PHIL 230: Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Winter 2020 – M/W/F 9:35-10:25 am
Remote Delivery

Chris Howard
chris.howard@mcgill.ca
919 Leacock
Zoom Hours: W 2:30-4:30 pm (and by appointment)

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 and lectures 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.

Weekly Structure
- Every Monday morning, by the course’s officially scheduled start time (9:35 am EDT), lectures for the week will be made available under the ‘Lecture Recordings’ tab on the myCourses site. You are responsible for viewing these on your own. We will not meet synchronously on Mondays.
- Every Tuesday, by 6:00 pm EDT, you will submit a thoughtful question about, or reaction to, the week’s lectures. Submitting these on time and to the correct folder on the myCourses site will contribute to your participation grade.
- Every Wednesday morning, at the course’s officially scheduled start time, we will meet synchronously. During this meeting, we will discuss the material covered in the week’s lectures, using a selection of your submitted questions/reactions as the basis for our discussion. For those unable to attend this meeting (e.g., if attending at the scheduled time would be unreasonable given your current time zone), the session will be recorded and made available shortly after it concludes. Students able to attend and participate in these meetings are strongly encouraged to do so.
- Every Thursday at 12:00 am EDT (starting Sept. 17) a quiz will become available on the myCourses site. You will have 25 mins. to complete the quiz once you start it. After 11:30 pm EDT on Friday, the quiz will no longer be available. This means you must complete it prior to this time each week.
- Starting the second week of classes, you will attend a conference in lieu of our having a Friday meeting. This means that, once registration opens, you must register for a conference as soon as possible. One conference section will be held on campus (if circumstances permit); the rest will be
held over Zoom. In all cases, your conference will be led by one of the TAs for the course, who will take attendance. Attending and participating in a conference will contribute to your participation grade. It is therefore important that you try to register for a conference that is suitable to your time zone. If this is impossible, accommodations will be made (see ‘Participation’ below).

- **Exceptions:** For our first meeting (Wednesday, September 2, 9:35 am EDT), we will not meet synchronously. Instead, a video introducing you to the course will be posted to the myCourses site at the time our class would ordinarily start. You must view this video prior to our meeting on Friday, which will be **synchronous**. During this meeting, I’ll field any questions you have about the course.

### Assessment

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Quizzes</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>25% (October 11, 11:59 pm EDT)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>35% (November 18, 11:59 pm EDT)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30% (Take-home, due date TBD)</td>
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### Participation

Your participation grade will be determined equally by two factors. First, each Tuesday by 6:00 pm EDT you will submit a thoughtful question about, or reaction to, the week’s asynchronous lectures. Your question/reaction must be submitted to the appropriate folder under ‘Assignments’ on myCourses. Second, your participation grade will be affected by your attendance at conferences. If you attend for the duration of a conference, you will receive full participation credit for the day. If you are 10 minutes late, or leave 10 minutes early, you will not receive credit for attending. If you’re unable to regularly attend the conference for which you’ve registered, you must let your TA know as soon as possible. They will meet with you promptly to determine an alternative way of assessing your participation. **Note:** Neither of these factors will begin to affect your participation grade until the Add/Drop deadline (on Sept. 15).

### Weekly Quizzes

Starting the week of Sept. 15, you will take a short quiz each week focused on the week’s readings and lectures. Each week the quiz will become available on myCourses on Thursday at 12:00 am EDT. You will have 25 minutes to complete the quiz once you start it. After 11:30 pm EDT on Friday, the quiz will no longer be available. This means that you must complete the quiz prior to this time each week.

### 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](http://www.chrismhoward.com/teaching.html).

### Final Exam*

You will write a take-home final exam for this course during the exam period (Dec. 8th-22nd). The exam will be comprehensive (cumulative). It will contain a mix of short answer and essay questions.

*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.
Teaching Assistants

Nikolas Hamm  Ian Plamondon  Jordan Walters
nikolas.hamm@mail.mcgill.ca  ian.plamondon@mail.mcgill.ca  jordan.walters@mail.mcgill.ca
Zoom Hours: TBD  Zoom Hours: TBD  Zoom Hours: TBD

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.

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).

Topics and Schedule of Readings

Preliminaries

2 September  Introduction & Overview
4 September  Live Q&A
7 September  Relativism vs. Objectivism
                James Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”
9 September  Synchronous Discussion

Moral Problems

14 September  Our Obligations to Others
                Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality”
16 September  Synchronous Discussion
21 September  *Tradeoffs*

Philippa Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”
Judith Thomson, “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”

23 September  Synchronous Discussion

28 September  *Abortion*

Don Marquis, “Why Abortion Is Immoral”
Judith Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

30 September  Synchronous Discussion

5 October  *Our Duties to Non-Human Animals*

Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal”

7 October  Synchronous Discussion

**Moral Theory**

14 October  *Consequentialism, Part 1*


19 October  *Consequentialism, Part 2*

John Stuart Mill, “In Defense of Utilitarianism”
Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”

21 October  Synchronous Discussion

26 October  *Kantian Ethics, Part 1*

Immanuel Kant, “The Moral Law and the Autonomy of the Will”
Joshua Glasgow, “Kant’s Principle of Universal Law”

28 October  Synchronous Discussion

2 November  *Kantian Ethics, Part 2*

Onora O’Neill, “Kant on Treating People as Ends in Themselves”

4 November  Synchronous Discussion
9 November  
*Rossian Pluralism*


David McNaughton, “An Unconnected Heap of Duties?”

11 November  
Synchronous Discussion

16 November  
*Virtue Ethics*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections)

Rosalind Hursthouse, “Normative Virtue Ethics”

18 November  
Synchronous Discussion

23 November  
*The Ethics of Care*

Carol Gilligan, “In a Different Voice”

Nel Noddings, “An Ethic of Caring”

25 November  
Synchronous Discussion

**Metaethics**

30 November  
*The Status of Morality*

J.L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values”

David Enoch, “Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)”

2 December  
Synchronous Discussion

3 December  
*Why Be Moral?*

Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints”