

# Moral Problems of Contemporary Society

Ph 232 A01 Spring 2021

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Instructor: Thomas Heyd, Ph.D.  
Lectures: TWF 13:30 – 14:20 live  
Videos: posted weekly by on Brightspace  
Office hours: WF 14:30-13:20 (by Zoom)  
e-mail: [heydt@uvic.ca](mailto:heydt@uvic.ca)



**Provisional outline:** Given changing circumstances in relation to Covid-19, there may be some changes to this outline before the course starts.

## Lectures

Normally lectures will be conducted over Zoom at the scheduled class time, **13:30 – 14:20 am** Pacific Time. You will find the link to join the meetings on the Brightspace website page. The same link will work for the duration of the course. **All lectures will be recorded and video recordings posted weekly** on the web page, in case that you cannot be present synchronously (no attendance taken). Lecture periods will give you an opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion. Additional materials, including videos with essential course content, will also be posted on the Brightspace website.

## 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.

## Technical Help

You'll find a link to the Zoom Help Centre on the Brightspace website 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. Don't hesitate to ask me for help with any technical issues that you run into. If I can't help, I'll find someone who can.

## 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 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. Everyone is encouraged to be self-reflective about his or her own beliefs, and to constructively contribute to class discussion. 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*, 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. Group 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 the Brightspace website **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 questions.

3. **Group project.** This group project is to provide a 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 consider a particular project from the list provided. Each group will produce a brief group report (worth 50% of the grade) on their reflections and analysis, later followed by a presentation (worth another 50% of the grade). **In view of Covid-19 precautions, projects should not require face-to-face interactions.**

*Schedule:* **By the end of the fourth week** a selection of project is to be approved by me. **By the end of the ninth week** written reports are due. Presentations will be scheduled for a date **within the last two weeks** of the course. Further information will be forthcoming after the start of the semester.

4. **Participation.** Assessed on the basis of a) *weekly assignments* based on the course readings, b) *constructive participation in class discussion* – as far as possible while online. 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 constructive class participation; a grade in the B range will be given if most of the assignments are handed in 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, while class participation was constructive; a grade in the D range will be given if half the required assignments, while class participation was constructive; any fewer assignments handed in or non-constructive participation, will receive a grade in the F range.

#### *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 (not copied from the textbook or other sources), and up to half a page long. 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 2021), 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.* Further information will be found on Brightspace.

### 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 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).

### 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.

### 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](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 a ©. *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.

#### *Transition and inclusivity/diversity*

Students who are new to the University and would like assistance may contact the Transition Office, [www.uvic.ca/transition](http://www.uvic.ca/transition). UVic is committed to providing a safe, supportive learning environment for all members. Information about UVic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are available at [www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policy/HkQ0pzdAN](http://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.

#### *Religious Accommodation*

Information regarding accommodation of religious observance can be located in the UVic Calendar at <https://www.uvic.ca/equity/education/religious/index.php>.

#### *Student Supports for Learning & Online Technologies*

Many students will be entering the fully online learning environment for the very first time this fall. Further, with the adoption of Brightspace as the new learning management system, and the addition of new technologies (e.g. Zoom, Kaltura, Crowdmark, Microsoft Teams), many students will be using these tools for the first time. Students’ “first stop” for support with any technology is the Computer Help Desk, [helpdesk@uvic.ca](mailto:helpdesk@uvic.ca). There are also numerous self-paced and live sessions offered by LTSI, as well as basic information provided in Orientation sessions. LearnAnywhere is the central portal through which students can find/access the full range of students support services including academic supports.

#### *New 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 crisis. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, but 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 2020-2021 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 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*.

### Highly recommended in advance of classes

View films: *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" (**Brightspace**)

Week 1  
4-10 Jan            **Introduction and situating ethics**  
Rachels, James, "Utilitarianism"  
Optional recommended: Silberbauer, George, "Ethics in small-scale societies" (**Brightspace**)  
**\*\*Wednesday 6 Jan: first day of classes\*\***

Week 2  
11-17 Jan         **Suffering, pleasure and rights: humans and animals**  
Singer, Peter, "Animal Liberation"  
Regan, Tom, "The Case for Animal Rights"  
Crisp, Roger, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism"  
**Explore topics for group projects**  
**\*\*Assignments due from this Tuesday, 12 of September, onwards\*\***

Week 3  
18-24 Jan         **Rights and treating others as ends: hunger and poverty**  
**\*\*Film, *The Business of Hunger*\*\***

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"  
\*22 January: last date for adding courses\*

Week 4  
25 Jan-31 Jan **Care and ecological feminist ethics: women and development**  
O'Neill, Onora, "Kant's Formula of the End in Itself and World Hunger" (Continued)  
Manning, Rita C., "Care Ethics"  
Shiva, Vandana, "Development, Ecology and Women"  
Extract from "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" (**Brightspace**)  
**\*\*Friday 29 Jan: final date for groups to form and to select group projects\*\***  
**\*\*31 February: Last Day for Withdrawing without Penalty\*\***

Week 5  
1-7 Feb **The value of life: population growth, refugees and euthanasia**  
Dasgupta, Partha "Population, Poverty and the Local Environment" (**Brightspace**)  
Parekh, Serena, "Our Moral Responsibility to Refugees Goes Beyond Resettlement" (**Brightspace**)  
Optional highly recommended reading: Mies, Maria, "The Myth of catching up development"  
Rachels, James, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"

Week 6  
8-14 Feb **The value of life and the right to die: euthanasia / Review and Mid-term**  
Krutzen, Rudy, "The Case of Robert and Tracy Latimer"  
Review  
**\*\*Friday 12 February: Mid-term\*\***

Week 7  
15-21 Feb **\*\*READING WEEK\*\***  
No new readings, no assignments  
\*15 February: Family Day\*  
\*20 February: Louis Riel Day\*  
**\*\*22 January: Last day for adding courses\*\***

Week 8  
22-28 Feb **The value of life and the right to choose: the question of abortion**  
Marquis, Don, "Why Abortion is Immoral"  
Thomson, Judith Jarvis, "A Defense of Abortion"  
**The right to property and 'improving' land: Indigenous and settler peoples**  
Locke, John, "The Creation of Property"  
**\*28 February: Last day for withdrawing from courses without penalty of failure\***

Week 9  
1-7 Mar **Treaty and ancestral rights: Indigenous and settler peoples**  
Trudeau, P.E., "Remarks on Indian Aboriginal and Treaty Rights"  
McDonald, Michael, "Aboriginal Rights"  
Extract from *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (**Brightspace**)  
**\*\*Date TBA: online GUEST SPEAKER: Prof. Christine O'Bonsawin, History and Indigenous Studies, UVic\*\***  
**\*Friday 5 March: deadline for handing in Group Project Reports\*\***

Week 10  
8-14 Mar **Fairness and environmental justice: nuclear mining and wastes**  
**\*\*Film: Uranium\***  
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  
15-21 Mar **Ethics and the value of the earth: land community and climate change**  
Leopold, Aldo, "The Land Ethic"  
**\*Film: Lewis, Avi and Klein, Naomi, This Changes Everything\***  
Klein, Naomi, "This changes everything"  
Optional recommended: Siegle, Lucy, "Ethical Guide to the Anthropocene" (**Brightspace**)

- Week 12  
22-28 Mar **Ethics and sex: aspiration, satisfaction, sociality / Student Presentations**  
Punzo, Vincent vs. Goldman, Alan, "Must sex involve commitment?" (Brightspace)  
Optional recommended: Shpancer, Noam, "Why do we have sex?" (Brightspace)
- Week 13  
29 Mar-4 Apr **Student presentations + Course Experience Survey (CES)**  
No new readings  
\*2 April: Good Friday\*
- Week 14  
5-11 Apr **Summary-conclusion and Final Exam**  
**\*\*Wednesday 7 April: last day of classes and Final take-home exam questions handed out\*\***  
**\*\*\*Exam answers to be submitted on Brightspace by NOON Monday 12 April\*\*\***  
Late answers will not be accepted!