

# PHIL 230: Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Fall 2022 – M/W/F 1:35-2:25pm

Leacock 26

Chris Howard

[chris.howard@mcgill.ca](mailto:chris.howard@mcgill.ca)

Leacock 919

Zoom Hours: T 3:00-5:00pm (and by appointment) – join [here](#).

## 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 obligations to aid those in need. 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 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. Please make sure you familiarize yourself with it, and know how to use it, as soon as possible.

## Assessment

Participation	5%	
Conference Quizzes	5%	
Paper 1	25%	(October 7, 11:59pm EST)
Paper 2	35%	(November 18, 11:59pm EST)
Final Exam	30%	(Date & time TBA)

## Participation

McGill uses a web-based polling system called Slido at no cost to students. This system allows you to use your own personal devices (laptop, tablet, or smartphone) to answer questions that I pose in class. Polling will be used in this course to enhance engagement, increase interactivity, and, less excitingly, to determine your participation grade. Polling will be used in each meeting. If you respond to the questions that I pose in a given meeting, you'll receive full participation credit for that meeting; otherwise, you'll receive none. This means that you should come to class ready to participate, and with your devices charged and connected to the Internet. For more information, please see the 'Polling Policy' section below.

## Conferences Quizzes

You must register for a conference for this course. Registration opens soon and conferences begin the second week of classes. At the beginning of each conference, you'll take a short quiz focused on the week's readings and lectures (starting the week of Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>). This means that you must arrive at conferences on time. To put yourself in a position to perform well on the quizzes, please make sure that you've done all the readings for the week and paid attention in lecture. **Your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped.** Your conference will be (expertly and brilliantly) led by one of the following TAs for this course:

Alexander Carty  
[alexander.carty@mcgill.ca](mailto:alexander.carty@mcgill.ca)  
Office: [Zoom Room](#)  
Hours: T 10:00-11:00am

Shailee Rajak  
[shailee.rajak@mcgill.ca](mailto:shailee.rajak@mcgill.ca)  
Office: [Zoom Room](#)  
Hours: T 11:00-12:00pm

Mingqiu Xue  
[mingqiu.xue@mcgill.ca](mailto:mingqiu.xue@mcgill.ca)  
Office: TBD  
Hours: TBD

## 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 that 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 formal final exam for this course during the exam period (Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>). The exam will be comprehensive (cumulative). It will contain a mix of short answer and essay questions.

*Special arrangements for the final exam.* Please note that all formal final examinations at McGill are centrally scheduled and administered. This means that the instructor has no control over the date of the exam for his or her course, which will be set by the Examination Office. (A preliminary draft of the examination schedule is released in October.) Nor is it possible to arrange to sit the exam at an alternative time which is more convenient for you: as specified in section 3.6.2.1 of the Calendar, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams with individual students. Given these facts, all students must plan to be in Montreal and available to write final exams during the entire exam period.

\*You must turn in all 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.

## Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted for 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.

## **Polling Policy**

Details about how to participate in polling sessions will be covered in class. Your participation in polling sessions will start to count towards your participation grade on Sept. 14, immediately following the add/drop period. On Sept. 7, we'll practice polling in class to make sure that everyone is prepared to participate the following week. For any technical problems with polling, please first contact the IT Service Desk: <http://www.mcgill.ca/it/support>. If you don't have a smartphone, tablet, or laptop to use to respond to polling questions, then please contact me immediately so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

## **Electronic Devices Policy**

Use of smartphones or any other electronic devices is not permitted during lectures (or conferences) for any purpose other than (1) taking notes or (2) responding to the polling questions I pose. Violators of this policy will be asked to leave class and will receive no participation credit for the day.

## **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/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for further information).

## **Topics and Schedule of Readings**

### **Preliminaries**

- 31 August      Introduction & Overview
- 2 September    *Relativism vs. Objectivism*  
James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

### **Moral Problems**

- 5 September    *Labor Day*
- 7 September    *Our Obligations to Others, Part 1*  
Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"
- 12 September   *Our Obligations to Others, Part 2*  
John Arthur, "World Hunger and Moral Obligation: The Case Against Singer"
- 14 September   *Tradeoffs, Part 1*  
Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect"

- 19 September *Tradeoffs, Part 2*  
Judith Thomson, "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem"
- 21 September *Abortion, Part 1*  
Don Marquis, "Why Abortion Is Immoral"
- 26 September *Abortion, Part 2*  
Judith Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"

### **Moral Theory**

- 28 September *Consequentialism, Part 1*  
Russ Shafer-Landau, "Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions"  
Jeremy Bentham, "The Principle of Utility"
- 3 October *Consequentialism, Part 2*  
John Stuart Mill, "In Defense of Utilitarianism"  
Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
- 5 October *Consequentialism, Part 3*  
Russ Shafer-Landau, "Consequentialism: Its Difficulties"
- 10 October *Thanksgiving*
- 12 October *Reading Break*
- 13 October *Kantian Ethics, Part 1*  
Immanuel Kant, "The Moral Law and the Autonomy of the Will"
- 17 October *Kantian Ethics, Part 2*  
Joshua Glasgow, "Kant's Principle of Universal Law"
- 19 October *Kantian Ethics, Part 3*  
Onora O'Neill, "Kant on Treating People as Ends in Themselves"
- 24 October *Rossian Pluralism, Part 1*  
W.D. Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?"
- 26 October *Rossian Pluralism, Part 2*  
David McNaughton, "An Unconnected Heap of Duties?"

31 October *Virtue Ethics, Part 1*  
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections)

2 November *Virtue Ethics, Part 2*  
Rosalind Hursthouse, “Normative Virtue Ethics”

7 November *The Ethics of Care, Part 1*  
Carol Gilligan, “In a Different Voice”

9 November *The Ethics of Care, Part 2*  
Nel Noddings, “An Ethic of Caring”

14 November *Ubuntu*  
Thaddeus Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory”

16 November *Ubuntu*  
Thaddeus Metz, “An African Theory of Moral Status”

21 November *Moral Theory, Where We’ve Been*

### **Metaethics**

23 November *The Status of Morality, Part 1*  
J.L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values”

28 November *The Status of Morality, Part 2*  
David Enoch, “Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)”

30 November *Why Be Moral? Part 1*  
Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”

5 December *Why Be Moral? Part 2*  
Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints”