PHIL 230: Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Fall 2021 – M/W/F 9:35-10:25 am
Remote Delivery

Chris Howard
chris.howard@mcgill.ca
919 Leacock
Zoom Hours: W 12:00-2:00pm (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 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 (9:35am EST), 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 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 combination of preconceived and spontaneous questions as the basis for discussion. For those unable to attend, the session will be recorded and made available shortly after it concludes. Students able to participate in these meetings are strongly encouraged and expected to do so.
• Every Wednesday at 11:00am EST (starting Sept. 16) a quiz will become available on the myCourses site. You will have 25 mins. to complete the quiz once you start it. After 11:30pm EST 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. All conferences will be held on campus (as of now). Your conference will be led by one of the TAs for the course, who **will take attendance.** This will contribute to your participation grade.
• **Exceptions:** For our first meeting (Wednesday, September 1, 9:35am EST), 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Quizzes</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation

Your participation grade will be determined by your attendance and participation in conferences. If you attend for the duration of a conference, you will receive attendance credit for the day. If you are 10 mins. late, or leave 10 mins. early, you won’t receive credit for attending. **Note: Attendance and participation won’t begin to affect your participation grade until the Add/Drop deadline (on Sept. 14).**

Weekly Quizzes

Starting the week of Sept. 14, 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 Wednesday at 11:00am EST. You will have 25 minutes to complete the quiz once you start it. After 11:30pm EST on Friday, the quiz will no longer be available. This means that you must complete the quiz prior to this time each week. **Your lowest quiz score will be dropped.** The answers to each quiz will be posted after it closes.

Papers*

You will write two 5-page (double-spaced) philosophical papers. Each will require to 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 take-home final exam for this course during the exam period (Dec. 7th-21st). 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Zoom Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan Walters</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jordan.walters@mail.mcgill.ca">jordan.walters@mail.mcgill.ca</a></td>
<td><strong>M, 10:30-11:30</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Wilkinson</td>
<td><a href="mailto:eric.wilkinson@mail.mcgill.ca">eric.wilkinson@mail.mcgill.ca</a></td>
<td>Zoom Hours: TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Carty</td>
<td><a href="mailto:alexander.carty@mail.mcgill.ca">alexander.carty@mail.mcgill.ca</a></td>
<td>Zoom Hours: <strong>TR, 11:00-12:00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

1 September  Introduction & Overview
3 September  Live Q&A
6 September  Relativism vs. Objectivism
            James Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”
8 September  Synchronous Discussion

Moral Problems

13 September  Our Obligations to Others
            Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality”
15 September  Synchronous Discussion
20 September  Tradeoffs
            Philippa Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”
            Judith Thomson, “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”
22 September  Synchronous Discussion
27 September  Abortion
            Don Marquis, “Why Abortion Is Immoral”
            Judith Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
29 September  Synchronous Discussion

**Moral Theory**

4 October  *Consequentialism, Part 1*

6 October  Synchronous Discussion

18 October  *Consequentialism, Part 2*
John Stuart Mill, “In Defense of Utilitarianism”
Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”

20 October  Synchronous Discussion

25 October  *Kantian Ethics*
Immanuel Kant, “The Moral Law and the Autonomy of the Will”
Joshua Glasgow, “Kant’s Principle of Universal Law”
Onora O’Neill, “Kant on Treating People as Ends in Themselves”

27 October  Synchronous Discussion

1 November  *Rossian Pluralism*
David McNaughton, “An Unconnected Heap of Duties?”

3 November  Synchronous Discussion

8 November  *Virtue Ethics*
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections)
Rosalind Hursthouse, “Normative Virtue Ethics”

10 November  Synchronous Discussion

15 November  *The Ethics of Care*
Carol Gilligan, “In a Different Voice”
Nel Noddings, “An Ethic of Caring”
17 November  Synchronous Discussion

22 November  *Ubuntu*

Thaddeus Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory”
Thaddeus Metz and Joseph Gaie, “The African Ethic of *Ubuntu/Botho*”

24 November  Synchronous Discussion

**Metaethics**

29 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)”

1 December  Synchronous Discussion

6 December  *Why Be Moral?*

Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints”