

Phil 1318 : Contemporary Moral Problems
Monday-Friday: May 16-31 2019
Room TBA

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

How do you know what is the right thing to do? Is it enough to just follow the rules and norms provided by your culture, religious community or government? Or can these norms themselves be unethical?

This is an introductory course in normative ethics. The course has two parts. In the first part we will look at philosophical approaches to the branch of ethics called Moral Theory with an eye to determining the viability of individual moral theories. Moral theories are theories that attempt to identify the underlying nature of morality, those features in virtue of which actions are right when they are right, and wrong when they are wrong. For example, according to the theory Utilitarianism, right and wrong have to do with the consequences of our actions; right actions are those that cause good outcomes and wrong actions cause bad outcomes. Other theories, such as the Divine Command Theory and Moral Relativism prescribe our adherence to rules that are dictated by an identified authority such as a god or one's culture.

The second part of the course focuses on applied ethics. Here we will ask what the right moral response would be to very specific concerns. We will focus on two topics. The first is global justice and our moral obligations to alleviate poverty, suffering, and death from lack of food, shelter and medical care. Do members of an affluent country have a moral obligation to provide material support to alleviate the suffering of people in impoverished communities? The second set of concerns has to do with determining what are our moral obligations to non-human animals and the environment. Do animals have rights? Does the environment have value apart from the economic value it has for humans? How would answers to these questions frame our response to various types of practical questions?

Professor Bio: Dr. Matey is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at SMU. She earned a Ph.D. from the State University of New York at 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 Cognitive Science. She also has teaching and research interests in Ethics.

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.
- 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 following pillars: *Depth- Philosophical and Religious Inquiry and Ethics*

Book: Conduct and Character: Readings in Moral Theory Ed. Mark Timmons. Wardsworth publishing.

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 a doctor's note). There will be three 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.

Grading Scale

- A = 93.5-100
- A- = 90-93.49
- B + = 87.5-89.99
- B = 83.5-87.49
- B- = 80-83.49
- C+ = 77.5-79.99
- C = 73.5-77.49
- C- = 70- 73.49
- D = 60-69.99
- F = under 60

Attendance and participation: 25%

Exam 1: May 20, 25%

Exam 2: May 24, 25%

Exam 3: June 31, 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

Timmons: "Concepts, Aims and Structure
& Evaluating Moral Theories"

Day 2: Egoism and Divine Command Theory

Plato: "Myth of Gyges"
Shoemaker, "Egoisms"
Timmons, "Does Morality Depend On God's Commands?"

Day 3: Cultural Relativism

Benedict, "A Defense of Ethical Relativism"
Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Exam 1

Day 4 Utilitarianism and Kantianism

Bentham, "The Principle of Utility"
Mill, "In Defense of Utilitarianism"
Darwall, "Utilitarianism, Act or Rule"

Day 5

Kant, "The Moral Law and Autonomy of Will"
Aristotle, "Virtue and Character"
Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics"

Day 6 Famine/Poverty

Exam 2

Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"
Sen, "Property and Hunger"

Day 7: Famine/Poverty/Social Justice

Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat"
Nielson, "Some Facts About Famine"

Day 8: Famine/Poverty/Social Justice

Jacobson, "Closing the Gender Gap in Development"
Young, "The Five Faces of Oppression"

Day 9: Environmental and Animal Ethics

Regan "The Case for Animal Rights"
Frey, "Moral Vegetarianism and the Argument from Pain and Suffering"

Day 10: Environmental and Animal Ethics

Warren, "Human and Animal Rights Compared"
Baxter, "People or Penguins, The Case for Optimal Pollution"

Day 11: Environmental Ethics

Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic"
Rollin, "Environmental Ethics"

Exam 3