

PHIL 4100/5000 Seminar in Ethics: The Function of Morality

Class time/location: Thursday 11:35 - 2:25pm, Paterson Hall 3A36

Instructor: Matthew Scarfone, matthew.scarfone@carleton.ca

Office hours: TBD in 3A43 Paterson Hall

Course webpage: TBD

Course Description

More often assumed than stated, the guiding thought behind normative ethics is that the function or purpose of moral judgments is ultimately to produce beneficial effects, follow good rules, or develop virtuous characters. But what else might these judgments do? In this seminar we will look at issues related to the purported function of morality. Some of the questions we will be working on are: What are moral judgments? Why have we come to characterize the world in moral terms? Do moral judgments have one function or many functions? Can morality, which is on the surface about doing good, be used to do bad? Can we tease apart descriptive and normative functions of moral judgments? Does learning about the emergence of moral judgments help us understand their current function? Can genealogies of morality have either a vindicatory or else a debunking effect?

Outcomes

This is an advanced seminar in philosophy. It is expected that you already possess a high-level of precision and clarity in your writing. We will aim to develop two additional skills: presenting and researching.

Each week we will have student-led presentations. These will be modelled on standard philosophy talks. Our seminar offers a low-stakes environment to gain familiarity with verbally presenting material, fielding questions, and leading discussions.

There is not a lot of assigned reading for this course (averaging less than 30 pages per week), and you will be expected to supplement the course readings with your own independent research in order to write your Midterm and Final Essays. The assigned readings provide an entryway and opportunity to follow up on your own insights and preferences within the course. Some issues or topics will grab your attention more than others. We want to capitalize on those moments, dive into the philosophical literature related to them, and develop essays that analyze issues related to the function of morality in more detail.

Course Structure and Requirements

Overview

Participation & Attendance	15% of final grade	
Presentation	15% of final grade	
Midterm Prospectus	10% of final grade	due February 17
Midterm Essay	20% of final grade	due March 10
Final Prospectus	10% of final grade	due April 7
Final Essay	30% of final grade	due April 27

Our class is a discussion-based seminar and not a lecture, so it requires us all to contribute to its success. The structure of our class will revolve around presentations and discussions. When we meet on Tuesday's a typical class will go as follow (times are a rough estimate):

11:35 – 12:00: I will introduce the material and set up the needed background for the class. This will orient us both within the course itself but also within the broader philosophical literature. Where is the reading coming from? What topics or other readings does it connect to? How does it follow from what we've already looked at or what's coming up? What core concepts are assumed within the material? I will leave the exposition, argument details, and analysis in the paper for the presenters to explain.

12:00 – 12:45: After the introduction, there will be a student-led presentation of the material for that week. (More detail below). In a typical week one or two students will share this task. The presentation will be roughly the length of a standard philosophy talk or colloquium.

12:45 – 1:05: After the presentation we will have a short break. This will allow our presenters a breather before leading the discussion to follow. Given the timing of our seminar, the break is a good opportunity to grab some lunch or a coffee or whatever. (You can of course do this during the seminar as well, so long as it is not disruptive.)

1:05 – 2:25: We will come back from the break and have a discussion in light of the presentation and the weekly reading. (More detail below).

15% Participation & Attendance

Because this is a seminar course, it is absolutely critical that we all read the material carefully before each meeting, pay close and respectful attention to our colleague's presentation, and engage in thoughtful and considerate discussion afterwards.

If you are not presenting in a given week, as part of your participation you will email me discussion notes (roughly 250 words) by the **Wednesday before class @ Noon**. Pick something from the reading that was either interesting (explaining why), too vague (again, explaining why), or that you disagreed with (you guessed it, explaining why). The weekly presenters will have their own questions to lead the discussion, but depending on how the class discussion goes, I may call upon some of us to share to explain these submitted notes during class.

Late submission of discussion notes will not be accepted. You must submit discussion notes every week you are not presenting. Missing submissions are docked 2pts off the participation & attendance grade: e.g. 15% to 13% for 9/10 submissions, from 15% to 11% for 8/10 submissions, from 15% to 9% for 7/10 submissions, etc.

Likewise, you have one free absence from class to use as you wish, after which you are docked the same 2pts off the participation & attendance grade for each unexcused absence. If you intend to miss class you still need to submit discussion notes that week. Note: attending only part of the class is the same as missing class, so you must attend both the presentation and discussion components of the class to get credit for attendance.

15% Presentation

For each class there will be a student-led presentation of the weekly material. The presentation should be around 45 minutes long. It should focus mostly on exposition: it should explain the core idea(s) of the material we are looking at that week, detail the structure of the arguments, connect it to themes or patterns in the course, etc. The presentation should also flag

some issues for analysis, i.e. things that we might want to take up in the discussion session. You'll be 'on call' during the discussion session, but everyone in the seminar will be expected to contribute.

Everyone will sign up for a presentation slot after our initial class meeting (on **January 12**). You will email me your ranked preferences for three different presentation slots. Student presentations will begin in the third week (**January 26**). On **January 19** I will present the material from Williams to give you an idea and model of how things should go.

10% Midterm Prospectus

There will not be any assigned essay topics in this course. Instead, you will submit a 1 page, single-spaced (approx. 350 words) plan of the Midterm Essay you want to write. Your Midterm Prospectus is due by **February 17 @ 11:59pm**.

Because there is not a lot of reading per week, that gives you the space to do independent research for your Midterm and Final essays. Making use of this space is critical for developing your research skills. As such, your Midterm Prospectus should show the early stages of this research. I will provide more guidance as the course goes on. When thinking about your Midterm plan, availing yourself of office hours is an excellent idea.

20% Midterm Essay

Your Midterm Essay should follow the topic and structure of your (corrected, returned) Midterm Prospectus. The research supporting your Midterm Essay should now be much more developed. Your essay should be 5 pages, double-spaced (approx. 1750 words). Your paper is due by **March 10 @ 11:59pm**.

10% Final Prospectus

Submit another 1 page, single-spaced (approx. 350 words) plan of the Final Essay you want to write. Your Final Prospectus is due by **April 7 @ 11:59pm**. As before, you should show the early stages of the research you are engaging in for your Final Essay.

30% Final Essay

Your Final Essay should follow the topic and structure of your (corrected, returned) Final Prospectus. The research supporting your Final Essay should now be much more developed. Your essay should be 8 pages, double-spaced (approx. 2800 words). Your Final Essay is due by **April 27 @ 11:59pm**.

Late Policy

1/3 alpha grade per 24 hours for the Prospectuses and Essays. No late submissions will be accepted for the discussion notes.

All the deadlines for your assignments are noted above, so you know them well in advance. But sometimes unforeseen circumstances arise that might prevent you from turning in work on time. To accommodate for this, you will have **five extension days** at your disposal for the entire course. You may use these extension days whenever and however you wish (except for on the weekly discussion notes). No explanation for using these extension days is needed. Simply submit your assignment with a note that mentions how many of your (remaining) extension days are being

used. For example, you can submit an assignment one day late and use one of your extension days; or you can submit an assignment five days late and use all five of your extension days; or you can submit two of your assignments two days late each and use four extension days; or you can refrain from using any extension days; and so on.

NB: If you are dealing with an extraordinary circumstance for which extension days would be insufficient (e.g. long-term illness, family crisis, etc.) please get in touch with me as soon as possible to make other arrangements.

Course Schedule and Readings

(all readings are available through the course webpage)

Date	Topic	Reading	!!!
Jan 12	Stage Setting	none	
Jan 19		Williams, "Morality, the Peculiar Institution" (22 p)	
Jan 26	Uses of Morality	Foot, "Moral Arguments" and "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" (24 p)	
Feb 2		Fricker, "What's the Point of Blame?" (19 p)	
Feb 9		Tosi & Warmke, "Moral Grandstanding" (21 p)	
Feb 16	Social Models	Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended" (20 p)	Prospectus due Feb 17
Mar 2		Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail" (20 p)	
Mar 9	Origin Stories	Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> (selections) (41 p)	Midterm due Mar 10
Mar 16		Joyce, "Morality and Evolution" (30 p)	
Mar 23		Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value" (40 p)	
Mar 30	Genealogy	Smyth, "A Genealogy of Emancipatory Values" (30 p)	
Apr 6		Srinivasan, "Genealogy, Epistemology, Worldmaking" (30 p)	Prospectus due Apr 7
Apr 27	Final Essay due		

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Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EDC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for [Student Activities](#):* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 7	Classes start.
Sept. 20	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 10	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 24-28	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 25	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 9	Last day of fall term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 10-22	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 22	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 9	Classes begin.
Jan. 20	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 20	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 20-24	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.
Mar. 29	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 7	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 12	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Classes follow a Friday schedule. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 13-14	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 15-27	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 27	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:
www.carleton.ca/philosophy
520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
520-7850

Writing Services:
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>
520-3822

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
520-2735

