

Philosophy 235 (A01): Ethics, Violence, War and Terrorism
SPRING 2026 [CRN 22517, 1.5 UNITS]

Scheduled class times

Monday & Thursday 1130-1250, Cornett B112

Instructor

Christopher Maier

Office Hours: Monday, 1000-1100, Thursday 1000-1100, or by appointment; Clearihue C308

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Provisional Draft: This outline is intended only to give students a general sense of what the course is like. It is not the final, official course syllabus.
Version 1.0.1

I acknowledge with respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples (including the Tsartlip, Pauquachin, Tsanout, Tseycum and Malahat nations) in whose territories and waters the university operates and whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Course Description

War has been with us as for as long as we have records of humans. What is it about humans that leads us to war, violence and domination? What is unique about war as an area of human endeavour? When we talk about war, and questions about right and wrong, how can we make sense of our judgements?

This course will look at war from a variety of questions that touch on the philosophy of war. These topics look at central questions of human nature and action. That is, it looks at whether there is a pre-disposition in human psychology that lends itself to violence and killing, which makes war-fighting easier. It will then look at the practice of war itself and what makes it unique, whether it has its own logic and nature.

This course will:

- introduce you to key issues in the philosophy of war.
- introduce issues in the moral psychology of killing
- give you a basic understanding of major the standard account of modern Just War Theory
- help you improve your ability to critically engage with academic literature
- help you improve your philosophical writing skills.

Texts

(1) Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars : A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. 5th ed. New York: BasicBooks, 2015, 1977.

Available through the UVic Bookstore. ([Publisher's page](#).) Two copies are on 2-hour reserve at McPherson library. You can check to see whether they are currently checked out through the [library website](#) or by looking at 'Course Reserves' under the 'Course Tools' tab on the Brightspace page.

(2) Several additional required readings will be made available via the course's Brightspace page.

Evaluation

Students' grades will be based on:

- Assignment 1 Essay (3-5 pages): One short essay assignment, which will count for 13% of the grade.
- Assignment 2: Preparation for the Essay - 5 %
- Assignment 3 Essay (8-10 pages): An essay worth 35% of the grade
- Participation/Reading Response worth 12% of the grade.
 - Six written responses to the reading. Students may choose which readings to respond to; two responses must be submitted in each of sections II, III, and IV. Each response will be worth 2%. Responses shall be turned in prior to the class for which the reading was assigned, and the student must attend the class.
- EXAM: An open book final exam worth 35%

In order to be eligible to pass the course, students must successfully complete the two essays and the final exam. Failure to complete one of these required components will result in a grade of 'N' for the course.

Beyond the student's having adequately addressed the topic question(s) on which they write, evaluation of the assignments, essays, and any essay question(s) appearing on the final exam will be based on: evidence of comprehension of the materials and issues addressed; evidence of original and critical thought with regard to that material; the extent to which the student stakes out a position and provides good reasons and arguments for it; the extent to which the student communicates ideas clearly (using complete and grammatical sentences, correct terms, a clear essay structure, and so on). For the short assignments, essays, and final exam, any materials used must be properly cited in the standard way. *The use of outside materials, including any readings not assigned for the course, is permitted only if you have received the instructor's permission ahead of time.*

Late Policy:

Assignments 1 & 3:

Late assignments unaccompanied by a legitimate excuse will be penalized at the rate of 5% per day or portion thereof, to a maximum of 30%. Exceptions to this penalty will only be considered in cases where an alternate deadline was arranged ahead of time or lateness was caused by an unexpected or unavoidable circumstance, as described in the University's [policies regarding academic concessions](#). If you are unable to meet a deadline because of conflicting responsibilities or unexpected or unavoidable circumstances, *you must contact me as soon as you are aware of the circumstances or conflict.*

Assignment 2:

This assignment is completed in two phases. Each phase of the assignment is worth 2.5% of the final grade; each phase will be marked out of 5. Complete work that contains all deliverables and is handed in by the deadline will be marked between 2.5 and 5. Work handed in after the deadline and unaccompanied by a legitimate excuse will be marked between 0 and 2.5. Exceptions to this penalty will only be considered in cases where an alternate deadline was arranged ahead of time or lateness was caused by an unexpected or unavoidable circumstance, as described in the University's policies regarding academic concessions. If you are unable to meet a deadline because of conflicting responsibilities or unexpected or unavoidable circumstances, you must contact me as soon as you are aware of the circumstances or conflict.

NB: If the work from either phase of 'Assignment 2' is overdue, then the instructor will not discuss the essay (Assignment 3) with a student during office hours

The standard [University grading scheme](#) will be used. Here is an excerpt:

Grade	Point Value	Percentage	Description
A+	9	90 – 100	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
A	8	85 – 89	
A-	7	80 – 84	
B+	6	77 – 79	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
B	5	73 – 76	
B-	4	70 – 72	
C+	3	65 – 69	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.
C	2	60 – 64	
D	1	50 – 59	A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
F	0	0 – 49	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

Expectations

This course is in-person only; lectures will not be recorded. Students are expected to come to class, to come to class having read the assigned readings, and to be ready to talk and ask questions about the material. Students who miss a class are responsible for any material covered therein, as well as for finding out what announcements, if any, were made. In general, this course is reading- and writing-intensive. It is very important to keep up with the readings and assignments as we go along.

The Material:

The material that this course examines will by its nature involve violence of all kinds, including discussions of sexual violence. As a result, the material is at times be disturbing, triggering and perhaps shocking. The topics will be discussed frankly and with candour. Students need to be ready for these types of discussions and be respectful of how the topics might affect their fellow students.

The material can also be politically charged or divisive. Again, respect for fellow students and the instructor are key. To encourage discussion and the exploration of ideas, the in class discussion is held under the 'Chatham House rule.' "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed."

(<https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>)

Three quick tips for doing well in the course

1. *Come to class* -- when you must miss, try to let the instructor know ahead of time; afterwards, talk to a classmate about what happened; ask for their lecture notes and/or visit the instructor in office hours.
2. *Do the readings ahead of time, and read 'actively'* – pay attention to what you're reading, ask yourself what point(s) the author(s) is trying to make, why this matters, what questions you'd like to ask the author, and so on.
3. *If you're having trouble with any of the course material, speak to the instructor right away* -- office hours are not just for crises; they are meant to provide you with an additional everyday means of improving your understanding of the course material.

Academic Integrity and Professional Conduct

Unless called for, Chat GPT and similar technologies are not permitted for this course. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. It is each student's responsibility to know the University's regulations in this regard. The Policy on Academic Integrity is published in [the University Calendar](#). You can also consult the [Libraries' plagiarism guide](#) or 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. Professionalism is expected from all students enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Humanities. As part of professionalism, students, faculty and staff are expected to be familiar with University policies, including the Tri-Faculty Standards.

Intellectual Property & Materials on the LMS Website

All assignments for this course and all materials posted to the LMS website are the intellectual property of the instructor and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without the instructor's permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of the instructor violates the Policy on Academic Integrity (link above). Any evidence that you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

Academic Supports

The University has a number of academic support services that may help you in this course, including the [Centre for Academic Communication](#), the [Library's Research Support page](#), and the [Library's "Ask Us" service](#). Information about academic supports can also be found through the [University's Learn Anywhere site](#).

Academic Accommodations

The University of Victoria is committed to creating a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you believe you will require academic accommodations to address barriers to your education in this course and you have not already registered with the [Centre for Accessible Learning](#), please [do so](#). The Centre for Accessible Learning is the office designated to

make arrangements for accommodations. You can find information about academic accommodations through the Centre for Accessible Learning's website.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

What follows is provisional and subject to revision at the instructor's discretion. Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class. (Students are responsible for staying apprised of any such changes.) As a default, readings for a given subject/week are listed in the order in which you should read them. 'JUW' refers to our main course textbook, *Just and Unjust Wars*. BCP refers to the Brightspace Course Pack of readings. This can be found under 'Course Tools' > 'Course Reserves'.

I. Introduction and Background

Introduction to the course	1	05-Jan-26		Introduction / No Reading Required
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II. The Philosophy of War

Violence	1	08-Jan-26	BCP	C.A.J Coady, "The Idea of Violence" in <i>Morality and Political Violence</i> . Cambridge University Press: 2008, pp. 21-42.
The Logic of War	2	12-Jan-26	BCP	Book 1 - Clausewitz, Carl von. <i>On War</i> . Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Edited by Sir Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984.
The Logic of War	2	15-Jan-26	BCP	Chapters 1-3 - Sun Tzu – Excerpt from <i>The Art of War</i> , Chapter 9 - Brodie, Bernard. <i>Strategy in the Missile Age</i> . New RAND ed. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp, 2007.
The Divisions of War	3	19-Jan-26	BCP	Hoffman, Frank G. "The contemporary spectrum of conflict: Protracted, gray zone, ambiguous, and hybrid modes of war." <i>The Heritage Foundation</i> 30 (2016).
War and Killing	3	22-Jan-26	BCP	Chapter 2 - Dyer, Gwynne. <i>War</i> . 2nd Rev ed. Toronto, Canada: Vintage, 2016. 1985.
	4	26-Jan-26	BCP	Section 1 - Grossman, L Col Dave. <i>On Killing</i> : The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society. 1st ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 1995.

III. Just War Theory – The Standard Account

War and Ethics	4	29-Jan-26	JUW	Chapter 1 – Against Realism
	5	02-Feb-26	JUW	Chapter 2 – The Crime of War
	5	05-Feb-26	JUW	Chapter 3 - The Rules of War
	6	09-Feb-26	JUW	Chapter 4 – Law and Order in International Society
	6	12-Feb-26	JUW	Chapter 8 – War's Means and the Importance of Fighting Well
Family Day / Reading Week		16-Feb-26		
Family Day / Reading Week		19-Feb-26		

	7	23-Feb-26	JUW	Chapter 9 – Non-Combatant Immunity & Military Necessity
Revisionist Just War	7	26-Feb-26	BCP	Lazar, Seth. "Just war theory: Revisionists versus traditionalists." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 20, no. 1 (2017): 37-54.
Terrorism	8	02-Mar-26	BCP	Chapter 4 - Walzer, Michael. <i>Arguing about war</i> . Yale University Press, 2008.
<u>IV Select Topics</u>				
Liberal War	8	05-Mar-26	BCP	§§13, 14 - Rawls, John. <i>The Law of Peoples ; with, the Idea of Public Reason Revisited</i> . Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.
Modern Divisions	9	09-Mar-26	BCP	Libicki, Martin C. "Cyberspace is not a warfighting domain." <i>ISJLP</i> 8 (2012): 321.
	9	12-Mar-26	BCP	Claverie, Bernard, and François Du Cluzel. "The Cognitive Warfare Concept." Innovation Hub Sponsored by NATO Allied Command Transformation 2 (2022).
Soldiers	10	16-Mar-26	JUW	Chapter 19 - War Crimes - Soldiers and their Officers
	10	19-Mar-26	BCP	Chapter 3 - Robillard, Michael, and Bradley Jay Strawser. <i>Outsourcing Duty : The Moral Exploitation of the American Soldier</i> . New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.
	11	23-Mar-26	BCP	Sherman, Nancy. <i>Afterwar : Healing the Moral Injuries of Our Soldiers</i> . New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015.
Killer Robots	11	26-Mar-26	BCP	Robillard, Michael. "No such thing as killer robots." <i>Journal of Applied Philosophy</i> 35, no. 4 (2018): 705-717.
The Extremes	12	30-Mar-26	BCP	Rawls, John, and Samuel Richard Freeman. "50 Years After Hiroshima" <i>Collected Papers</i> . Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.
	12	02-Apr-26	BCP	Nozick, Robert. "The Holocaust." Chap. 20 In <i>The Examined Life : Philosophical Meditations</i> , 236–42. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.

Summary Of Assignments and Dates

- Assignment 1
 - Assigned 5 Jan 2026
 - DUE: Midnight 19 Jan 2026
- Assignment 2- Phase 1
 - Assigned 29 Jan 2026
 - DUE: Midnight 26 Feb 2026
- Assignment 2 – Phase 2
 - Assigned – 29 Jan 2026
 - DUE: Midnight 12 Mar 2026

- Assignment 3
 - Assigned 29 Jan 2026
 - DUE: Midnight 6 April 2026

Some Important Administrative Dates

- Sun. Jan 18: last day for 100% reduction of fees.
- Wed. Jan 21: last day to for adding first-term courses.
- Sun. Feb 8: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date.
- Sat. Feb 28: last day for withdrawing from second-term courses without penalty of failure.

Other Resources

Student Resources

- a. [UVic Learn Anywhere](#). UVic Learn Anywhere is the primary learning resource for students. It offers many learning workshops and resources to help students with academics and learning strategies.
- b. [Library resources](#). Information for students wishing to use the UVic library.
- c. Indigenous [student services](#)
- d. [Centre for Academic Communication](#)
- e. [Learning Strategist Program](#)
- f. [Academic Concession Regulations](#)
- g. [Academic Concessions and Accommodations](#)
- h. Academic accommodation & access for students with disabilities – [Policy AC1205](#)
- i. [Student wellness](#) resources.
- j. [Ombudsperson](#). A resource to help resolve disputes or complaints.
- k. Other [student groups and resources](#).

University Statements and Policies

- a. University Calendar – [“Information for all students”](#)
- b. [Creating a respectful, inclusive and productive learning environment](#)
- c. [Accommodation of Religious Observance](#)
- d. [Student Conduct and Non-Academic Student Misconduct](#)
- e. [Accessibility](#)
- f. [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
- g. [Equity and Human Rights](#)
- h. [Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response](#)
- i. Discrimination and Harassment [Policy](#)