

Phil 237: Current Moral Issues
Winter 2020, McGill University

SYLLABUS

Lecture time and location: M/W/F(ish) 12:35-1:25 pm, ADAMS AUD

Professor: Stephanie Leary

Course Overview

In this course, we'll discuss various moral questions related to three current social/political movements: the Black Lives Matter movement, the #MeToo movement, and the vegan/vegetarian movement. For example, we'll discuss the following: are we morally responsible for our implicit racial biases, what is racism, should businesses and universities adopt affirmative action policies, what is sexual consent and its moral significance, how should we respond to sexual assault accusations, what is misogyny, do other animals have rights, and is consuming meat and other animal products morally wrong? Our discussion of these issues will be primarily informed by reading contemporary philosophical articles, but these readings will be supplemented by podcasts, newspaper articles, or documentaries. This course aims to improve your ability to think carefully and critically about ethical issues and to express your own views in a clear, well-reasoned way through both writing and conversation.

myCourses

There is a myCourses site for this class and you need to know how to use it. All of the readings are available here (there is no textbook for this course), you will turn in all assignments through myCourses, and I will be using it to post announcements, assignments, and grades. It is your responsibility to make sure that myCourses has your correct email address so that you receive any email notifications that I send out.

Conferences

You must register for a conference for this course – registration will open soon and conferences will begin in the third week of classes. Attendance and participation during conferences is part of your grade.

Contacting the Professor and TAs

If you have substantive questions about the material or about your work for this course, please come to office hours (don't email). If you have logistical questions about the course, please email your TA (not the professor), but double-check the syllabus first to see if your question has been answered.

TAs' email and office hours:

Emily Walsh: emily.walsh@mail.mcgill.ca,

Sebastian Rodriguez-Duque: sebastian.rodriguezduque@mail.mcgill.ca,

Anaid Ochoa Echeverria: anaid.ochoa@mail.mcgill.ca,

Jeanne Allard: jeanne.allard@mail.mcgill.ca,

Professor's email and office hours:

Stephanie Leary: stephanie.leary@mail.mcgill.ca, Tues 3:30-5:30pm, LEA 942

Assignments and Grades

(1) Participation in lecture polling (10%): Polling will be used in this course to gauge students' understanding of readings and lecture and to make lectures more interactive and engaging. Instructions for participating in polling:

- During a class with polling questions, you will respond to questions from the instructor from a personal device (smartphone, tablet, or laptop). Students should come to class with their devices charged and [connected to the Internet](#).
- 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 more information, please visit the **Getting Started for Students** section at www.mcgill.ca/polling.
- For any technical problems with polling, please contact the IT Service Desk: <http://www.mcgill.ca/it/get-started-it/need-help>.
- If you do not have a phone, tablet, or laptop to use to respond to polling questions, please contact the instructor immediately in order for appropriate arrangements to be made.
- Please ensure that any polling responses you submit are appropriate and relevant to the question asked. Note that unless the poll is labelled as anonymous, your responses are identifiable to the instructor.

(2) Participation in conferences (10%): Attendance will be taken in conferences and you will earn participation points by participating in class discussions, small group activities, and the occasional in-class writing.

(3) Short Writing Assignment (15%): You will complete a short writing assignment (2 pages, double-spaced), which will prepare you for writing the midterm and final papers.

(4) *Midterm and Final Papers (65% total): You will submit a midterm and final paper (each 5 pages, double-spaced), in which you will be required to defend a position on one of the issues we discuss in class. You will be expected to provide a valid argument for your position, defend its premises, and consider and respond to an objection to your argument. You will be provided with a selection of paper topics to choose from. (See schedule below for due dates.)

***You must submit a midterm and final paper in order to pass this course. Failure to turn in one of these will result in an automatic F.**

Electronic Devices Policy

I strongly discourage you from using a laptop or tablet during lecture for a variety of reasons: <https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/> If for some reason you need or strongly prefer to use an electronic device for note-taking, you may do so, as long as you sit in the back few rows of the classroom (where fewer people will be distracted) and you vow to use your device only for purposes related to this class (taking notes and looking at readings). Use of cell phones is permitted only when participating in polling and should be put away otherwise. If I notice you on your cell phone at other times during lecture, I will get distracted and subject you to public shaming.

Late-Work Policy

Late work is not accepted, unless you have an extremely serious excuse and can provide some documentation for your excuse (e.g. photo of your detached limb). The writing prompts for the papers will be posted very early so that you have plenty of time to complete them.

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 Policy

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: www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/. Since polling records will be used to compute a portion of course grades, **responding as someone other than yourself is considered an academic offense**. During class, possession of more than one response device or using the credentials of another student will be interpreted as intent to commit an academic offense.

Meta-policy

I reserve the right to amend the readings, assignments, and policies as the semester progresses. I will only do so fairly, for good reasons, and with plenty of warning.

Provisional Schedule *(expect reading schedule to change as course progresses)*

Topic	Main Questions	Date	Reading	Special Events	Work Due
Intro to course		06-Jan	Syllabus		
THEME 1: Black Lives Matter		08-Jan	Invisibilia podcast episode, "The Culture Inside": http://www.npr.org/2017/06/09/532953261/the-culture-inside	Guest lecture by Prof Eric Hehman on implicit bias (McGill, Psychology)	
Moral Responsibility	Are we morally responsible for our implicit biases?	10-Jan	Angela Smith's "Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life"		
		13-Jan	Neil Levy's "The Good, the Bad, and the Blameworthy"		

	Application: to what extent is implicit bias a problem in policing and are officers blameworthy?	15-Jan	<u>"Minnesota Officer Acquitted in Killing of Philando Castile"</u> , Mitch Smith The New York Times: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/us/police-shooting-trial-philando-castile.html? _r=0	Skype conversation with Judge William Leary	
		17-Jan	This American Life podcast episode: "The Cops See it Differently": http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/547/cops-see-it-differently-part-one		
Racism	What is racism?	20-Jan	Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Racisms"		
	Do racist beliefs wrong?	22-Jan	Rima Basu's "The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs"		
		27-Jan	(catch up - no new reading)		
		29-Jan	Washington Post article: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/07/01/canadas-indigenous-population-is-over-represented-in-federal-prisons-and-its-only-getting-worse/	Documentary Viewing (Part 1): <i>13th</i>	
		31-Jan (FRI)			Short Writing Assign Due
Affirmative Action	Should businesses and universities adopt affirmative action policies in hiring and admissions?	03-Feb	Celia Wolf-Devine's "Preferential Policies Have Become Toxic"		
		05-Feb	Sendhil Mullainathan's "Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions" in NYT: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/upshot/the-		

			measuring-sticks-of-racial-bias-.html		
		10-Feb	(catch up - no new reading)	Documentary Viewing (Part 2): 13th	
THEME 2: #MeToo		12-Feb	Radiolab podcast episode "In the No": https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/no-part-1?fbclid=IwAR3PuSle5YP4sC5b0bqO7OSKMRjo24LntvA9FELNxvq3lRdmoJqO3eHgxV0	Guest lecture	
Sexual consent	What does sexual consent require and what is its moral significance?	17-Feb	Tom Dougherty's "Sex, Lies and Consent"		
		19-Feb	Hallie Liberto's "Intention and Sexual Consent"		
		24-Feb	Rebecca Kukla's "That's What She Said: the Language of Sexual Negotiation"		
Sexual Assault Accusations	How should we respond to sexual assault accusations?	26-Feb	Kim Ferzan's "#BelieveWomen and the Presumption of Innocence"		
		28-Feb (FRI)			Midterm Paper Due
		March 2-4	MCGILL READING WEEK		
		09-Mar	Georgi Gardiner's "She Said/He Said"		
		11-Mar	Sarah Stroud's "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"		

		16-Mar	Invisibilia podcast episode “The Callout”: https://www.npr.org/2018/04/13/601971617/the-callout		
Misogyny	What is misogyny?	18-Mar	Kate Manne's "What is misogyny?"		
		23-Mar	Nora Berenstein's Review of <i>Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny</i>		
		25-Mar	(catch up - no new reading)		
THEME 3: Veganism		30-Mar		Guest lecture	
Moral status	Do animals have the same moral status as humans?	01-Apr	Peter Singer's "All Animals are Equal"		
		06-Apr	Matthew Liao's "The Basis of Human Moral Status"		
Veganism	Is eating meat and other animal products morally wrong?	08-Apr	Tristram McPherson's "The Ethical Basis for Veganism"		
		15-Apr (WED)			Final Paper Due