

Moral Problems of Contemporary Society

Ph 232 A02 Spring 2019

CRN 22358

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Course description

In this course we discuss ethically significant issues of our societies with a philosophical perspective. We begin with a discussion of the distinction between ethics and applied ethics, the role of arguments in ethics, and the relation of ethics to religion and to law. Throughout the remainder of the course key ethical principles and theories are introduced and applied to contemporary issues such as euthanasia, abortion, poverty, uranium mining and sexual relations. Students from all faculties are welcome.

Course objectives

- To learn about ethical theories and their application to the complexities of issues of our contemporary world.
- To carefully examine the philosophical arguments that arise surrounding the controversial issues discussed in the course.
- To sharpen our ability for critical analysis of assumptions and arguments, and how to assess their strength and weaknesses, supported by consideration of realistic cases.

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: Anthony Weston, **A Rulebook for Arguments** (Hackett).

Course organisation and student engagement

To facilitate class discussion, assigned weekly readings are to be read *ahead of class lectures*. Attendance during class periods, constructive participation and tolerance of the views of others are expected. Students are responsible for materials covered if classes are missed and are expected to ask classmates about any announcements while absent. Everyone is encouraged to be self-reflective about his or her own beliefs, and to constructively contribute to class discussion. Class time will be devoted to brief presentation of key points from the material assigned, and to class discussion. In general, all graded work will be assessed on the basis of A) care in the explanation of key points, B) quality of development of points presented, C) clarity, neatness, and organisation of points.

Tips for best performances

- Do readings ahead of class periods, and do weekly assignments.
- Come to class, and constructively participate in class discussion.
- Speak to the instructor if failing to understand the material.

Graded student activities

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| 1. Participation, including weekly assignments | 10% |
| 2. Experiential group project and presentation | 20% |
| 3. Mid-term test | 30% |
| 4. Final take-home exam | 40% |

1. **Participation.** Assessed on the basis of a) *regular attendance*, b) *constructive participation in class discussion*, c) *weekly assignments* based on the course readings and analysis of the issues under discussion. *Class attendance will be taken*, and is particularly encouraged in the case of guest speakers (justified absences on those days should be discussed with the instructor ahead of time).

Weekly response assignments

You are expected to write up a brief response to a question regarding each week's readings to help you engage with the material and concepts before the lecture. Responses should be brief (normally about one paragraph suffices), and handed in on the first day of classes every week (usually Tuesdays). Your response should be in your own words and **not** be copied from the textbook or other texts.

At the head of the page please state, in this order, a) your last and first name (e.g. JONES, Peter), b) the date assignment is due (e.g. 9 January 2018), c) the particular readings discussed (e.g. Singer and Taylor). Feedback will be given on the first sets of assignments, and occasionally thereafter (dependent on availability of TA support). At the end of the semester the total of the assignments minus the two with the lowest grades will be graded on a pass or fail basis.

2. **Experiential group project.** This group project is to provide experiential context for students to develop skills in applying ethical theories to real world settings. (This is not an exercise in research processes and involves no human subjects.) Students are expected to visit monuments and natural sites related to course content, and reflect on what they perceive there. Groups of 4-6 students (depending on class size) a) select a site in the Victoria area from the list provided, b) reflect on ethical perspectives related to the selected site, c) visit the selected site and reflect on their skills in applying ethics in practice, c) students jointly write a 2-3 page report about their experience, d) students present on their experience and reflections in class.

Schedule: by **1 February** groups select a site/activity to visit and have it approved by the instructor. Students write 2-3 page group papers (worth 50% of this grade), to be handed in on **8 March**. Presentation of group reports on the discussions (worth another 50% of this grade) will be scheduled for the last two weeks of classes. Presentations can be organised as the group best sees fit, and not everyone needs to speak as long as work is divided fairly. Reports and presentations will be evaluated on 1) understanding of the ethical theories applied, 2) engagement in the on-site visit and background research, and 3) clarity of presentation to the class.

List of sites: 1) places on campus where wild animals can be encountered, 2) monuments in Victoria that motivate reflection on economic inequality, such as the "Spirit of the Republic" monument and plaque at the B.C. Legislature, 3) locations from which the historical isolation centres for immigrants, d'Arcy Island and William Head, can be seen, 4) monuments emblematic of First Nations presence in the Victoria area, such as the whorls and totems distributed around town and the pre-contact historic site on Beacon Hill, 5) places where environmental concern is exhibited or celebrated, such as in Mystic Vale and the Peter Thomas Dixon Plaque, respectively, 6) monuments where violence against women is commemorated, such as the Plaque outside the Engineering Laboratory Wing.

3. **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.

4. **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 NOON, five (5) days after the last day of classes**. Late exams will **NOT** be accepted (they will receive 0%). **Exams also have to be submitted simultaneously through Coursespaces** (unless otherwise indicated). Understanding of material covered and reflective analysis will be expected.

Grading scale and interpretation

Percentages will convert to a letter grade according to the standard University scheme:

A+ = 90-100	B+ = 77-79	C+ = 65-69	D = 50-59
A = 85-89	B = 73-76	C = 60-64	F = 0-49

A- = 80-84 B- = 70-72

What the Grading Scale Means:

- A+, A, or A-** 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.
- B+, B, or B-** 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.
- C+ or C** 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.
- D** 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** Work that is not worthy of course credit toward the degree.

Interpretation of these grade definitions is up to the discretion of the instructor. If you receive a grade during the course that you believe is unfair, please begin by discussing the matter with the instructor (or TA) in a respectful, open-minded manner. Rest assured that if you still believe the grade you received is unfair you can appeal the matter to the chair of the department. For additional information regarding grades, please see pp. 51-53 of the most recent edition of the *Uvic Undergraduate Calendar*.

All evaluations of tests and assignments will be calculated according to *percentage scores*. Letter grades and grade point scores are listed purely for reference. Final examinations are the property of Uvic and are not returned. They are available for viewing at the Records Office according to Uvic procedures and regulations (pp. 49-51 of the calendar).

Other matters

Late assignments, extensions and plagiarism

Late weekly assignments will **not** be accepted and the test will **not** be rescheduled (no make-up exams). If a test is missed serious, **documented**, 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**. Late papers will have 5% subtracted per working day from grade unless documentation is provided of illness or family emergency. Academic honesty will be expected in this course.

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/calendar2016-09/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. Uvic is committed to providing a safe, supportive learning environment for all members.

Further information regarding Uvic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are located in the Uvic calendar (p. 15). If you have any particular concerns in our course please do not hesitate to contact me.

Counseling Services

Many, if not most, students experience some difficulties with their mental health during their years as undergraduate students. Make sure you are familiar with Uvic [Counseling Services](#), which is an excellent resource you have at your disposal on campus. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, if at any point you can benefit from help with mental health issues, please contact *Counseling Services*. They genuinely want to help, and why not take advantage of this free resource?

Important Dates

Please consult the Uvic calendar's [Academic Year Important Dates](#) for information about last possible dates to withdraw from courses without penalty, examinations period start/end dates, etc.

Technology in Classroom

Some students require laptops or voice recognition apps for their learning strategies, so I do not prohibit their use in the classroom. However, studies demonstrate that multi-tasking reduces the performance of *other nearby students*, so anyone caught on social media, internet surfing, etc. will be asked to leave and potentially subject to disciplinary action.

Academic Advising

For information about declaring a program, academic concessions or interpreting your Uvic CAPP report, please visit Undergraduate Advising or make an appointment with an adviser.

Territory Acknowledgment

The University of Victoria is committed to acknowledging and respecting the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. For information about support for indigenous students and efforts to foster reconciliation, please visit the Uvic Office of Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement.

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 7-13 Jan	<u>The origin of ethics, pleasure and happiness</u> Silberbauer, George, "Ethics in small-scale societies" (Coursespaces) Rachels, James, "Utilitarianism"
Week 2 14-20 Jan	<u>Pleasure and happiness and rights: animals</u> Crisp, Roger, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism" Singer, Peter, "Animal Liberation" Regan, Tom, "The Case for Animal Rights" Explore topics for group visits to Victoria sites **Assignments are due from this week onwards**
Week 3 21-27 Jan	<u>Rights and treating others as ends: hunger and poverty</u> **Tuesday 22 January: <i>The Business of Hunger</i>** Hardin, Garret, "Living on a Lifeboat" Singer, Peter "Rich and Poor" O'Neill, Onora, "Kant's Formula of the End in Itself and World Hunger" *23 Jan, last day for adding courses*
Week 4	<u>Rights and life: the question of euthanasia</u>

28 Jan - 3 Feb	Rachels, James, "Active and Passive Euthanasia" Krutzen, Rudy, "The Case of Robert and Tracy Latimer" **Friday 1 Feb: final date for groups to form and select sites to visit**
Week 5 4-10 Feb	<u>Rights and loss of life: the question of abortion</u> Marquis, Don, "Why Abortion is Immoral" Thomson, Judith Jarvis "A Defense of Abortion"
Week 6 11-17 Feb	<u>Care and women: development and refugees</u> Manning, "Care Ethics" Review for Mid-term ***15 February: Mid-term***
Week 7 18-24 Feb	READING WEEK No new readings, no assignments 20 February **Louis Riel Day**
Week 8 25 Feb-3 Mar	Shiva, Vandana, "Development, Ecology and Women" Extract from "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" (Coursespaces) Parekh, Serena, "Our Moral Responsibility to Refugees Goes Beyond Resettlement" (Coursespaces) Optional reading: Mies, Maria, "Myth of catching up development" *28 February: Last day for withdrawing from courses without penalty of failure*
Week 9 4-10 Mar	Rights and Indigenous people: First Nations of Canada and settler peoples ***Friday 8 March GUEST SPEAKER: Christine Sy, ATTENDANCE REQUIRED*** ATTENTION: class will meet in The Ceremonial Hall of the First Peoples House Locke, John, "Creation of Property" Trudeau, P.E. "Remarks on Indian Aboriginal and Treaty Rights" McDonald, Michael, "Aboriginal Rights" <i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Coursespaces)</i> **Friday 8 March: deadline for handing in reports on realised visits **
Week 10 11-17 Mar	<u>Utility, justice and energy politics: nuclear mining and wastes</u> *12 March, Film: Uranium* , Discussion 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"
Week 11 18-24 Mar	<u>Ethics and doing something: earth and climate change</u> Leopold, Aldo, "The Land Ethic" Garvey, James, "Doing Something", "Individual Choices" and "Epilogue" *Wed 20 March, Film: This Changes Everything*
Week 12 25-31 Mar	Pleasure and aspirational ethics: sex, intimacy and the social context Punzo, Vincent, vs. Goldman, Alan, "Must sex involve commitment?" (Coursespaces) Shpancer, Noam, "Why do we have sex?"
Week 13 1-7 Apr	Presentations of experiential group projects Course Experience Survey **Friday 5 April: LAST DAY OF CLASSES Final take-home exam questions handed out **
Week 14 8-14 Apr	***10 April, before NOON, final exam submission (hardcopy AND on Coursespaces)***