

**Phil 237: Contemporary Moral Issues
Summer 2019 Syllabus**

MTWR 11:05-1:25 Rutherford Physics Building, room 115

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Office Hours Mon & Wed, 2:00-3:00
 (or by appointment)

Course Description

This course is dedicated to exploring and examining issues of moral importance that we face in the world today. Over the course of this semester, we will cover a range of topics within four main domains; the ‘Global World’, the ‘Natural World’, the ‘Artificial World’, and the ‘Social World’. To begin, we will look at issues of global responsibility, starting off with the debate about vaccination, and then moving on to discuss principles of ‘global justice’ and global poverty, followed by moral perspectives on immigration and national borders. In our next section, we will discuss a range of issues pertaining to our collective relationship to the (changing) natural environment. Within this section, we will address the specifically *moral* dimensions of climate change and our duties to remediate the changes that have occurred at our hands, followed by a look at our current systems and norms of food production and consumption, in terms of both agriculture and animals. We will then switch away from the natural, to discuss the moral aspects of technology in our society. We will begin by looking at the moral benefits and risks of the ongoing development of artificial intelligence (AI), followed by some moral concerns that arise from the growth of social media and ‘big data’. Finally, in the fourth section, spanning the last two weeks of the course, we will turn our attention to the social world, addressing issues of social identity, through identity politics and the moral aspects of gender and personal identity, and finishing off by looking forward to ‘new generations’ in discussing the moral dimensions of reproduction, and our duties toward future generations.

Readings

All readings will be made available on MyCourses.

Note: Given the condensed nature of the summer schedule, and in an effort to keep your required reading level to a manageable level, in addition to one (or more) central daily *required* reading(s), I will also make available (on MyCourses) a number of *recommended* readings. The content of *all* readings, however, will be incorporated into the lectures, and any reading *may* appear in the assignments.

Assignments

Reading Analyses (3% x 5 = 15%)

Each week you are to select one of the readings and write a critical reflection on a topic you find to be of particular interest. For each reflection, you must reconstruct and critically analyze a particular argument or claim made by the author you chose to engage with (1 to 1.5 pages, double-spaced). All analyses are due by Thursday evening (11pm) and must engage with one of the readings of that given week. Note: the assignment folder on MyCourses will close at 11pm, and late submissions will not be graded.

Attendance (5%)

Attendance for this course is required. Given the condensed nature of summer course schedules, content moves quickly, and so multiple absences means missing a substantial amount of material. As such, you may not miss more than 2 classes without appropriate medical documentation. All unexcused absences beyond that point will result in swift penalties.

Short Paper (20%)

For the short paper assignment, you will be asked to reconstruct an argument from one of the readings covered in the class and to provide an objection to (or support for) this argument. This paper must be 700-800 words, 12pt font, double spaced and submitted in either .docx or .pdf file formats (.pages files will **not** be accepted). Topics will be provided in advance.

Long Paper (30%)

For the long paper assignment, you will be asked to reconstruct an argument from one of the readings covered in the class, provide an objection (or support), *and* address a possible counter-objection to your view. This paper must be 1000-1200 words, 12pt font, double spaced and submitted in either .docx or .pdf file formats (.pages files will **not** be accepted). Topics will be provided in advance.

Exam (30%)

The exam will consist of short essay responses to questions provided. The content of the exam will be cumulative, and you will be given some degree of choice regarding which questions to answer.

Note: Exam dates for summer courses are set in advance by the University and cannot be changed by course instructors. If you **need** to defer your exam you must apply through the university, *not* through the course instructor. Deferred exams will be written with the same instructor and will follow the same format as the regular exam, but you will be provided with a different set of questions to answer. More information can be found here: <https://www.mcgill.ca/exams/dates/supdefer>

Policies

Extensions

Extensions to all assignments will *only* be granted in cases of medical necessity and must be documented with an appropriate medical note. Any undocumented late submissions will be penalized at a rate of 1/3 letter grade per day (including weekends). Extensions can be applied retroactively provided the medical documentation provided pertains to the dates in question.

Grading

All grade appeals must be directed first to the TA in scheduled office hours. At this meeting, you must come prepared with *specific* concerns regarding the comments they provided. If, after this meeting, you still feel as though your assignment warrants a different grade, you may *then* appeal your grade to the instructor, by filling out the appeal form provided on MyCourses and emailing it to me. Once this has been completed, we will set up a meeting to discuss your grade. Note: Assignments submitted for re-evaluation may see their grade increase *or decrease*.

Email Policy

When emailing either the instructor or TA, please allow up to 24-48 hours for a reply. If, after 48 hours you still have not heard back, feel free to send us a friendly reminder (we are imperfect beings, after all). When emailing, please always use your McGill email address, and be sure to check the syllabus for answers **before** emailing us.

Electronics and Laptops Policy

Laptops will be permitted (though not encouraged) for notetaking and academic use **only**. Cellphones and other devices are prohibited and must be either turned off or put away during lecture. Recording of lectures will **not** be permitted.

Academic Integrity, Language and Accessibility

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.

L'Université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires.

(see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/students/ for more information).

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.

According to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1, General University Information & Regulations at www.mcgill.ca

If you have a disability, please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 514-398-6009 before you do this.

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