each other, requiring an agent to weigh their importance. *Virtue ethics* further challenges the notion that morality is about discovering and following clear rules of conduct, seeking instead to understand the kinds of agents we should be. Finally, we will consider *moral particularism*, which holds that there are no general ethical truths to be followed.

Course Aims: The primary aim of this course is to investigate the strengths and weakness of leading moral theories. A secondary aim is to explore the methodology of moral theorizing.

Assigned Readings: The primary texts for this course are *Moral Theory: An Introduction* (second edition) by Mark Timmons and *Consequentialism and Its Critics* edited by Samuel Scheffler. These texts have been ordered through Paragraphe Bookstore. Additional required articles and chapters will be made available via myCourses on a rolling basis. Students are responsible for an average of 50 pages of material per week, and are expected to invest their time in reading the texts carefully and preparing questions they'd like to pursue in class.

Class Format: Classes are 80 minutes. Tuesday sessions will feature a combination of traditional lecture, call-and-response interactive lecturing, and a dedicated open floor period for any questions or objections not raised during the lecture (note: student contributions are welcome throughout, and class-wide give-and-take is preferred). Thursday sessions will be divided

between lecture and small group discussion. On the first day students will be sorted into permanent groups of six. Every Thursday I will post two discussion questions based on the week's readings, which students will address as a group. The class will then reconvene to share their results. The 'assessment' section below contains additional information about group work.

Academic Freedom: As much as is possible, I will aim to teach this course without bias. I have no agenda beyond philosophical inquiry, and students have a right to disagree with me and with each other without any penalty to their grade whatsoever. Further, students are free to openly question or challenge any ideas or social practices that are relevant to the subject of the course. I will make every effort to ensure that this class offers a learning environment conducive to informed controversy. The right to speak in my class is not absolute, however. Students are expected to be civil to one another, and to respect the right of others to have their equal say.

Assessment: In order to pass this course, students must receive a passing mark on both their midterm and final papers as well as fulfill their responsibilities in the small group discussions. All submitted work should be in Times New Roman 12 font, double spaced, with 1" margins. For all assignments, hard copies are due in person at the start of class; email or mailbox submissions will only be accepted without late penalty in the event of a documented emergency.

Participation – 30%. In addition to attending and contributing to the weekly small group discussions (10%), students will twice serve as a spokesperson for their group (10% and 10%). Spokespersons are responsible for taking notes on the conversation, speaking on behalf of their group when the class reconvenes to discuss and debate, and submitting by the start of class the following Thursday a two page short paper based on the topics and resulting discussions.

Midterm Paper – 30%. Prior to the deadline I will distribute a list of potential paper topics. Students will write a five page paper on whichever of these prompts they prefer. Equal attention should be paid to carefully reconstructing arguments from the reading and explaining the strengths or weaknesses you perceive in those arguments. Due February 28 in class.

Final Paper – 40%. I will again distribute a list of potential paper topics, but students are also welcome to generate their own topic pending my feedback and approval. Students will write an eight page paper. In addition to reconstructing and critically evaluating arguments from the reading, students will be expected to entertain and respond to a possible objection against whichever position they adopt. Due April 16 in class.

Grading: Marks in this course are not curved. If you do not understand why you have received a certain score, or if you have textual evidence that the TA has erred in their grading, you are welcome to meet with your grader within a week of your work being returned. I am always happy to meet with students wanting advice about how to improve their future performance.

Late Work: Written work not submitted by the deadline will be penalized by a full letter grade (10%). For each additional calendar day the work remains outstanding, it will lose an additional full letter grade. For example, a paper otherwise worth an A- will receive a B- if it is submitted after the start of class, a C- if it is submitted the following day, a D- if it is submitted two days after the deadline, and a progressively failing mark thereafter until the score reaches 0%. Work

being turned in late should be emailed directly to the TA. I'll consider late penalty waivers under extraordinary and appropriately documented circumstances, such as severe medical emergency or similar crisis. I encourage students to work on their paper assignments in a timely manner; falling ill the evening before a deadline will rarely count as an excuse. If you are unable to turn in work on the day and time specified due to a documented and university-approved scheduling conflict, you must contact me no later than one week before the deadline to be considered for a limited extension.

Disruptive Behavior: Students are required to comply with all University policies concerning threatening behavior. In addition, I ask students not to come late or pack up early, to put away their cellphones (and keep them on silent), and to only use laptops or tablets if they are essential for note-taking or following along with articles.

Notices: 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.mcgil.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.

Schedule of Readings:

- *MTI: Moral Theory: An Introduction* (textbook)
- *C&C: Consequentialism and Its Critics* (textbook)
- *MC*: .pdf or link available on myCourse
 - *CD: Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory* (myCourse .pdf)

January 8 and 10

Timmons: *MTI* ch. 1

Shaw: "The Consequentialist Perspective" (stop at 'Objections to Consequentialism'), *CD*

Kagan: *Normative Ethics* ch. 2 (sections 1, 3, and 6), *MC*

Timmons: *MTI* ch. 5 (through section 1)

January 15 and 17

Scheffler: *C&C* introduction (to top of p. 7)

Timmons: *MTI* ch. 6 (through section 3)

Williams: "Consequentialism and Integrity," *C&C*

Nagel: "Autonomy and Deontology" (sections 1-3), *C&C*

January 22 and 24

Railton: "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," *C&C*

Jackson: "Decision-theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection," *MC*

January 29 and 31 (continued on next page)

Norcross: "Reasons Without Demands" (stop at 'Rightness as an Ideal'), *CD*

Kagan: *Normative Ethics* ch. 3 (section 1), *MC*

Scheffler: *C&C* introduction (p. 7 to end)
Shaw: "The Consequentialist Perspective" ('Objections to Consequentialism' to end), *CD*
Nagel: "War and Massacre," *C&C*

February 5 and 7

Nozick: "Side Constraints," *C&C*
Nagel: "Autonomy and Deontology" (sections 4-6), *C&C*
Fried: *Right and Wrong* ch.1 (sections 1-3 and 5-6) and ch. 2 (sections 1-2), *MC*

February 12 and 14

Kamm: "Nonconsequentialism" (through section 6), *MC*
Timmons: *MTI* ch. 4 (sections 5, 7-8, 10 [craniotomy], and 12 [moral absolutism, principle of double effect, and revisiting the problem of moral conflict])
Davis: "Contemporary Deontology," *MC*

February 19 and 21

Foot: "Utilitarianism and the Virtues," *C&C*
Scheffler: "Agent-Centered Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues," *C&C*

February 26 and 28: ** Midterm Paper due on the 28th **

Ross: *The Right and the Good* ch. 2 ("What Makes Right Acts Right?"), *MC*
Timmons: *MTI* ch. 9 (sections 1-7, 10)

March 5 and 7

[Study Break]

March 12 and 14

Dancy: "An Ethic of Prima Facie Duties," *MC*
McNaughton: "An Unconnected Heap of Duties?" *MC*
Rawls: *A Theory of Justice* ch. 1 (sections 7-8), *MC*
Timmons: *MTI* ch. 9 (sections 11-12)

March 19 and 21

Stocker: "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *MC*
Oakley: "Varieties of Virtue Ethics" (pages 128-140 only), *MC*
Timmons: *MTI* ch. 10 (sections 1-5)
Slote: "Virtue Ethics" (sections 1-9), *MC*

March 26 and 28

Hursthouse: "Normative Virtue Ethics," *MC*
Hursthouse: *On Virtue Ethics* (pages 43, 52-57, 60-62, 163-170, 192-193, and 205-216), *MC*

April 2 and 4 (continued on next page)

Keller: "Virtue Ethics is Self-Effacing," *MC*
Timmons: *MTI* ch. 10 (sections 6-7)
McNaughton: *Moral Vision* ch. 13, *MC*

Timmons: *MTI* ch. 11 (section 6)

April 9 and 11

Hooker: "Moral Particularism: Wrong and Bad," *MC*

Timmons: *MTI* ch. 12

Heathwood: book note on *MTI*, *MC*

April 16: **** Final Paper due ****