

**Phil 1318: Contemporary Moral Problems**  
**Monday-Friday; May 17- June 2**  
**Room: TBA**

Professor: Dr. Jennifer Matey  
Office: Hyer 211B  
jmatey@smu.edu  
Office hours: TBA

This Philosophy course provides an introduction to both theoretical and applied ethics through careful reading of works exemplary of, and also critical of, the major moral theories along with three ethical issues of contemporary interest. Moral theories reviewed will include Egoism, Divine Command Theory, Utilitarianism and Virtue Ethics. There will also be topical readings on social and global justice, environmental ethics/animal ethics, and hate speech and censorship. We will aim to apply the abstract principles of the various moral theories to these topics to better understand how different moral theories yield competing moral prescriptions.

Professor Bio: Dr. Matey is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at SMU. She earned a PhD from SUNY Stony Brook in 2007. Before coming to SMU she was an Assistant and Associate Professor at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. Her research focuses on various issues in the Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Perception and Philosophical foundations of Psychology and the Cognitive Sciences.

**Course Goals:**

- Students will be introduced to general philosophical principles and methods including how to determine the thesis and structure of a complex philosophical argument. Students will also learn to critically evaluate arguments using the principles of elementary and formal logic.
- Students will practice taking positions on difficult ethical issues and will construct arguments in support of positions.
- Students will work on essential writing skills.
- It is hoped that the tools developed in this class will lead students to become more thoughtful and critical thinkers, particularly when engaging with normative issues in their own lives.
- This course satisfies the Level I Philosophical and Religious Inquiry and Ethics Pillar. In completing this pillar, students should be able to describe, explain and/or employ some of the principles and theoretical methods of philosophy, religious studies, or ethics.

**Texts:** Conduct and Character ed. Mark Timmons

Additional readings will come from the text Social Ethics by Mappes and Zembaty and will be made available by the professor

**Coursework:**

Students are expected to attend class having completed all of the assigned readings and should be prepared to discuss the material. One unexcused absence will be permitted. Additional absences will be considered on a case by case basis but typically an unexcused absence will result in up to a two point deduction from your final numerical score (a 93/A overall will turn into a 91/A- if

the student misses more than one class without a documented excuse such as a doctor's note). There will be three exams. These exams will be short essay format and will typically have two essay questions. Blue books will be provided for the exams. Students should keep this syllabus and refer to it often. Details of the syllabus are subject to change and updates will be announced in class.

Attendance and participation: 25%

Exam 1: May 23, 25%

Exam 2: May 30, 25%

Exam 3: June 2, 25%

**Disability Accommodations:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call [214-768-1470](tel:214-768-1470) or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with me as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

**Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify me in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with me, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any missed work.

**Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students who must miss class due to participation in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity may make up class assignments but it is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with me prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work.

**Academic Dishonesty Policy:** Plagiarism will be reported to the relevant campus office. It is your responsibility to become acquainted with proper citation practices.

#### **Day 1: Introduction to Ethical Theory**

Timmons: Concepts, Aims and Structure:

Timmons: Evaluating Moral Theories

#### **Day 2: Egoism**

Plato, "Myth of Gyges"

Shoemaker, "Egoisms"

#### **Day 3: Divine Command Theory & Relativism**

Timmons, "Does Morality Depend On God's Commands"

Benedict, "A Defense of Ethical Relativism"

Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

#### **Day 4: Utilitarianism**

Bentham, "The Principle of Utility"

Mill, "In Defense of Utilitarianism"

Darwall, "Utilitarianism, Act or Rule"

#### **Day 5: Kantianism**

Kant, "The Moral Law and Autonomy of Will"

Onora O'Neill, "Kant on Treating People as Ends in Themselves"

**Day 6: Virtue Ethics**

Aristotle, "Virtue and Character"

Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics"

**Day 7: World Hunger/Global Justice**

Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

Peter Singer video

**Day 8: World Hunger/Global Justice**

Sen, "Property and Hunger"

Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat"

**Day 9: Animals/Environment**

Leopold, "The Land Ethic"

**Day 10: Animals/Environment**

Baxter, "People or Penguins The Case for Optimal Pollution"

Rollin, "Environmental Ethics"

**Day 11: Hate Speech and Censorship**

Altman: Racist Speech as the Functional Equivalent of Fighting Words

Stone: Liberalism and Campus Hate Speech: A Philosophical Examination