

## PHIL 232: Moral Problems of Contemporary Society



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Office Hours on Zoom:  
T, W, Th 2:30–3:00

### Course Description

William James once described philosophy as "the unusually stubborn attempt to think clearly." In this course we will take a philosophical approach to a variety of controversial and sometimes emotionally charged moral issues facing us today. Topics we will address include the treatment of non-human animals, genetic engineering, pornography, abortion, our handling of the environment, sex work, and our response to human starvation and suffering. As we approach each of these issues, we will consider what various philosophers have said makes an act right or wrong and see whether their theories help us in solving moral problems. We will make a determined effort to develop well-reasoned positions on these issues, articulating and evaluating arguments on both sides of the debates. In short, we will be thinking in a philosophical way about how we should live our lives.

### Class Meetings

All of our class meetings will be conducted over Zoom during the scheduled class time. That's 10:30 Pacific Time for the A01 section and 12:30 Pacific Time for the A02 section. You'll find the link to join the meetings on the CourseSpaces page. The same link will work for the duration of the course. The class meetings will be recorded and posted on CourseSpaces. Additional videos with essential course content — narrated slideshows with integrated quizzes — will also be posted on CourseSpaces.

### Technical Help

You'll find a link to the Zoom Help Center on CourseSpaces along with a link to UVic's *Learn Anywhere* site. That site is designed to help students navigate all aspects of UVic's online learning environment. And don't hesitate to ask me for help with any technical issues you run into. If I can't help I'll find someone who can.

### Texts

You'll need this book: Daniel DeNicola. **Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction.** Broadview Press. 2018. You can buy a digital copy direct from Broadview Press [here](#). It's also available as a paperback through the UVic Bookstore.

All of the other readings for this course will be available through the **CourseSpaces** page. To access the page, go to [coursespaces.uvic.ca](https://coursespaces.uvic.ca) and log in with your regular network ID. Please let me know immediately if you have any difficulty accessing the readings.

**Course Requirements** (See schedule below for dates.)

First Paper	25%	Take Home Exercise	20%
Second Paper	30%	Five Online Quizzes	5% each

**The papers** will be opportunities for you to develop and defend a position on one of the issues we have been discussing in class. The first paper will be 1300 words maximum. The second will be 1500 words maximum. Due dates for the papers can be found on the schedule below. Detailed instructions for the papers are available on CourseSpaces.

Help with Papers

We will discuss how to approach the paper assignment in class on May 15. Advice about how to write a philosophy paper is available now on the CourseSpaces page. Prior to the due dates for both papers the teaching assistants for the course will have additional office hours to help you with your papers. The schedule for these hours is on the CourseSpaces calendar. It is wise to start work on your paper early enough to take advantage of this extra help.

Late Papers

If you have a legitimate reason for submitting your paper late, please notify me immediately. Unexcused lateness will result in a 5% reduction in the grade for that assignment each day. No essay will be accepted for grading after **June 7** unless academic concession has been granted. For policies concerning academic concession see <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policies?group=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations>.

Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with the University Policy on Academic Integrity. It will be enforced in this course. You can find it online in the UVIC Calendar at Help with proper citation for your papers is available through the CourseSpaces page. <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policies?group=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations>

**Please Note:** Anyone who does not write both of the two assigned papers will receive a grade of N for the course.

**The Take Home Exercise** will be a short writing assignment in which you will apply two ethical theories to a particular case and evaluate their success. You'll have an opportunity to discuss the case with a group of students and with the whole class before writing up your exercise.

**The Quizzes** will be short, timed online quizzes given on CourseSpaces. You will have an 8 hour window to do each quiz. The timer will start for you when you open the quiz. If you miss a quiz due to illness or accident, contact me immediately to schedule a make-up.

To complete the quizzes you will need to sign the included Academic Integrity Pledge.

**Grading**

Letter grades for the course will be assigned using the standard university scheme:

Percentage	Grade
90 - 100	A+
85 - 89	A
80 - 84	A-
77 - 79	B+
73 - 76	B
70 - 72	B-
65 - 69	C+
60 - 64	C
50 - 59	D
Below 50	F

**Equity**

Uvic is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive, supportive and safe learning and working environment for all its members. Information about Uvic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are available at <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policy/HkQ0pzdAN> If you have any particular concerns about equity in our course please don't hesitate to contact me.

**Religious Accommodation**

Information regarding accommodation of religious observance can be located in the UVIC Calendar at <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policies?group=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations>

**Territory Acknowledgement**

The University of Victoria acknowledges with respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

**Course Schedule**

Please note that this schedule is tentative.  
 Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class and posted on CourseSpaces.  
 Also on CourseSpaces you'll find information about which sections to focus on in some of the longer readings.

M 5/11	Introduction Singer <i>All Animals are Equal . . .</i>
T 5/12	DeNicola Chapter Six: <i>Utilitarianism</i>
W 5/13	DeNicola Chapter Seven: <i>Kantianism</i> Steinbock <i>Speciesism and the Idea of Equality</i>
TH 5/14 Q1 12-8pm	Regan <i>The Case for Animal Rights</i> Varner <i>The Prospects for Consensus and Convergence in the Animal Rights Debate</i>
F 5/15	How to write a philosophy paper DeNicola Designer Baby case Sandel The Case Against Perfection DeNicola Chapter Nine: <i>Virtue Ethics</i>

M 5/18	— Victoria Day No Class Meeting —
T 5/19	Part One of the Take Home Exercise due by class time Driver <i>Individual Consumption and Moral Complicity</i>
W 5/20	Jaggar <i>Prostitution</i> Nussbaum <i>Whether from Reason or Prejudice</i>
TH 5/21	Part Two of the Take Home Exercise due by class time Klepper <i>Sexual Exploitation and the Value of Persons</i> Singer <i>Famine, Affluence and Morality</i>
F 5/22 Q2 12-8pm	Igneski <i>Defending Limits on the Sacrifices We Ought to Make for Others</i> Thomson <i>A Defense of Abortion</i>

M 5/25	<p align="center"><b>—Paper Help Day—</b>                  No Class Meeting                  Help will be available through the Zoom Office Hours Link                  10am- 11:30, 1pm - 2:30pm and 6:30pm - 8 pm</p>
T 5/26	<p align="center"><b>— First Paper Due at 10 p.m. —</b></p> <p>Warren <i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i>                  Marquis <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i></p>
W 5/27 Q3 12-8pm	<p>Dworkin <i>Life's Dominion</i>                  Little <i>Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate</i></p>
TH 5/28	<p>DeNicola <i>Chapter Eight: Contractarianism</i>                  Gardiner <i>A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption</i></p>
F 5/29 Q4 12-8pm	<p>Gambrel and Cafaro <i>The Virtue of Simplicity</i></p>

M 6/1	<p>The Philosophers' Magazine <i>Would You Eat Your Cat?</i>                  Nussbaum <i>Discussing Disgust</i></p>
T 6/2 Q5 12-8pm	<p>Husak <i>Vehicles and Crashes: Why is this Moral Issue Overlooked?</i>                  LaFollette <i>Licensing Parents</i></p>
W 6/3	<p align="center"><b>—Paper Help Day—</b>                  No Class Meeting                  Help will be available through the Zoom Office Hours Link                  10am- 11:30, 1pm - 2:30pm and 6:30pm - 8 pm  <b>— Second Paper Due at 10 p.m. —</b></p>