

Phil 237-001: Contemporary Moral Issues

Summer 2022, McGill University

SYLLABUS

Instructor: Tristan Tondino
Contact: tristan.tondino@mcgill.ca
Lecture time: Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, 01:35 pm-03:55 pm
Dates: June 6-July 6, 2022
Location: Leacock 15 (This course will be taught in person)
Office hours: Monday 12:15 pm-1:15pm

Course Description:

In this course, we will begin by considering moral questions from a subjective perspective. More than any other philosophical topic, ethics is about you, and it is about your relationship with all that is around you. It is uncontroversial therefore to claim that some aspect of ethics is social or environmental or cultural, and some aspect is individual, perhaps universal, part of your human nature.

For reasons to be discussed in depth, this course also analyzes ethics as language. For example, we will consider the concept PERSON. How does the concept PERSON relate to certain contemporary moral issues? We will look at disagreements regarding the meaning of words such as 'lying' or 'duty' to understand how so-called hot button contemporary moral issues arise and evolve.

The primary goal of our course is for us to evaluate our reactions to moral issues. Because certain issues can be upsetting, I intend to conduct regular polls so we can begin to discuss these issues without excessive self-censorship. However, I expect us all to make a commitment to expressing our views in a reasonable manner while respecting our differences. From my moral and psychological perspective, anyway, feeling and expressing disappointment and sadness about the state of the world is healthier than expressing anger. Blaming others for their beliefs is an unsuccessful strategy. Rather we should strive to make a better world through community.

An important goal in philosophy is to think carefully, critically, and empathetically about ethical issues. Because language will be a central aspect of the course, another of our goals is to work on our abilities as writers and speakers. Note, if time permits, we will have guest presentations.

Timetable for Grading – Essays longer than requested will lose 50% -- Submit your papers on time!

Item:	Date due:	Value:	Notes:
Participation:	Please attend all classes	10%	You are encouraged to participate but be kind and respectful . We will discuss shyness on the first day. Participate in the daily polls.
Essay 1:	June 20 th , 2022	20%	Not more than 2 pages/ double spaced - Essay submissions will be via email to tristan.tondino@mcgill.ca or uploaded on MyCourses
Essay 2:	June 27 th , 2022	30%	Not more than 2 pages/ double spaced - Essay submissions will be via email to tristan.tondino@mcgill.ca or uploaded on MyCourses
Final paper:	July 6 th , 2022	40%	Not more than 5 pages/ double spaced - Essay submission will be via email to tristan.tondino@mcgill.ca or uploaded on MyCourses

MyCourses

There is no textbook, and all of our readings and other materials are available online. The links to readings will be available on MyCourses and on this syllabus. Essay submissions will be done directly via email or uploaded to MySpace. Any short questions can be sent via email, however, consider office hours (Monday 12:15 pm-1:15pm) best for discussions.

Course content (topics and readings may change as we proceed):

Date:	General topic:	Readings:	Extra research:	To think about:	Discussions:
Mon. 6 th (1)	Introduction: What is Philosophy? Main branches; Sub-branches; Science & Ethics.	Syllabus “Interview: Amia Srinivasan” (Watch until 4:18) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSMNf6y80d4 4	“Interview: Amia Srinivasan” Watch all (20:07) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSMNf6y80d4	Be respectful please. Content warnings.	On Shyness. Why you are all moral philosophers.
Tues. 7 th (2)	Meanings. Are we free? Trolley Problems. Abortion. Mixing board analogy.	SEP “ Chapter 6. Determinism and Human Action ” (Total Read Time: (TRT): 2:40) https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/determinism-causal/#DetHumAct “Would you sacrifice one person to save five?” – by Eleanor Nelsen (TRT: 4:56) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yg16u_bziPE Lessons From the Trolley Problem by John Perry (TRT: 3:12) https://www.philosophytalk.org/blog/lessons-trolley-problem SEP Browse some of the documents on kinds of philosophy (lookup your area of interest) (Time: TBD by you) https://plato.stanford.edu/search/search?query=philosophy	Philosophy Entry in Wikipedia (TRT) 30:15) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy	Are there any moral agents? Mysterianism: the view that our understanding of the world is limited.	Metaethics – it can’t be avoided; Free will & determinism. Psychology & psychiatry.
Wed. 8 th (3)	Naturalism; Bias. Conservatism and Liberalism; The Trolley Problem and your Brain	“The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect” by Phillipa Foot https://www2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ362/halam/Readings/FootDoubleEffect.pdf “The Culture Inside” <i>Invisibilia</i> podcast (Listen: 56:00) http://www.npr.org/2017/06/09/532953261/the-culture-inside	“Can Science Tell Us Right from Wrong?” by Steven Pinker (TRIGGER WARNING upsetting examples) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJ9YFGP8vw (Watch: 10:56)	Bias in general.	Today’s discussion: Abortion.
Thurs. 9 th (4)	Pluralism; Absolutism; Relativism; Deontology (Kantianism); Virtue ethics; Consequentialism.	“Ethics Unwrapped” Glossary with videos – (Watch as many as you’d like Time: TBD by you): https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary SEP “Feminist Perspectives on Reproduction and the Family” by Debra Satz, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-family/ (TRT: 45:00)		We can’t avoid doing some metaethics. Ethics in analytic philosophy was metaethics until the late 60’s.	Today’s discussion: Reproductive rights. Consent versus Heroism
Mon. 13 th (5)	Language, ethics, and metaethics. Concepts; Meanings; Slippery Slopes	Wikipedia entry “Euthanasia and the Slippery Slope” (TRT: 0:00) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euthanasia_and_the_slippery_slope	Killing, Letting Die and the trolley Problem by J. Jarvis Thompson (TRT: 122:40):	Environment versus Nature; Personhood; Heroism.	Today’s discussion: Euthanasia

	(fallacy versus argument).	<p>“Killing and Letting Die” by James Rachels (TRT: 11:00) http://www.jamesrachels.org/killing.pdf</p> <p>“Killing and Letting Die: Rachels on Euthanasia” by Brendan Shea (TRT: 12:00) https://www.academia.edu/17314545/Killing_and_Letting_Die_Rachels_On_Euthanasia</p> <p>Browse: Government of Canada <i>MAID</i> https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/medical-assistance-dying.html</p>	https://learning.hccs.edu/faculty/dauid.poston/phil1301.80361/readings-for-march-31/JJ%20Thoms%20-%20Killing-%20Letting%20Die-%20and%20the%20Trolley%20Problem.pdf		
Tues. 14 th (6)	What is virtue? Language and morality; Moral rationalism.	<p><i>Meno</i> by Plato (read diagonally and/or find a summary of the arguments on YouTube or elsewhere) (TRT: 10:00/Watch 10:00) http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/meno.html</p> <p>“Why Do You Care About Fairness? Ask A Chimp” by Alison Bruzek (Warning: Little creatures in cages. Watch 2:43) https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2014/09/18/349514734/life-s-unfair-but-chimps-and-humans-know-when-to-even-the-score</p> <p>“Every Argument Against Veganism” by Ed Winters https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byTxzzztRB U (Warning: some rough wording. Watch: 19:29)</p>	<p>“Fellow Creatures” by Christine Korsgaard (Watch: 57:50) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bn3-qffqiAc</p>	Can our feelings of compassion stop us from improving the world?	Moral Status of Non-human Animals’ Indirect Duties; Being as an end in herself
Wed. 15 th (7)	Are animal rights the answer?	<p>“The Moral Status of Animals” by Lori Gruen (TRT: 35:00) https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-animal/</p> <p>“The Case Against Animal Rights” by David E.Os (TRT: 20:15) https://www.academia.edu/54897599/The_Case_Against_Animal_Rights</p>	<p>“The Case for Animal Rights” by Tom Regan (TRT: 30:00) http://www.animal-rights-library.com/texts-m/regan03.htm</p>	Do animals have rights?	Animal Rights
Thurs. 16 th (8)	Review Personhood & moral issues Essay 1: Topic Assigned	<p>SEP Aristotle’s Ethics (TRT: 35:00) https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/</p>	<p><i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>: Aristotle Book 2 (TRT: 30:00) http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.2.ii.html</p>	Character traits. Good habits. Is the mean between extremes enough?	Review of your notes. Reflections and concerns.
Mon. 20 th (9)	Essay due: Equal Rights Gender Minority Rights What are rights?	<p>SEP Read ONLY: CH 1,2,6,7 Rights: (TRT: 50:00) https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights/</p>	<p>SEP Read the ENTIRE article on Rights: (TRT: 75:00) https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights/</p>	Are rights more trouble than they’re worth? Do rights create conflict or resolve conflict?	Conflicting rights; Affirmative action; The Property rights problem; Group rights.
Tues. 21 st (10)	Aristotle’s Mean; Wealth,	<p>“The Cost of Inequality” by Joseph Stiglitz (Watch: 16:11)</p>	<p>“The Price of Inequality” PDF</p>	Is private property theft? Is PROPERTY	The Price of Inequality

	Property & Poverty	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYHT4zJsCdo Oxfam: <i>Inequality Kills</i> (Browse: 25:00) https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621341/bp-inequality-kills-170122-en.pdf	by Joseph Stiglitz https://resistir.info/livros/stiglitz_the_price_of_inequality.pdf	an innate concept? Is the right to property morally permissible?	What can be done about inequality?
Wed. 22 nd (11)	Egoism Altruism More on the virtues; Virtue ethics Kant (reason) Hume (passion & sympathy)	“The Moral Obligations Owed to Strangers” by Peter Singer (Watch: 19:53) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AkV EA bCC4w Please visit (Time TBD by you): https://www.thelifeyou cansave.org/best-charities/		Is there a mean between extremes when children are at stake? Are things getting better or worse?	Egoism Altruism
Thurs. 23 rd (12)	Essay 1 Discussion. Topic 2 Assigned	Review your notes		Redistribution and moral issues	
Mon. 27 th (13)	Environmental ethics	“Environmental Ethics” Andrew Brennan and Y. S. Lo Norva: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/ <p style="text-align: center;">ENGAGE WITH ANY OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING:</p> Klein and Sanders “On Climate Change” (Pro-Social Democracy) (Watch 9:57) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN1YFLUm cOk “Our Planet: Too Big To Fail” WWF (Pro-Capitalism) (Watch 42:58) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IvNqT5aMTw “The Uninhabitable Earth” by David Wallace-Wells (Warning Frightening: TRT: 41:00) https://www.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/materials/The%20Uninhabitable%20Earth.pdf “Climate Change 2021 The Physical Science Basis” (Browse 20:00: note the use of “Likely, Very Likely etc. Time TBD by you) https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM_final.pdf “Neil deGrasse Tyson scolds cherry picking climate science”: (Watch 5:28) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1MZ8U8Cc8	Naomi Klein: (Watch: 141:48) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krYHHInkf2M	What can you do to improve your world?	Lying and Propaganda When is it okay to lie? Is it ever okay to lie? What is lying? What is propaganda? What is advertising?
Tues. 28 th (14)	Capitalism and Socialism	SEP “Socialism” (TRT: 112:00) https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/socialism/	“Can civilization survive really existing capitalism?” by Noam Chomsky (Watch 47:16)		

			https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uuYjUxf6Uk		
Wed. 29 th (15)	Maladjustment, Civil Disobedience, and Divestment.	<p>“Fairy Creek: Indigenous-Led Blockade of Old-Growth Logging Is Now Canada’s Largest Civil Disobedience” Democracy Now! (Watch: 14:15) https://www.democracynow.org/2021/9/14/fairy_creek_blockade_bc_canada</p> <p>“North Dakota Versus Amy Goodman” (Watch: 2:58) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQnIkFfgQZl&t=36s</p> <p>Steven Pinker with Bill Maher (Watch: 6:54) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t33pow_AK4E</p> <p>“Martin Luther King, Jr. on Civil Disobedience” (Watch: 5:26) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2-v31yIJyU</p>	<p>https://divestmentdatabase.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DivestInvestReport2021.pdf</p> <p>“Tenured McGill Prof resigns over university's refusal to divest from fossil fuels” by Franca Mignaca https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/mcgill-university-professor-resigns-amid-refusal-to-divest-1.5426979</p>	Can it sometimes be legal to do what is illegal? Can it sometimes be a moral obligation to do what is illegal?	
Thurs. 30 th (16)	War & Terror Essay 2 Discussion. Topic 3 Assigned (Final Essay)	<p>What is Just War? By Michael Walzer (Watch 45:49) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f4XuOkMCsA</p> <p>Just War Response by Noam Chomsky (Watch 45:20) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6Fj91yPacs</p>		Practicing non-violence in a world that terrorizes.	
Mon. 4 th (17)	What should you feel? How lucky are you? Is believing badly, okay?	<p>“White People Have a Very, Very Serious Problem” Toni Morrison on Charlie Rose (Watch 4:54) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2txzMkT5Pc</p> <p>“Egalitarianism” Richard, Arneson (TRT: 112:00) https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/egalitarianism/</p>	<p>“James Baldwin vs William F Buckley: A legendary debate from 1965” (Watch 58:42 Warning: James Baldwin uses the n-word) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Tek9h3a5wQ</p>	Can we believe badly?	
Tues. 5 th (18)	Review	Review your notes		What have you learned?	
Wed. 6 th (19)	Final essay due	Summing up		What did you write about in your final paper?	

Electronic Devices Policy

Please do not use your phones or surf social media during the course. If you can't help it sit at the back.

Late-Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted without an excellent reason. This will not change.

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.”

« Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue). »

Academic Integrity Policy

“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.” Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures: www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/.

« 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 (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/). »

Policy on Changes of Content

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

Content (readings or online material) may change should the lecturer deem it appropriate or should a link no longer be available.

Inclusivity

“As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009”