Moral Problems of Contemporary Society
Ph 232 A01 Winter 2015
CRN 22349

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Office hours: Tue 2:30-3:20, Fri 4:00-4:50, or by appointment
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Meeting times: 9:30-10:20 TWF
Classroom: ECS 124

Course description
The aim of this course is to help students think through the right and wrong of ethically significant issues of our societies, such as euthanasia, abortion, poverty, sexual relations and drugs. We begin with a discussion of the distinction between ethics and applied ethics, the role of arguments in ethics, and the relation among ethics, religion and law.

After this preamble, the course is divided into three sections. Each section introduces some relevant theories, which can then be applied to particular morally relevant problems in today’s society. The first section concerns the ethical principles that we live by as individuals. The second deals with ethical principles by which we may negotiate our relation to society. The third considers ethical principles by which we may help maintain or transform certain aspects of our world.

Section I., Principles individuals live by: right, good and fair, introduces the Kantian, the utilitarian, and the Rawlsian approaches. We consider how those perspectives may help us in thinking through our relation to animals, euthanasia, and abortion.

Section II. Principles for life in society: rights, solidarity and care, introduces Locke’s account of property rights, Singer’s notion of solidarity with the suffering, and Manning’s conception of care ethics. We consider the help that these accounts may provide us regarding hunger and poverty, women and development, and First Nations Rights.

Section III., Principles for making our world: earth, selves and connections, introduces the land ethic, Sartre’s existentialist ethics, and the Buddhist approach. We will draw on these outlooks to understand better what stand to take with regard to the natural environment, sexual relations, and drugs.

Texts and Coursespaces readings
Required text: A Coursepack, plus selected texts to be downloaded from Coursespaces (see details on the schedule of lectures below). Be attentive to announcements in class and on Coursespaces. Recommended optional supplementary: Anthony Weston, A Rulebook for Arguments (Hackett, 2009).

Course organisation and student engagement
Assigned weekly readings need to be done ahead of class lectures. Attendance during class periods, constructive participation, and tolerance with regard to the views of others will be expected. Students are responsible for materials covered, and for informing themselves about announcements missed if absent. Weekly class time will be devoted to brief presentation of key points from the material assigned and to class discussion. Attendance, constructive engagement, and performance of weekly assignments all contribute to the participation grade credit.

Tips for best performances
1. Do readings ahead of class periods and read material attentively (by asking questions about the material), and do weekly assignments.
2. Come to class, and participate in class discussion with constructive points.
3. Speak to the instructor if failing to understand the material.
Grading
Mid-term test, worth 30%
A final, comprehensive, take-home exam, worth 50%
Participation, including weekly assignments, worth 20%

1. The mid-term test will cover both readings and lectures. Both understanding and recall of material covered, and reflective analysis, will be expected. Test and exam questions may be a combination of short answer, long answer, true-false and multiple choice questions.

2. The final exam will be a comprehensive take-home exam with short answer and long answer questions. Questions will be handed out on the last day of classes, and the completed exam must be brought to the Department of Philosophy no later than 5 days after exam questions hand-out, before 3:30 p.m. Late exams will NOT be accepted (late exams will receive 0%). Exams also have to be submitted simultaneously through Coursespaces. Understanding of material covered and reflective analysis will be expected. Answers will be assessed on the basis of the following three criteria: (1) accurate presentation of the views discussed, (2) presentation of valid arguments, (3) effective and correct use of the English language.

3. Participation is assessed on the basis of a) regular attendance, b) constructive participation in class discussion, and c) weekly worksheets based on the course readings and personal analysis of the issues under discussion. Class attendance will be taken, and is particularly encouraged in the case of guest speakers. Justified absences should be discussed with the instructor ahead of time.

Other matters
Numerical and letter grades
Grades will be given as percentile marks, which are equivalent to letter grades in the following manner: A+ = 90 - 100, A = 85 - 89, A- = 80 - 84, B+ = 77 - 79, B = 73 - 76, B- = 70 - 72, C+ = 65 - 69, C = 60 - 64, D = 50 - 59, F = 0 - 49. The A range means exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance. The B range means a very good, good and solid performance. The C range means satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory, performance. D or D- indicates merely passable or marginal performance. F indicates unsatisfactory performance.

Late assignments
Late assignments will not be accepted (they will be worth 0) and exams will not be rescheduled. There will not be make-up exams. If an exam is missed for significant reasons of a medical sort (provide medical certificate), or for other serious, documented personal reasons, the final exam will be weighted so as to incorporate the weighting of the missed exam. Documented evidence for having legitimately missed an exam and an explanatory statement in writing have to be received no more than ten days after the deadline or exam missed.

Plagiarism and other policies
Academic honesty will be expected in this course. Plagiarism (e.g. copying from others or working together on the take-home exam) may lead to dismissal from the course and the university. Any matters not covered in this handout will be handled in accordance with University and Department policies.

Transition and inclusivity/diversity
Students who are new to the University, and would like assistance may contact the Transition Office, www.uvic.ca/transition. This course is committed to inclusivity and diversity, in line with the policy of the University Senate outlined in 1999, which states that “UVic is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a supportive and safe learning and working environment for all its members.”

Course Experience Survey (CES)
Towards the end of term students have the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey regarding their learning experience. It is intended to provide feedback to the university regarding the course and my teaching. In the last
two weeks of classes, you will receive an e-mail about this. If you do not receive such an invitation, you can go
directly to http://ces.uvic.ca. Class time will be set aside to do the CES.

Schedule of lectures and tests
Please note that this schedule is subject to changes. Weekly reading assignments will be specified in class, so please
be attentive to announcements both in class and on Coursespaces. Informed participation in class discussion will be
expected, so please read the assigned texts in advance. Readings are from the Coursepack and from the
Coursespaces website, unless otherwise indicated.

Week 1
5-11 Jan
Introduction and laying the groundwork
On the distinction between ethics and applied ethics, the role of arguments in ethics, and the
relation among ethics, religion and law.
Begin readings: Rachels, James “Utilitarianism”

Week 2
12-18 Jan
Section I. Principles individuals live by: right, good and fair
O’Neill, Onora, “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics” (this is the first part of “Kant’s Formula
of the End in Itself and World Hunger”, on pages 143-150 of the Coursepack)¹
Rachels, James, “Utilitarianism”,
“Rawlsian Ethics” (Coursespaces)
Continue readings: Singer, Peter, “Animal Liberation”
**Worksheets are due from this week onwards**

Week 3
19-25 Jan
Applications: animals and euthanasia
Singer, Peter, “Animal Liberation”
Regan, Tom, “The Case for Animal Rights”
Crisp, Roger, “Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism”
Continue readings: Rachels, James, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”
*21 Jan, last day for adding courses*

Week 4
26 Jan – 1 Feb
Applications: euthanasia and abortion
Rachels, James, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”
Krutzen, Rudy, “The Case of Robert and Tracy Latimer”
Marquis, Don, “Why Abortion is Immoral”
Continue readings: Thomson, Judith Jarvis, “A Defense of Abortion”

Week 5
2-8 Feb
Applications: abortion continued, review, mid-term test
Thomson, Judith Jarvis “A Defense of Abortion”
**Mid-term in-class test on the last class day of the week, 6th of February**

Week 6
9-15 Feb
READING WEEK
No new readings, no worksheets
9 February **Family Day**

Week 7
16-22 Feb
Section II. Principles for life in society: rights, solidarity and care
Locke, John, “Creation of Property”
Applications: world hunger, poverty and need
Hardin, Garret, “Living on a Lifeboat”
*Film: The Business of Hunger*
Continue readings: Singer, Peter, “Rich and Poor”

Week 8
Singer, Peter “Rich and Poor”

¹ Supplementary OPTIONAL: Dimock, Susan and Tucker, Christopher, “Kantian Deontology”.
23 Feb – 1 Mar
O’Neill, Onora “Kant’s Formula of the End in Itself and World Hunger”
Manning, Rita, “Care Ethics” (Coursespaces)
Continue readings: Shiva, Vandana, “Development, Ecology and Women”

Week 9
Applications: women, development and population, First Nations’ rights and mining
2-8 Mar
Shiva, Vandana, “Development, Ecology and Women”
Extract from “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (Coursespaces)
Dasgupta, Partha “Population, Poverty and the Local Environment” (Coursespaces)
Trudeau, P.E. “Remarks on Indian Aboriginal and Treaty Rights”
*28 February: Last day for withdrawing from courses without penalty of failure*
Continue readings: McDonald, Michael, “Aboriginal Rights”

Week 10
McDonald, Michael, “Aboriginal Rights”
9-15 Mar
Applications: the ethics of mining and power generation
Brook, Andrew, “Ethics of Wastes: The Case of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle”
Collins-Chobanian, Shari, “Environmental Racism, American Indians, and
Monitored Retrievable Storage Sites for Radioactive Waste”
*Film: Uranium*

Week 11
Section III., Principles for making our world: earth, selves and connections
16-22 Mar
Leopold, Aldo, “The Land Ethic”
Sartre, Jean-Paul, “Existentialism is a Humanism”
Brown, Karin, “Buddhist Ethics”
*Film: A Cut Above: My Grandfather Was a Logger* (To be confirmed)

Week 12
Applications: environment, sex and drugs
23-29 Mar
Garvey, James, Ethics of Climate Change: “Doing Something”, “Individual Choices” and
“Epilogue”
Punzo, Vincent, vs. Goldman, Alan, “Must sex involve commitment?” (Coursespaces)
Husak, Douglas “Drugs legalisation” (Coursespaces)

Week 13
Review, summary-conclusion
30 Mar – 5 Apr
Review, Course Experience Survey
*1 April: last Day of Classes. Final take-home exam questions handed out **

Week 14
***6th April before 3:30 p.m., final exam submission to the Dept of Philosophy AND on
Coursespaces***