

Moral Problems of Contemporary Society

Ph 232 A02 Fall 2017

CRN 12504

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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.

The remainder of 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 to live by when we think of ourselves as separate individuals. The second deals with ethical principles by which we may want to negotiate our relation to society. The third considers ethical principles by which we may want to help maintain or transform certain aspects of our world.

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

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 ethic, 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%
Participation, including weekly assignments, worth	20%
A final, comprehensive, take-home exam, worth	40%
Experiential group project	10%

1. **The mid-term test** will cover both readings and further points raised in lectures. Both understanding and recall of material covered, and reflective analysis, will be expected. Test questions will likely consist of a combination of shorter and longer answer 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 **by December 6th, NOON**. Late exams will **NOT** be accepted (they 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) explanation of key points, (2) well-developed discussion of points presented, (3) clarity, neatness, and organisation of points.

3. **Participation** is assessed the basis of a) *regular attendance and constructive participation in class discussion*, and b) *weekly assignments* based on the course readings and personal analysis of the issues under discussion, c) participation in experiential group project. *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. Both quantity and quality of assignments, and of contributions to class discussion, will be taken into account in grading.

4. **Experiential group project**: to explore one course topic together with other group members a) by visiting relevant sites in the Victoria area, b) by writing up a one-page report (per group) about observations, and c) class presentation in the final week of classes of insights of the group. Possibilities: 1) places reminding us of First Nations presence in the Victoria area, 2) places where care (or lack of care) for animals is being exhibited, 3) places where poverty and hunger are being addressed, 4) places where concerns regarding drugs are addressed, 5) where climate change or other environmental problems are being addressed, 6) places where problems regarding sexual relations are addressed. By **6 October** groups select a site/activity to visit. On **3 November** one page reports on realised visits to be handed in. Presentations will be evaluated on completeness and engagement in the (on site and background) research, and clarity of presentation to the class.

Other matters

Numerical and letter grades

Grades will be given as percentile marks. The percentile mark for the course will be converted to a letter grade 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. A grade in the B range means a very good, good and solid performance. A grade in the C+ or C range means satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory, performance. A grade of D or D- indicates merely passable or marginal performance. An F indicates unsatisfactory performance.

Late assignments

Late assignments will **not** be accepted (they will be worth 0%) and exams will **not** be rescheduled. If a test is missed for significant reasons of a medical sort (provide medical certificate), or for other serious, **documented** personal reasons, arrangements will be made to accommodate the student within reason. 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.**

Academic integrity

The University Calendar states that “Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. ... Any action that contravenes this standard, including misrepresentation, falsification or deception, undermines the intention and worth of scholarly work and violates the fundamental academic rights of members of our community.” Violations of academic integrity include plagiarism, multiple submissions, falsifying materials subject to academic evaluation, cheating on work, tests and examinations, and aiding others to cheat. Penalties for these violations vary, with first violations generally resulting in a failing grade on the work. Please familiarise yourselves with the policies at <http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2017-05/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html>

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.*”

Tentative schedule of lectures and tests

Please note that this schedule is tentative and will adjusted as we proceed through the semester. Weekly reading assignments will be confirmed 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**, unless otherwise indicated.

Week 1 4-10 Sept	<u>Introduction and laying the groundwork</u> On the distinction between ethics and applied ethics, the role of arguments in ethics, and the relation among ethics, religion and law.
Week 2 11-17 Sept	<u>Section I. Principles to live by as individuals: right, good, fair</u> RIGHT: O’Neill, Onora, “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics” (this is the <i>first</i> part of “Kant’s Formula of the End in Itself and World Hunger”, on pages 143-150 of the Coursepack) ¹ GOOD: Rachels, James, “Utilitarianism” FAIR: “Rawlsian Ethics” (Coursespaces) **Assignments are due from this week onwards** Groups for visits to Victoria sites may be explored
Week 3 18-24 Sept	<u>Applications: animals</u> Singer, Peter, “Animal Liberation” Crisp, Roger, “Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism” Regan, Tom, “The Case for Animal Rights” *22 Sept: last day for adding courses*
Week 4 25 Sept – 1 Oct	<u>Applications: euthanasia</u> Rachels, James, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” Krutzen, Rudy, “The Case of Robert and Tracy Latimer” CARE: Manning, Rita, “Care Ethics” (Coursespaces)
Week 5 2-8 Oct	<u>Applications: abortion</u> Marquis, Don, “Why Abortion is Immoral” Thomson, Judith Jarvis “A Defense of Abortion” **6 Oct: final date for groups to form and select sites to visit**

¹ Supplementary/optional: Dimock, Susan and Tucker, Christopher, “Kantian Deontology”.

Week 6 9-15 Oct	<p>Review</p> <p>*9 October, Monday, Thanksgiving Day*</p> <p>**12 October, Columbus' Arrival in the Americas**</p> <p>**11 October: Mid-term**</p> <p>*Film: <i>The Business of Hunger</i>*</p>
Week 7 16-22 Oct	<p><u>Section II. Principles for life in society: care, rights, solidarity, autonomy</u></p> <p>Applications: world hunger and poverty (continued)</p> <p>RIGHTS: Hardin, Garret, "Living on a Lifeboat"</p> <p>SOLIDARITY: Singer, Peter "Rich and Poor"</p> <p>AUTONOMY: O'Neill, Onora "Kant's Formula of the End in Itself and World Hunger" (focus on 2nd half of article)</p> <p>Optional reading: Monbiot, "The Tragedy of Enclosure" (Coursespaces)</p>
Week 8 23-29 Oct	<p>Applications: women, development and population</p> <p>Shiva, Vandana, "Development, Ecology and Women"</p> <p>Dasgupta, Partha "Population, Poverty and the Local Environment" (Coursespaces)</p> <p>Mies, Maria, "Myth of catching up development"</p> <p>Extract from "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" (Coursespaces)</p>
Week 9 30 Oct -5 Nov	<p>Applications: First Nations' rights</p> <p>RIGHTS: Locke, John, "Creation of Property"</p> <p>RIGHTS: Trudeau, P.E. "Remarks on Indian Aboriginal and Treaty Rights"</p> <p>RIGHTS: McDonald, Michael, "Aboriginal Rights", CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS (Coursespaces)</p> <p>*3 Nov: GUEST SPEAKER: Dr. Christine O'Bonsawin, ATTENDANCE REQUIRED*</p> <p>ATTENTION: <u>Meet in The Ceremonial Hall, First Nations House. PLEASE be respectful</u></p> <p>** Friday 3 Nov: deadline for one page report on realised visits **</p> <p>31 Oct: Last day for withdrawing from courses without penalty</p>
Week 10 6-12 Nov	<p>Applications: ethics of mining and power generation</p> <p>*Film: <i>Uranium</i>*</p> <p>Brook, Andrew, "Ethics of Wastes: The Case of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle"</p> <p>Collins-Chobanian, Shari, "Environmental Racism, American Indians, and Monitored Retrievable Storage Sites for Radioactive Waste"</p> <p>**11 November, Saturday, Remembrance Day**</p>
Week 11 13-19 Nov	<p><u>Section III. Principles for making our world: earth, selves and connections</u></p> <p>EARTH: Leopold, Aldo, "The Land Ethic"</p> <p>Applications: environment, sex and drugs</p> <p>Garvey, James, from <i>Ethics of Climate Change</i>: "Doing Something", "Individual Choices" and "Epilogue"</p> <p>Punzo, Vincent, vs. Goldman, Alan, "Must sex involve commitment?" (Coursespaces)</p> <p>*13-15 November, READING BREAK*</p>
Week 12 20-26 Nov	<p>Presentations of experiential group projects</p>
Week 13 27 Nov – 1 Dec	<p>Presentations of experiential group projects, <i>Course Experience Survey</i>, Final exam</p> <p>**1 December, Last Day of Classes. Final take-home exam questions handed out **</p> <p>**4 December, National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women**</p> <p>***6 December, before NOON, final exam submission (hardcopy AND on Coursespaces)***</p>