

PHIL 334: Ethical Theory

Winter 2021

Remote Delivery

Professor: Chris Howard

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919 Leacock (<https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/2959872915>)

Zoom Hours: W 2:45-4:45 pm (and by appointment)

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Office Hours: TBD

Overview

This course introduces and explores contemporary ethical theory via an examination of current debates in the field. We'll start by looking at what's perhaps the most popular and resilient ethical theory in the history of ethical theorizing: consequentialism. We'll then interrogate two moral phenomena that many have thought to be incompatible with consequentialism: *options* and *constraints*. Next, we'll discuss Kant's ethics and look at some contemporary challenges and defenses. Both consequentialism and Kant's ethics are *monistic* ethical theories: they each claim there's just a single factor that's relevant to the rightness of acts, disagreeing only about what this factor is. Our next ethical theory—Rossian pluralism—is *pluralistic*: it claims that a multiplicity of factors can be fundamentally relevant to the rightness of acts. We'll assess the plausibility of this theory in comparison to monistic alternatives. In our penultimate unit, we'll discuss the recent proposal that all ethical theories can be *consequentialized*, i.e., reduced to versions of consequentialism. And in our final unit, we'll discuss some feminist critiques of dominant Western ethical theories and an alternative known as the ethics of care. Students can expect to gain a deep and cutting-edge understanding of contemporary ethical theory along with the methods used to adjudicate its disputes.

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 permission from instructor.

myCourses

This course has a myCourses site. All 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 written work. This site is important. Please make sure you familiarize yourself with it, and know how to use it, as soon as possible.

Weekly Structure (All times are EST)

- By **Monday** each week, the lectures for the week will be posted under the 'Lecture Recordings' tab on the myCourses site. You are responsible for viewing these on your own. You are advised to complete the readings for the week before viewing the lectures.
- Use **Tuesday** and **Wednesday** to view the lectures for the week, work on any assignments that may be due, or catch up on any readings that you may have missed. **We will not meet synchronously on Tuesdays.**

- Every **Thursday**, 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 readings and lectures. 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.** Starting Thursday, Jan. 28, you will submit, every Thursday, by 11:30 pm, a short, critical response to one of the readings for the week (see 'Reading Responses' below).
- Every **Friday**, if we are not under 'red alert', I will hold an in-person conference from 2:35-3:25 pm in a room on campus that's TBD. We are currently under red alert, and so, for now, this conference will not be held. I will keep you posted about any developments.
- **Exceptions:** For our first meeting (Thursday, Jan. 7, 2:35 pm) we will **not** meet synchronously. Instead, a video introducing you to the course will be posted to the myCourses site by the time our class would ordinarily start. You are advised to view this video as soon as possible and prior to engaging with any further assigned material.

Assessment

Reading Responses	20%
Peer Review	10% (5% x 2)
Midterm Paper	30%
Final Paper	40%

Anonymous Grading

All written work will be graded anonymously. To facilitate this, please include only your student ID number – *and not your name* – at the top of the first page of any piece of written work that you submit for assessment. Also, please observe the following naming convention for any file you submit that contains an assessment item: "*Student ID, Assessment Item*". So, for example, when you submit your midterm paper, please name the file that you submit "[Your student ID], Midterm Paper" and when you submit your first reading response, please name the file "[Your student ID], Reading Response 1".

Reading Responses

Each week you will write a short, critical response to one of the readings for the week. These responses should be 200-300 words, and they should be *critical*: To receive full credit, your response must highlight an argument or claim made by the author with whom you're engaged and raise either a criticism of, or critical question about, that argument or claim. These responses are due each Thursday, by 11:30 pm, and should be submitted to the appropriate folder under the 'Assignments' tab on myCourses. When submitting these, please respect the file naming convention laid out above under 'Anonymous Grading'. Your first reading response will be due on Jan. 28, the first Thursday following the add/drop deadline.

Peer Review

For each paper, you will be randomly assigned a peer's draft to review prior to the due date of the final version. To facilitate this, we will be using Peergrade.io. Invitations to register for our class on Peergrade, along with instructions about how to review one another's papers, will be circulated in due course.

Midterm Paper*

You will write a 5-7 page (double-spaced) philosophical paper. This paper will require you to explain, and develop a critical response to, some argument of theory that we've covered in class. A writing prompt for this paper will be available early (on myCourses), so you'll have more than enough time to complete the assignment. 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 personal website: www.chrismhoward.com/teaching.html.

Final Paper*

You will write a 10-12 page (double-spaced) philosophical paper. A writing prompt for this paper will be available on myCourses, though you'll also have the option to write on a topic of your choosing. If you choose this latter option, I ask that you please meet with me during my office hours or by appointment to discuss your proposed topic before you begin writing.

*You must turn in both of these assignments to receive a passing grade in this course. If you do not turn in one of these assignments, you will automatically receive an F for the course.

Late Work Policy

In general, late work will not be accepted without a(n) (uncontroversially) serious excuse. I will consider requests for extensions for papers if the request is made at least one business day prior to the due date. If you anticipate that you'll need an extension, please notify me as soon as possible.

Email Policy

Please allow 24 hours for a response from me or the 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 info). Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text matching software within myCourses.

Meta Policy

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

Topics and Schedule of Readings *Please read all readings in the order in which they appear below.

Preliminaries

- 7 January Introduction & Overview
- 12 January *What is Ethical Theory?* + *Bonus Lecture on Relativism*
Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* ch. 1, pp. 1-19 (up until last para.) + ch. 2 pp. 25-29
Michael J. Zimmerman and Ben Bradley, "Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value" (through first two paras. of § 2)
- 14 January *Synchronous Discussion*

Consequentialism

- 19 January *Consequentialism: The View*
William Shaw, "The Consequentialist Perspective," pp. 5-12 + 15-top 17
G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* ch. 1, § 17 + ch. 5, §§ 88-89
- 21 January *Synchronous Discussion*
- 26 January *Options & Constraints, Part 1*
Samuel Scheffler, *Introduction to Consequentialism and its Critics*, up to last para on p. 5
Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* ch. 9, §§ 1-3
William Shaw, "The Consequentialist Perspective," pp. 17-19
Samuel Scheffler, *Introduction to Consequentialism and its Critics*, pp. 5-8
Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"
- 28 January *Synchronous Discussion*
- 2 February *Options & Constraints, Part 2*
Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* ch. 3, § 1
Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* ch. 9, §§ 4-5
Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"
Samuel Scheffler, *Introduction to Consequentialism and its Critics*, p. 9 to end
Robert Nozick, "The Rationality of Side Constraints"

- 4 February *Synchronous Discussion*
- 8 February ***Draft of Midterm Paper due @ 11:30 pm***
- 9 February *Skepticism About Good Simpliciter*
 Peter Geach, “Good and Evil”
 Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Goodness and Utilitarianism”
- 11 February *Synchronous Discussion*
- 15 February ***Peer review of Midterm Paper due @ 11:30 pm***

Kantian Ethics

- 16 February *Kant’s Ethics: The View*
 Immanuel Kant, “Morality and Rationality”
 David Velleman, “Reading Kant’s *Groundwork*”
- 18 February *Synchronous Discussion*
- 22 February ***Final draft of Midterm Paper due @ 11:30 pm***
- 23 February *Challenges*
 Rae Langton, “Maria Von Herbert’s Challenge to Kant”
 Christine Korsgaard, “The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil”
- 25 February *Synchronous Discussion*
- 2 March *No class – Study Break*
- 4 March *No class – Study Break*

Rossian Pluralism

- 9 March *A Moderate Third Way?*
 W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* ch. 2
 Optional: David McNaughton, “An Unconnected Heap of Duties?”
- 11 March *Synchronous Discussion*

Consequentializing

- 16 March *We Are All Consequentialists Now*
Jamie Dreier, “The Structure of Normative Theories,” up to last para on p. 29
Douglas Portmore, “Consequentializing Moral Theories,” up to § 4
Optional: Douglas Portmore, “Consequentializing”
- 18 March *Synchronous Discussion*
- 23 March *Challenges*
Kieran Setiya, “Must Consequentialists Kill?”
Chris Howard, “Consequentialists Must Kill”
Optional: Daniel Muñoz, “The Rejection of Consequentializing”
- 25 March *Synchronous Discussion*

Critiques & The Ethics of Care

- 30 March *Critiques of Dominant Western Moral Theories*
Hilde Lindemann, “Standard Moral Theories from a Feminist Perspective”
Annette Baier, “The Need for More Than Justice”
- 1 April *Synchronous Discussion*
- 6 April *The Ethics of Care*
Virginia Held, “The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory”
Michele Moody-Adams, “Gender and the Complexity of Moral Voices”
- 8 April *Synchronous Discussion*
Draft of Final Paper due @ 11:30 pm
- 13 April *Catch Up & Course Summary*
- 15 April ***Peer review of Final Paper due @ 11:30 pm***
- 22 April ***Final draft of Final Paper due @ 11:30 pm***