**Ethical Theory**

**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 written permission of the instructor.

This is a second course in ethics, intended for students with prior university coursework in moral philosophy. One of the above-listed prerequisites is mandatory; if you lack the prerequisite you may not take the course without my written permission.

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 55 pages a week—consist of articles from philosophical journals and selections from important books, most dating from the last thirty years or so. We begin with contemporary consequentialism, which holds that the right action in any given situation is the one with 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 which must be weighed against each other in individual cases. Virtue ethics comprises ethical theories which approach the central moral categories via the idea of a virtuous agent, rather than in terms of free-standing rules of conduct. 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 defences 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.

**Required Texts**

There is one required textbook for this course: *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, by Mark Timmons, 2nd edition (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013). It is available for purchase at Paragraph Books and is also on reserve at Redpath Library. Do not buy the first edition. Most of the required readings, however, are available on line (hyperlinks to these will be provided). Other readings will be posted in PDF format on the myCourses page. There is also one supplementary recommended text on reserve: *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students*, ed. Vaughn and McIntosh, 2nd edition (OUP Canada, 2013).
Group Discussion

Group discussion will be an important component of the course. The class will be divided up into small groups of five for the weekly Wednesday in-class group discussions and will proceed to discuss two questions on the week’s readings posted by the instructor. A class-wide exchange of views from the different groups will follow. Attendance at these ten weekly discussions (which will start Jan. 18) is mandatory. Each group will select a “secretary/spokesperson” each week to take notes on the group’s discussion and to speak for the group in the class-wide exchange. That person will later turn in a paper of approximately two double-spaced pages based on the discussion. A separate information sheet with further details of the group discussions and the papers based on them will be distributed to guide you.

Course Requirements

In order to pass the course, you must satisfactorily complete all of the following course requirements:

i) a midterm paper of approx. six double-spaced pages, worth 30% of your final mark;
ii) a final paper of approx. ten double-spaced pages, worth 50% of your final mark; and
iii) two group discussion papers, each of two to two-and-a-half (2 to 2½) double-spaced pages, each worth 10% of your final mark.

If your course mark is borderline, your attendance at and participation in the group discussions will be used as a deciding factor.

Course Policies

It is forbidden to use, hold, or touch a cell phone, or to use earbuds or headphones, in class. The use of a computer or tablet in class is permitted exclusively for course activities (taking notes or viewing required readings). Students who are seen to be violating this policy will be asked to leave the room. No student may record a lecture or class without the express permission of the instructor.

Late papers will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a grade per 24-hour period (e.g., from a B to a B- if submitted between one minute and 24 hours after the deadline). No extensions on the papers will be granted, save for the following case: requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) when requested at least one business day before the paper is due and substantiated at the time of request by a medical note documenting illness.

Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, outlines, summaries, paper topics, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor.
The University requires that the following notices appear on every syllabus:

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.

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 the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.