

Course Director: Professor A. MacLachlan
Office Hrs.: T., Th. 1.30-2.30pm S418 Ross
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Class Location: Life Sciences Bldg. 107
Class Time: T., Th. 11.30-1pm
(Contact me by email, please, not phone)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is an advanced course in ethical theory, covering both normative ethical theory and metaethics. Over the course of the semester, we will examine the central questions and theories that have framed and defined contemporary approaches to philosophical ethics. These include: “Why be moral?” “Are there any objective moral values?” “Is there an ultimate moral principle?” “How do I balance duties to friends and family, to myself, and to the world in general?” as well as “How can we make good moral judgments?” We will read leading contemporary theorists who defend particular answers to these questions, and will critically evaluate the arguments they make in support of these theories. Along the way, we will also connect abstract questions in ethical theory to concrete moral dilemmas (global and local).

COURSE READINGS:

All readings for this course can be found in the assigned textbook (below) or as links on the course Moodle site. Please make sure you have access to both for the entire semester.

Shafer-Landau, Russ. *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* 2nd Ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

You are expected to come to class having read and reflected on the readings (for more information about what this entails, see the assigned reading for Week 1 by David Concepción, “How to Read Philosophy”) and be prepared to respond and discuss the author’s position, arguments and examples. Don’t worry! This doesn’t mean you have to understand everything. Asking questions like “What does the author mean here?” *is* a valuable contribution, and your classmates and I will both be grateful if you ask.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES: (continued on next page)

At the end of this course:

1. You will be able to identify and respond to philosophical questions about the nature of moral values, action, thinking, and decision-making. You will also be able to recognize the concepts and assumptions behind these questions, and you will be able to form questions (and answers) of your own.
2. You will be able to recognize and engage in contemporary debates in ethical theory, and to identify and evaluate the frameworks, values, and arguments underlying various positions in those debates (e.g. moral relativism, moral realism, deontology, virtue ethics, feminist ethics).

3. You will be able to think critically about the relationships between abstract ethical theory and concrete scenarios, such as complex moral dilemmas or other difficult decisions. You will have practice applying philosophical discussions to moral questions from your own life, and from current affairs.
4. You will have developed advanced analytic and communicative skills in philosophy: namely, the ability to articulate and defend a coherent thesis within an essay, as well as the ability to absorb, synthesize, and reflect upon complex information gained from reading assignments or in a classroom setting.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There are four components to your course assessment in PHIL 3020:

- a) Assignment #1: Reading Response, due **September 29** (15% of final grade)
Details and instructions provided by September 15
- b) In-Class Midterm Test (Definitions, Short-Answer), held **October 27** (30% of final grade)
Details and instructions provided by October 6
- c) Assignment #2: Short Paper, due **November 19** (15% of final grade)
Details and instructions provided by October 29
- d) Final Paper, **December 10** (30% of final grade)
Details and instructions provided by Nov 19
- e) Participation, **Ongoing** (10% of final grade)

This includes your attendance, your respectful and engaged verbal contributions to class discussion and group work (this is a matter of quality, and *not* quantity, of contributions) or it may reflect your participation in our class's online discussion forums (you can, for example, choose to pose a question regarding the readings the night before class).

If you feel uncomfortable speaking in a classroom setting, coming to office hours and pertinent email inquiries (again, quality not quantity, please) will also count toward your grade. Alternatively, you can contribute to your participation grade by keeping a class journal, into which you record your reflections and thoughts on the course readings and class discussion, and which you will submit to me by the end of the semester. This should not be a summary of readings/slides, but a personal exploration of your own thoughts, reactions, questions, and further investigations.

There is a self-assessment component to your participation grade. Carefully read the participation self-assessment form on Moodle (this will outline what I expect from you) and, at the end of the semester, fill it out. This is due with your final paper on **DECEMBER 10**.

NOTE: THE DROP DEADLINE FOR THIS COURSE IS NOVEMBER 9, 2015.

LATE POLICIES AND EXTENSIONS:

Late work (or a missed test) will only be accepted without penalty if you have made prior arrangements from me, or in the event of a *documented* emergency.
All other work will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day. After 5 days it will not be accepted.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM:

I take plagiarism very seriously. You are expected to submit your own, original, independently authored work for all course requirements, and to properly cite all your sources. You must use quotation marks and page citations appropriately in your reading responses, use in-text citations or footnotes and a bibliography in your final paper, and to appropriately identify authors by name in your take-home test.

York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity and are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty:

<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=69>

Students are also expected to review the Academic Integrity website. If you are not sure you understand these standards, I encourage you to take the Academic Integrity Tutorial:

http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/
www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity

If you are worried about your writing, I encourage you to come and see me, or to make an appointment with York's Writing Centre.

<http://www.yorku.ca/laps/writ/centre/>

I can also recommend some excellent resources on philosophical writing, in particular. This is a good place to start:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

ACCESSIBILITY:

Your success in this course is important to me. I encourage students registered in the course to discuss their learning needs and comprehension requirements with me during my office hours or at another arranged time, if necessary. Every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating learning experience. Students with disabilities are also strongly encouraged to avail themselves of the services provided by York's Counseling and Disability Services, as well as the Tools and Resources at the York Accessibility Hub:

<http://www.yorku.ca/cds/>
<http://accessibilityhub.info.yorku.ca/tools-resources/>.

Date:	Topic:	Required Readings (please complete <i>before</i> class each week)
10/9	Introduction to the Course	Concepción, "How to Read Philosophy" (Moodle)
15/9	What Matters? (Value)	Nozick (pp. 264-5) Ross (pp. 299-302) Smith, "Meaning is Healthier than Happiness" (Moodle)
17/9	Is It All Relative? (Cultural Relativism)	Gensler (pp. 44-47) NY Times, "Russian Pole-Vaulter Backs Disputed Law" (Moodle)
22/9	It Might Just be Subjective (Moral Subjectivism)	Mackie (pp. 22-30)
24/9	How Objective is Morality? (Moral Realism I)	Smith (pp. 63-68) McBrayer (NYT), "Why Our Children Don't Think There are Moral Facts" (Moodle)
29/9	There Might Be <i>Really</i> Real Values (Moral Realism II) Reading Response Due	Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of the Good" (Moodle) Engber (Slate), "The Kids are Alright" (Moodle)
1/10	<i>Prof. M Away, Class TBA</i>	<i>TBA</i>
6/10	Good Guys Finish Last (Immoralism)	Plato (pp. 132-137) Bloomfield, "10 Reasons Why It's Good to be Good" (Moodle)
8/10	We're In It For Ourselves (Psychological Egoism)	Feinberg (pp. 167-177) Kahane (G&M), "Would We Swallow a Morality Pill?" (Moodle)
13/10	Why Follow the Rules? (Moral Imperatives)	Foot (pp. 138-143)
15/10	Saints and Sinners (Moral Saints)	Wolf (pp. 200-212)
20/10	It's the Results that Count (Consequentialism)	Mill (pp. 417-422) Driver, "Normative Ethics in the 20 th C." *pp. 1-5 only* (Moodle)

22/10	The Organ Lottery (Killing vs Letting Die)	Harris, pp. 474-478
27/10	MIDTERM TEST	<i>None</i>
29/10	<i>Fall Reading Days</i>	<i>None</i>
3/11	Would you marry a Consequentialist? (Consequentialism and Alienation)	Railton, pp. 441-457
5/11	It's the Thought that Counts (Kantian Ethics)	Kant (pp. 485-497) Driver, "Normative Ethics..." *pp. 9-11 only* (Moodle) TAL, "Full Disclosure" 19-minute podcast (Moodle)
10/11	Would you befriend a Kantian? (Kantian Ethics and Evil I)	Langton, "Maria von Herbert's Challenge to Kant" (Moodle) TAL, "Full Disclosure" 19-minute podcast (Moodle)
12/11	Your Oppression? Your Problem (Kantian Ethics and Evil II)	Hay, "The Obligation to Resist Oppression" (Moodle)
17/11	Look, It Builds Character, OK? (Virtue Ethics I)	Annas (pp. 676-685) Scientific American, "Which Character Strengths are Predictive of Wellbeing?"
19/11	Virtues for Everyone! (Virtue Ethics II) Short Paper Due	Nussbaum (pp. 630-644) Driver, "Normative Ethics..." *pp. 5-9 only* (Moodle)
24/11	I Didn't Think You Cared... (The Ethics of Care)	Noddings (pp. 699-712)
26/11	Wait – Who's Missing? (Ethical Theory and Bias)	Calhoun (pp. 713-720) Second Reading TBA
1/12	Who Matters? (Moral Standing)	Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs and People" (Moodle) Elizabeth Barnes, "Confessions of a Bitter Cripple" (Moodle)
3/12	Final Topic TBA	A topic/theme of <i>your</i> choosing, to be determined as a group.