

PHILOSOPHY 335 - Moral Philosophy Fall 2026

Class meets: Monday & Thursday 11:30am-12:50 pm DSB C126

Instructor: Prof. Colin Macleod (pronouns: he & him)

Office: CLE B328

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Office Hours: Monday 1:30-3:30 pm and by appointment

Texts

There are no required texts that you must purchase for the course. All the readings will be available via web resources, the University Library or Brightspace. However, it may be useful for you to acquire a copy of Immanuel Kant, [*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*](#). There are many editions available of this text and the text can be accessed via the web but the edition edited and translated by Allen W. Wood (Yale University Press 2002) has some valuable interpretative essays in it. Wood's book is available online at the UVic library- [here](#). You may also want to acquire an edition of [Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*](#) (UVic library has an online version [here](#)) and [Henry Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics*](#). (UVic library has an online version that also included writings by J.S. Mill and Jeremy Bentham [here](#).)

Additional Resources

The Routledge Companion to Ethics (available online via UVIC library)

<http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>

<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/cuws/>

<http://www.utilitarianism.com/index.htm>

Course Objective

This course explores some of the most important and influential theories about the nature of morality that have been developed in the tradition of Western philosophy. Towards this end, we will study excerpts from some of the classic texts of Hobbes, Kant and Sidgwick as well as some work in moral theory by a variety of contemporary philosophers. The objective of the course is to provide students with a sound understanding of the main problems in normative ethics and the different moral theories that have been developed in response to them. We devote special attention to the following broad theories: consequentialism (especially utilitarianism), Hobbesian contractarianism, contractualism, and Kantian theory. Although the course examines some classic texts in the history of philosophy, we will approach the material with an emphasis on the relevance of the material studied to theories and debates in contemporary moral philosophy.

Territorial Acknowledgement

I acknowledge and respect the Lək'wəḡən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək'wəḡən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Formal Course Requirements

Written work for the course consists of 1 term paper (approximately 3,000 words in length), 1 midterm exam, 1 final exam and (as many as) 10 quote and comment assignments. The term paper is worth 40% of the course grade, the midterm is worth 20% of the course grade, the final exam is worth 30% of the course grade, and the quote and comment assignment is worth 10% of the course grade.

Informal Course Expectations

Although no grade is assigned for participation in class discussion or attendance, I expect students to attend class regularly and to participate actively in class discussion. You should feel free to pose questions and raise philosophical issues related to the material we are studying. I expect students to be attentive to and respectful of the perspectives of others in the class but this does not mean you should not voice disagreements with or raise criticisms about the philosophical views presented by members of the class. We can all learn a lot from lively exchanges of different points of view. So, I encourage voice your views in an open and thoughtful manner. You should expect to challenge the views of others and to have your views challenged by me and other members of the class. If there is material in the course that you find puzzling or difficult to understand please ask me about at an appropriate juncture in class or discuss your questions with me during my office hours.

Late Policy

Unless you qualify for an academic concession due to [unexpected and unavoidable circumstances, or conflicting responsibilities](#) I will not change the due date of assignments nor will I reschedule exams for you. I will accept, without grade penalty, **essays** that are submitted up to one week after the due date. However, essays that are submitted in this period will not receive detailed comments. After this **grace period** unexcused essays will not be accepted.

Course Materials on Brightspace

You can access the Brightspace page for this course by signing in with your netlink id. Various essential course materials will be posted there (e.g., some readings, assignments, etc.) **Please note** that all assignments for this course and all materials posted to Brightspace are the intellectual property of myself and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without my permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of your instructor violates the [Policy on Academic Integrity](#).

Appropriate Academic Conduct and Professionalism

Students are expected to understand and abide by the University regulations concerning academic misconduct - e.g., plagiarism, cheating, etc. For further information about these matters students can consult the [Policy on Academic Integrity](#) . If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism or academic misconduct, consult me before submitting an assignment. Professional and mutually respectful conduct is expected from all students enrolled in courses at UVic. The [Tri-Faculty Standards for Professional Behavior for](#)

[Students](#), which draws together a number of existing UVic policies in one place for ease of reference.

Use of Digital Tools

Please be advised that in this course you are not authorized to use any form of generative AI. In order to successfully complete course activities, generative AI is not required nor welcomed. **Students should not make any use of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT that use AI for content generation.**

Wellness and Counseling Resources

Many students experience challenges to their wellbeing during their studies. [Uvic Student Wellness](#) offers many resources to support student wellness. Assistance for matters concerning physical, mental, and spiritual health is available. There is a designated [student counsellor for law students](#). Information about other resources and opportunities for law students is [available here](#).

Uvic Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response:

You can learn more about how Uvic defines sexualized violence and its approach to prevention by visiting www.uvic.ca/svp. If you or someone you know is impacted by sexualized violence and needs information, advice, and/or support, please contact the sexualized violence resource office in Equity and Human Rights (EQHR). Whether or not you have been directly impacted, if you want to take part in important prevention work on campus, you can reach out to: Sexualized Violence Resource Office in EQHR, Sedgewick C119; email: svpcoordinator@uvic.ca.

Important Dates

Term Paper: Due on or before December 7 (Grace period ends December 14)

Quote and Comment Assignments: Throughout the term (maximum 1 per week)

Midterm Exam: October 15

Final Exam: **As Scheduled by the University**

Late Assignments/Missed Tests and Grace Period Policy

Unless you provide me with a written note that provides a compelling reason (e.g. a documented medical problem) for granting an extension or for missing an exam, I will not change the due date of assignments nor will I reschedule exams for you. I will accept, without grade penalty, essays (but no other assignments) that are submitted up to one week after the due date. However, **essays** that are submitted in this period will not receive any comments. After this grace period unexcused essays will not be accepted. For other information with regards to missing deadlines, etc. please see the UVic University Calendar.

Reading Schedule

Note: This is a provisional reading schedule. Some revisions may be made during the course of the term.

BS = available on Brightspace

Week of September 7 - The Ethical Impulse and Enduring Puzzles about Value

Allen Wood 'Relativism' (BS)

[Ian Parker, 'The Gift' in *The New Yorker* August 2, 2004](#) (available online via UVic Library)

[James Sterba, 'Understanding Evil: American Slavery, the Holocaust, and the Conquest of the American Indians', *Ethics* Vol. 106, No. 2 \(Jan., 1996\), pp. 424-448](#) (available online via UVIC library)

Supplementary Readings

Larissa MacFarquhar, *Strangers Drowning: Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices, and the Urge to Help* (Penguin 2016).

[Larissa MacFarquhar, 'The Kindest Cut' in *The New Yorker* July 27, 2009](#) (available online via UVic Library)

Week of September 14 – The Right and the Good: Considering the Relation Between Living Well and Living Morally

Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* Chapters 1-4 available online at <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/bentham/ipml/ipml.toc.html>

Robert Nozick, 'The Experience Machine' (BS)

James Griffin, 'Utilitarian accounts: state of mind or state of the world' (BS)

Derek Parfit, '[What Makes Someone's Life Go Best?](#)' (BS)

Recommended background reading: [Singer, P. \(1972\). 'Famine, affluence, and morality. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1\(3\), 229-243.](#) (available online via UVic Library)

Supplementary Readings:

[Lin, E. \(2022\). Well-being, part 2: Theories of well-being. *Philosophy Compass*, 17\(2\).](#)

Week of September 21 - Consequentialism & The Varieties of Utilitarianism

Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, Book III, chapters 11- 14 and Book IV, chapters 1-2 (available online at <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/sidgwick/me/index.html>)

[Derek Parfit, 'The Repugnant Conclusion'](#) (BS)

Derek Parfit ‘The Non-Identity Problem’ (BS)

Supplementary Reading:

[David Phillips, *Sidgwick's The Methods of Ethics: A Guide*, \(OUP 2022\).](#) (Available online via Uvic library.)

Week of September 28 – Integrity, Demandingness, and Fairness

Excerpt from Bernard Williams (BS)

[Elizabeth. Ashford, ‘Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Partiality.’ *The Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 8 \(2000\): 421-39.](#) (Available online via UVIC Library).

[Julia Driver, ‘Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics’, *Hypatia* Vol. 20, No. 4, \(Autumn, 2005\), pp. 183-199](#) (Available online via UVic Library).

Supplementary Reading:

[Railton, P. \(1984\). ‘Alienation, consequentialism, and the demands of morality’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 13\(2\), 134-171](#) (available online via UVic Library)

Week of October 5 – Contemporary Contractualism

[Thomas Scanlon, ‘Contractualism and Utilitarianism’](#) (BS)

[Rahul Kumar, ‘Contractualism’ in *The Routledge Companion to Ethics*](#) (Available online via UVIC Library)

Supplementary reading:

[Colin Macleod “Making Moral Judgements and Giving Reasons”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 31, No. 2 June 2001: pp. 263-290.](#) (Available online via UVic Library)

Week of October 12 – MIDTERM OCTOBER 15

Week of October 19 - Introduction to Kantian Ethics - The Good Will and Duty

[Allen Wood, ‘What is Kantian Ethics’](#) (BS)

Kant, Preface of *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Kant, First Section of *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Supplementary Reading:

[Marcia Baron 'Acting from Duty' \(BS\)](#)

Allen Wood 'On the Murderer at the Door' (BS)

Week of October 26 - Interpreting the Categorical Imperative

Kant, Section Two of *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

[Christine Korsgaard, 'Kant's Formula of Universal Law' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, vol 66, # 1 & 2. \(available online via Uvic Library\)](#)

[Barbara Herman, 'Mutual Aid and Respect for Persons' *Ethics*, 94, No. 4 \(July 1984\), pp 577-602 \(available online via UVic Library\)](#)

Week of November 2 – Life without Morality: 'Nasty, Brutish, Solitary, and Short'?

Excerpt from Plato's *Republic*, Book II from 357-368e (The Ring of Gyges available online)

Hobbes, *Leviathan* Chapters I, V, VI, XIII (available online in various places including: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm>)

Hobbes, *Leviathan* Chapters, XIV, XV, (XIII (available online in various places including: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm>)

Week of November 9 – An Interlude: Moral Saints?

[Vanessa Carbonell, V. \(2009\). What moral saints look like. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 39\(3\), 371-398,513.](#)

Week of November 16 – Contemporary Hobbesian Contractarianism: Morality as Mutual Advantage

David Gauthier, 'Why Contractarianism?' (BS)

David Gauthier, Excerpt from *Morals by Agreement* (BS)

[Susan Dimock, 'Why All Feminists Should Be Contractarians', *Dialogue*, Vol 47, No 2. Spring 2008 pp. 273-290 \(available online via UVIC library\)](#)

Week of November 23 – Morality and Virtue

Chapter 1 of [Snow, N. E. \(2020\). *Contemporary virtue ethics* \(1st ed.\). Cambridge University Press.](#) (Available online via UVic library)

[Jonathan J, Sanford, 'Contemporary Virtue Ethics and its Aspirations' in *Virtue Ethics Here and Now* edited by Stephen Gardiner. \(Available online via UVic library\)](#)

Supplementary Reading:

[Toner, C. \(2006\). The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics. *Philosophy \(London\)*, 81\(4\), 595–618.](#) (Available online via UVic library)

Week of November 30 – Other Directions?

[Samantha Brennan, 'Feminist Ethics' in *Routledge Companion to Ethics*](#) (Available online via UVIC Library).

[Friedman, M. \(1987\). 'Beyond caring: The de-moralization of gender', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy ; Supplementary Volume, 13*, 87.](#) (Available online via UVic Library)

[Thaddeus Metz, 'Toward an African Moral Theory', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15, 3 2007: 321-41.](#) (Available online via UVIC library.)

Supplementary Readings:

[Symposium on Metz's Toward an African Moral Theory in *South African Journal of Philosophy*, vol 26, No 4. 2007.](#) (Available online via UVIC Library).

December 7 – Review

Quote and Comment Assignment Instructions

Over the course of the term, you may complete as many as 10 quote and comment assignments. However, you may only submit **ONE** quote and comment in any given week of term. In order to receive marks for the quote, comment, and critique assignment you must submit your assignment to the Brightspace page during the week that reading is on the outline. **You must also attend the class at which the reading is discussed** in order to receive credit for a submission. Your task is to identify an interesting passage in the assigned readings for the week and offer a clear, concise, and thoughtful comment on the passage. Make sure you clearly identify **the author** and **source of the passage** you quote. In your remarks, provide a brief explanation of the issue raised in the cited passage and then provide a brief response – e.g., a criticism or comment or constructive question – about the cited passage. It is best to begin with the quotation, then provide a brief characterization of the point made in the quoted passage (e.g., “In this passage Jones claims...”). Only after you have characterized the issue at stake should you offer your comment. Your remarks **should never exceed** a single, double-spaced piece of paper. Use 12 point font and regular margins. The date, your name, student number and the course number should be clearly indicated at the top left-hand side of the page. I will assign full marks to any assignment that reflects a good faith effort to engage the material in a thoughtful way.

Your assignment **MUST** have the following elements:

Your Name & Student #

The date

Course #

Quote & Comment # (e.g., #1)

Quotation and source (this can be single-spaced)

Your concise comment (this must be double-spaced)

About Colin Macleod

Colin Macleod B.A. (Queens), M.A. (Dalhousie), Ph.D. (Cornell) is a Professor of Philosophy and Law. He joined the Philosophy department at the University of Victoria in 1998. His research focuses on issues in contemporary moral, political and legal theory with a special focus on the following topics: (1) distributive justice and equality (2) children, families and justice and (3) democratic ethics. He is the author of *Have A Little Faith: Religion, Democracy and the American Public School* (University of Chicago Press 2016) [co-written with Ben Justice]; *Liberalism, Justice, and Markets: A Critique of Liberal Equality* (OUP 1998) and coeditor with David Archard of *The Moral and Political Status of Children* (OUP 2002). His articles have appeared in journals such as *The Chicago-Kent Law Review*, *Theory and Research in Education*, *Politics and Society*, *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *The Canadian Journal for Law and Jurisprudence*, *Law and Philosophy*, and *Dialogue*. He is an executive editor of the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. When he is not engaged in philosophical discussion and argument, he enjoys playing hockey and tennis and strumming his guitar while jamming with his musical friends.