

**Philosophy 334: Ethical Theory**  
**Dr. Daniel Silvermint**

**Period:** Winter 2013, January 07 – April 16  
**Classroom:** Rutherford Physics Bldg., 112  
**Class Time:** TR 2:35 to 3:55

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**Office Location:** Ferrier Hall, 404  
**Hours:** TR 1:00 to 2:15 or appt.

**TA:** Joey Van Weelden

**TA Contact:** [joseph.vanweelden@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:joseph.vanweelden@mail.mcgill.ca)

**Prerequisites:** This is a second sequence course in ethics, intended for students with prior coursework in moral philosophy. Absent my written permission, having completed one of the following is required: Introduction to Moral Philosophy (Phil 230), Contemporary Moral Issues (Phil 237), Introduction to Feminist Theory (Phil 242), or Biomedical Ethics (Phil 343).

**Course Description:** This course serves as an introduction to some of the dominant strands in contemporary moral theory, drawn from the last thirty or so years of the analytic tradition. We will primarily be concerned with questions about the nature of the good and the right, and with the kinds of considerations that contribute to moral rightness and wrongness. We will begin with *consequentialism*, or the idea that the right thing to do is whatever produces the best consequences. *Deontological* theories, in contrast, judge conduct to be right or wrong independently of its consequences; some actions must be taken—and some should never be—simply because of the kinds of actions that they are. While both consequentialist and deontological theories attempt to provide a unified understanding of the right thing to do, *pluralist* moral theories take there to be a range of relevant values and duties that bear on a given situation. These values and duties are sometimes in genuine conflict with each other, requiring an agent to weigh their importance. *Virtue ethics* further challenges the notion that morality is about discovering and following clear rules of conduct, seeking instead to understand the kinds of agents we should be. Finally, we will consider *moral particularism*, which holds that there are no general ethical truths to be followed.

**Course Aims:** The primary aim of this course is to investigate the strengths and weakness of leading moral theories. A secondary aim is to explore the methodology of moral theorizing.

**Assigned Readings:** The primary texts for this course are *Moral Theory: An Introduction*

between lecture and small group discussion. On the first day students will be sorted into permanent groups of six. Every Thursday I will post two discussion questions based on the week's readings, which students will address as a group. The class will then reconvene to share their results. The 'assessment' section below contains additional information about group work.

**Academic Freedom:** As much as is possible, I will aim to teach this course without bias. I have

being turned in late should be emailed directly to the TA. I'll consider late penalty waivers under extraordinary and appropriately documented circumstances, such as severe medical emergency or similar crisis. I encourage students to work on their paper assignments in a timely manner; falling ill the evening before a deadline will rarely count as an excuse. If you are unable to turn in work on the day and time specified due to a documented and university-approved scheduling conflict, you must contact me no later than one week before the deadline to be considered for a limited extension.

**Disruptive Behavior:** Students are required to comply with all University policies concerning threatening behavior. In addition, I ask students not to come late or pack up early, to put away their cellphones (and keep them on silent), and to only use laptops or tablets if they are essential for note-taking or following along with articles.

**Notices:** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences under the

Scheffler: *C&C* introduction (p. 7 to end)

Shaw: "The Consequentialist Perspective" ('Objections to Consequentialism' to end), *CD*

Nagel: "War and Massacre," *C&C*

February 5 and 7

Nozick: "Side Constraints," *C&C*

Timmons: *MTI* ch. 11 (section 6)

April 9 and 11

Hooker: "Moral Particularism: Wrong and Bad," *MC*

Timmons: *MTI* ch. 12

Heathwood: book note on *MTI, MC*

April 16: \*\* Final Paper due \*\*