

Moral Problems of Contemporary Society

Ph 232 A01 Fall 2021

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Instructor: Thomas Heyd, Ph.D.
Lectures TWF 10:30 – 11:20am
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Provisional outline: Given changing circumstances in relation to Covid-19, there may be some changes to this outline before the course starts.



Territory acknowledgment

We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples, on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. This acknowledgment entails a commitment to ongoing dialogue and reconciliation with the peoples of these lands. For information about support for indigenous students and efforts to foster reconciliation, please visit the UVic Office of Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement.

Course description

In this course we discuss ethically significant issues of our societies from a philosophical perspective. We begin with a discussion of how applied ethics works, 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

All texts will be found on *the Brightspace website*. To access the website, log in with your regular network ID. Please let me know immediately if you have any difficulty accessing the readings. This website will also be used to post announcements, to give you online access to lecture notes, handouts and assignment sheets and to collect short answer assignments. Recommended optional: Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Hackett).

Course organisation and student engagement

To facilitate comprehension and class discussion, assigned weekly readings are to be read *ahead of lectures*. Constructive participation and tolerance of the views of others are expected. Everyone is encouraged to be self-reflective about his or her own beliefs, and to constructively contribute to class discussion. Throughout the course, work will be assessed on the basis of A) care in the explanation of key points, B) quality of development of points presented, C) effective and correct use of the English language and clarity, neatness, and organisation of points.

Tips for best performances

- Do readings *ahead of class periods*, read material attentively (by asking questions about the material), and do weekly assignments.
- *Participate* in class discussion with constructive contributions.
- *Contact the instructor* if failing to understand the material.

Graded student activities

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

1. **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 submitted **to Brightspace and as hardcopy by NOON, five (5) days after the last day of classes**. Late exams will **NOT** be accepted (they will receive 0%). Understanding of material covered and reflective analysis will be expected. Answers to questions will be assessed on the basis of the following three criteria: (1) accurate presentation of the views discussed and explanation of key points, (2) well-developed discussion of points presented, (3) effective and correct use of the English language and clarity, neatness, and organisation of points.

2. **The mid-term take-home test** will cover both readings and further points raised in lectures. Both understanding and reflective analysis will be expected. Test questions will likely consist of a combination of shorter and longer answer, and possibly of multiple choice, questions.

3. **Group work experiential project.** This project is to provide an *experiential* context for students to develop skills in reflecting on ethical issues by viewing them through real world settings. (This project does *not* involve human subjects.) We will establish groups of 4-6 students (depending on class size) that will choose a particular topic and associated sites from a list of options. Groups will engage with these topics and sites on the basis of course content, and a set of the questions provided. In all cases, choices need to be approved by the instructor. All health precautions regarding Covid-19 in place need to be applied in a strict manner.

To receive a grade for the group work experiential project group members have to comply with ALL four of the following steps: a) join a group by Week 4, b) submit a plan of action by Week 5, c) submit a report by Week 9, d) give a group presentation on the assigned day in the last two weeks of classes. The group report is worth 50% of the experiential project grade, and the in-class presentation is worth another 50% of the grade. Further information will be forthcoming after the start of the semester.

4. **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 expected in the case of guest speakers* (justified absences on guest speaker 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. Answers to questions posed should be in your own words and **not** copied from the textbook or other sources, be about a paragraph long, and submitted by Tuesday.

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 September 2018), c) the particular readings discussed (e.g. Singer and Taylor). Feedback will be given on the first sets of assignments, and occasionally thereafter. 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. *Both* quantity and quality of assignments will be taken into account in grading. All assignments that *pass* will be assigned 85%. *No late assignments will be accepted.* **IMPORTANT:** when submitting your assignments, title the assignment this way: LAST NAME, First name, Ph 207, Week 2 (or whatever week it is). 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. *Both* quantity and quality of assignments will be taken into account in grading. All assignments that *pass* will be assigned 85%. *No late assignments will be accepted.*

A grade in the A range will be given if all required assignments were handed in, done up to a sufficient level for receiving a pass, combined with regular attendance, and class participation was constructive; a grade in the B range

will be given if most of the assignments are handed in and most lectures have been attended and class participation was constructive; a grade in the C range will be given if less than 2/3 of assignments have been handed in and attendance has been less than 2/3 of the time; a grade in the D range will be given if half the required assignments and half the lectures were attended while class participation was constructive; any fewer assignments handed in in combination with less than half the lectures attended or non-constructive participation, may receive a grade in the F range.

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.
- N** An N grade indicates that the student did not complete one or more of the course's essential requirements. "N" is a failing grade and factors into the student's GPA as "0".

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 that you received is unfair you can appeal the matter to the Chair of the Department of Philosophy. For additional information regarding grades, including N and DEF status, please see the most recent edition of the *UVic Undergraduate Calendar*. Final examinations are the property of Uvic and will not be returned. They are available for viewing at the Records Office according to UVic procedures and regulations.

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. Grades for assignments, mid-term, group work and final exam will be posted by the submission dropboxes on Brightspace. The final course grade will be calculated according to the percentages indicated above. However, this will not be done automatically on Brightspace, so ignore the 'Grades' section on Brightspace.

Other matters

Late assignment and extensions

Late weekly assignments will *not* be accepted and tests will *not* normally be rescheduled (no make-up exams). If a test is missed for 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 a test and an explanatory statement in writing have to be received *no more than ten days after the deadline or test missed*. Late assignments will have 5% subtracted per working day from grade unless documentation of illness or family emergency is provided.

Academic integrity and University academic regulations

The University Calendar states that “Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility and... 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, unauthorized use of an editor, and aiding others to cheat. To avoid plagiarism and cheating please view the Libraries’ plagiarism guide

<https://www.uvic.ca/library/research/citation/plagiarism/>. I reserve the right to use plagiarism detection software or other platforms to assess the integrity of student work.

Penalties for violations vary, with first violations generally resulting in a failing grade on the work. Please view https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policy/Sk_0xsM_V?bc=true&bcCurrent=08%20-%20Policy%20on%20Academic%20Integrity&bcGroup=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations&bcltemType=policies. Also, please familiarise yourselves with Undergraduate Academic regulations here:

<https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/future/undergrad/index.php#/policies>.

Copyright Statement

All course content and materials are made available by instructors for educational purposes and for the exclusive use of students registered in their class. The material is protected under copyright law, even if not marked with ©. Any further use or distribution of materials to others requires the written permission of the instructor, except under fair dealing or another exception in the Copyright Act. Violations may result in disciplinary action under the Resolution of Non-Academic Misconduct Allegations policy (AC1300). Any evidence you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

Technology in the classroom

Some students require laptops or voice recognition apps for their learning strategies, so they are not prohibited 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. may be asked to leave and potentially subject to disciplinary action.

Transition

Students who are new to the University and would like assistance may contact the Transition Office, www.uvic.ca/transition.

Inclusivity/diversity

The Philosophy Department is committed to providing an environment for all students, staff, and faculty that is safe, inclusive, and respectful. We affirm the diverse identities of persons and the rights all individuals have to be treated with dignity and respect irrespective of their gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, class, or national origin. This basic commitment entails, among other things, specific recognition and support for trans, queer, two-spirited, and non-binary people, and we respect individuals’ rights to self-determination and self-description. Information about UVic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are available at www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policy/HkQ0pzdAN. If you have any particular concerns about these matters in our course please don’t hesitate to contact me. Information regarding accommodation of religious observance can be located in the UVic Calendar at <https://www.uvic.ca/equity/education/religious/index.php>.

New Student Connect Program

In case that you are a new student to UVic, you may participate in Student Connect. Participating students will be assigned in small groups by Faculty and/or interest groups to upper year peer mentors who will provide a wealth of knowledge about student life, the UVic student community, available support services, and ways that students can

get connected as needed. More information about New Student Connect can be found at:

<https://www.uvic.ca/services/studentlife/initiatives/new-student-connect/index.php>

Student Mental Health Supports / UVic Support Connect

Many, if not most, students experience some difficulties with their mental health during their years as undergraduate students. This may especially be the case during the present Covid-19 times. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, however, if at any point you believe that you could benefit from help with mental health issues, please contact the new UVic Student Wellness Centre / UVic Support Connect. In addition to providing face to face help, they offer a 24 x 7 phone & online mental health counselling and support program, no matter where you are located, at any time. This is an excellent resource at your disposal on campus. They genuinely want to help, so do consider taking advantage of this free resource.

Health Services and Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL)

A note to remind you to take care of yourself, especially in these times. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. The sooner you let any of these on-campus services know your needs the quicker they can assist you in achieving your learning goals. Resources include

- Counselling Services, already mentioned above. See <https://www.uvic.ca/services/counselling/>.
- University Health Services (UHS) provides a full-service primary health clinic for students and coordinates healthy student and campus initiatives. <http://www.uvic.ca/services/health/>
- Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Center for Accessible Learning (CAL) as soon as possible. CAL staff members are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations: <https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/>. Please note that instructors cannot provide CAL-type accommodations without CAL documentation.

Food bank and Community Cabbage

Sometimes students run out of money for food. Health restrictions permitting, these two options are available at the Students' Union: 1) "The UVSS Food Bank & Free Store is run by a team of dedicated staff and volunteers and offers all UVic students access to food essentials and free household items", see <https://uvss.ca/foodbank/>. 2) "The Community Cabbage is a student organization at the University of Victoria. We serve a free weekly hot meal to the campus community prepared from reclaimed food – edible but unsellable food donated by grocery stores. A crew of volunteers turn these ingredients into a healthy and delightful vegetarian meal at a community kitchen. Anyone is welcome to come cook with us and/or eat with us!" See <https://uviccommunitycabbage.wordpress.com/about/>.

Important dates and academic advising

Important dates for the 2020-2022 Academic Year are found here: <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/dates/>. Please consult the Important Dates for information about last possible dates to withdraw from courses without penalty, examinations period start/end dates, etc. For information about declaring a program, academic concessions or interpreting your UVic CAPP report, please visit Undergraduate Advising or make an appointment with an advisor.

Tentative schedule of lectures and tests

Please note that this schedule is tentative and will be adjusted as we proceed through the semester. Any changes to the schedule will be announced on the Brightspace website. *Informed* participation in class discussion will be expected, so *please read the assigned texts in advance*. Readings are on the Brightspace website, unless otherwise indicated.

Highly recommended in advance of classes

View films (links are on Brightspace): *The Business of Hunger*, *Uranium* and *This Changes Everything*

Do readings: Rachels, James, "The Utilitarian Approach"; optional recommended: Silberbauer, George, "Ethics in small-scale societies"

Week 1 6-12 Sept	<p><u>Introduction and situating ethics</u> Optional recommended: Silberbauer, George, "Ethics in small-scale societies" *Wednesday 8 Sept: first day of classes* **Assignments are due from Tuesday 14 of September onwards**</p>
Week 2 13-19 Sept	<p><u>Ethics: preventing suffering and the case of non-human animals</u> Rachels, James, "Utilitarianism" Mill, J.S., "Utilitarianism" Singer, Peter, "Animal Liberation" **Tuesday 14 Sept: assignment about these readings is DUE (ahead of lectures!)** **Exploration of groups and topics**</p>
Week 3 20-26 Sept	<p><u>Ethics: happiness, subjects of a life and rights</u> Crisp, Roger, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism" Regan, Tom, "The Case for Animal Rights" **Film, <i>The Business of Hunger</i>** *24 Sept: last day for adding courses*</p>
Week 4 27 Sept –3 Oct	<p><u>Ethics: treating others with respect for their autonomy</u> 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" **Friday 1 Oct: <u>Final date for groups to form and select topics and sites</u>**</p>
Week 5 4-10 Oct	<p><u>Ecological feminist ethics and patriarchal development</u> Shiva, Vandana, "Development, Ecology and Women" Dasgupta, Partha "Population, Poverty and the Local Environment" Mies, Maria, "The Myth of catching up development" Extract from "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights"</p>
Week 6 11-17 Oct	<p><u>The value of life and the right to die: euthanasia</u> Rachels, James, "Active and Passive Euthanasia" Krutzen, Rudy, "The Case of Robert and Tracy Latimer" Marquis, Don, "Why Abortion is Immoral"</p>
Week 7 18-24 Oct	<p><u>Review and Mid-term</u> Thomson, Judith Jarvis, "A Defense of Abortion" **Friday 22 Oct: MID-TERM**</p>
Week 8 25-31 Oct	<p><u>The right to property and Indigenous rights</u> Locke, John, "The Creation of Property" Trudeau, P.E., "Remarks on Indian Aboriginal and Treaty Rights" McDonald, Michael, "Aboriginal Rights" Extract from <i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</i> *31 October: Last day for withdrawing from courses without penalty of failure* **Friday 29 Oct, GUEST SPEAKER: Prof. Christine O'Bonsawin, History and Indigenous Studies, UVic** TO BE CONFIRMED</p>
Week 9 1-7 Nov	<p><u>Fairness and environmental justice</u> **Film: <i>Uranium</i>** **Tuesday 9 Nov: <u>Experiential group work reports due</u>** *10-12 November, READING DAYS* **11 November, Remembrance Day**</p>

- Week 10
8-14 Nov **Fairness and environmental justice**
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: Lewis, Avi and Klein, Naomi, *This Changes Everything*
- Week 11
15-21 Nov **Ethics and caring for the earth**
Leopold, Aldo, "The Land Ethic"
Klein, Naomi, "Introduction" and "Conclusion", *This changes everything*
Optional recommended: Siegle, Lucy, "Ethical Guide to the Anthropocene"
Manning, Rita C., "Care Ethics"
- Week 12
22-28 Nov **Ethics: sex and aspiration / Group Work Presentations**
Punzo, Vincent vs. Goldman, Alan, "Must sex involve commitment?"
Optional recommended: Shpancer, Noam, "Why do we have sex?", Booth, "The kingdom of women: the society where a man is never the boss"; Natasha McKeever, "Is the Requirement of Sexual Exclusivity Consistent with Romantic Love?"
- Week 13
29 Nov – 5 Dec **Group Work presentations + Summary-conclusion**
Friday, 3 Dec, Last Day of Classes:
****FINAL EXAM take-home exam questions handed out****
****4 December, National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women****
- Week 14
6-12 Dec *****BEFORE NOON, Wed 8 Dec: Final Exam submission to Brightspace and hardcopy to Department of Philosophy*** NO LATE SUBMISSIONS ARE ACCEPTED**