

PHIL 232 A01  
CRN#12729

September – December 2022  
TWF: 12:30am – 1:20pm

# Moral Problems of Contemporary Society

Instructor: Scott Woodcock [he/they]  
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Office Hours: Open hours Tuesdays 1:30pm – 2:30pm  
Individual meetings via Zoom by appointment

## Course Description:

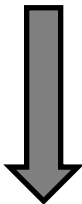
The aim of this course is to introduce students to a variety of controversial moral issues in contemporary society. In particular, students will be encouraged to carefully examine the *philosophical arguments* that arise in debates surrounding these controversial issues. The moral problems we will address in the course involve complex and often highly sensitive questions. The goal is to enable students to thoughtfully engage this subject matter and to learn how to articulate their opinions in the most persuasive way possible. The issues we will address in the course include the following: the ethics of genetic engineering, the basis for our obligation to protect the environment, the moral status of abortion, the duty to help alleviate global poverty, the ethics of prostitution, the distinctive wrong of colonization, and the possible decriminalization of addictive recreational drugs. Class participation will be strongly encouraged in order to generate thoughtful discussion of the philosophical arguments proposed in the readings and their application to current events.

**Course Website:** Online course materials will be available via Uvic *Brightspace*.

**Texts:** Readings available online via Uvic *Brightspace*.

Suggested text for reference: *Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction*  
Daniel R. DeNicola, Broadview Press, 2018

**Requirements:** First paper (10%)  
Mid-term test (20%)  
Second paper (20%)  
Final exam (40%)  
Five quote/news & comment assignments (5%)  
Two activist letters (5%)



**Note:** Writing assignment due dates and midterm test dates are posted below in the weekly schedule. *You are responsible for knowing these dates.* Plan ahead, and manage your overall personal workload accordingly.

## Grading System

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definition
90 – 100	A+	9	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically <b>superior</b> , 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.
85 – 89	A	8	
80 – 84	A-	7	
77 – 79	B+	6	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a <b>good</b> 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.
73 – 76	B	5	
70 – 72	B-	4	
65 – 69	C+	3	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an <b>adequate</b> 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.
60 – 64	C	2	
50 – 59	D	1	A D is earned by work that indicates <b>minimal</b> command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
0 – 49	F	0	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is <b>inadequate</b> and unworthy of course credit towards 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 undergraduate grades, please consult the [Grading](#) section 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 [Examinations](#) procedures and regulations.

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 [General University Policies](#), but if you have any particular concerns related to our course please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Policy on Late Assignments:** 5% per working day will be subtracted from grade unless documentation is provided of illness or family emergency.

**Plagiarism:** Review the [University Policy on Academic Integrity](#) *very carefully*, and be aware that anti-plagiarism software may be used in this course. Resources will be provided via *Brightspace* for students seeking guidance about what constitutes plagiarism and how they can avoid it, but *it is the responsibility of each student* to be informed about these details.

**Counseling:** Many students experience difficulties with mental health during their years as undergraduate students. Make sure you are familiar with Uvic [Student Wellness](#), which is an excellent resource on campus. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, but if you can benefit from help with mental health issues, then why not take advantage of this free resource? They are understaffed, but they genuinely want to help.

**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.

**Tech in Class:** Some students require laptops/tablets for their learning strategies, so I do not prohibit their use in class. However, studies prove that multi-tasking *reduces performance for nearby students*, so anyone who distracts others will be asked to leave and potentially subject to disciplinary action.

**Academic Advising:** For information about declaring a program or interpreting a CAPP report, please make an appointment with [Undergraduate Advising](#).

### **Uvic Sexualized Violence Prevention:**

Learn more about preventing sexualized violence by visiting [www.uvic.ca/svp](http://www.uvic.ca/svp). If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexualized violence and needs advice, and/or support, please contact the [Sexualized Violence Resource Office](#).

**Minor in Applied Ethics:** If you enjoy this class, you will almost certainly want to look into the requirements for the [MAE program](#).

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### **Territory Acknowledgment**

The University of Victoria is committed to acknowledging and respecting the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples 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](#).



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## Schedule of Readings and Assignments

**Note:** Dates are subject to change as we take more or less time to cover certain readings, so class attendance is essential to stay informed about up to date scheduling. All material should be read *before* the class in which it is discussed.

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic and Assigned Readings</u>
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Introduction to Moral Problems</b>
Sept. 7	First Meeting
Sept. 9	Michael J. Sandel: <i>The Case Against Perfection</i>
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Background Ethical Theory</b>
Sept. 13   Sept. 16	Daniel R. DeNicola: <i>Intro to Moral Philosophy Chapter 6: Utilitarianism</i>  Daniel R. DeNicola: <i>Intro to Moral Philosophy Chapter 7: Kantianism</i>
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Genetic Engineering and Respect for Disabled Persons</b>
Sept. 20	Julian Savulescu & Guy Kahane: <i>The Moral Obligation to Create Children with the Best Chance of the Best Life</i> [parts I & II]  Suggested = Inmaculada de Melo-Martín: <i>The Trouble with Moral Enhancement</i>
Sept. 21	Adrienne Asch: <i>Prenatal Diagnosis and Selective Abortion: A Challenge to Practice and Policy</i> + Julian Savulescu & Guy Kahane: <i>The Moral Obligation to Create Children with the Best Chance of the Best Life</i> [part III]
Sept. 23	How to Write a Philosophy Paper
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Genetic Engineering and Respect for Disabled Persons</b>
Sept. 27	Elizabeth Barnes: <i>Valuing Disability, Causing Disability</i> [parts I-IV + VI]  Suggested = David DeVidi & Catherine Klausen: <i>No Mere Difference</i>
Sept. 28	Sahar Akhtar: <i>Respecting Embedded Disability</i>  Suggested = Harriet McBryde Johnson: <i>Unspeakable Conversations</i>
<b>Sept. 30</b>	<b>National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – No Class</b>

<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Environmental Ethics</b>
Oct. 4	Joseph DesJardins: <i>Biocentric Ethics and the Inherent Value of Life</i>
Oct. 5	Ben Bradley: <i>The Value of Endangered Species</i>
<b>Oct. 7</b> 	Robert Elliot: <i>Faking Nature</i> <b>*** First Writing Assignment Due ***</b>
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>Collective Action Problems</b>
Oct. 11	Garrett Hardin: <i>The Tragedy of the Commons</i>  Suggested = Simo Kyllonen: <i>Climate Change, No-Harm Principle, and Moral Responsibility of Individual Emitters</i>
Oct. 12	Review
<b>Oct. 14</b>	<b>*** Midterm Test ***</b>
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>The Moral Status of Abortion – Part One</b>
Oct. 18 	Mary Anne Warren: <i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i>  Suggested = Cixin Liu: <i>The Village Teacher</i>
Oct. 21	Don Marquis: <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i>  Suggested = Skott Brill: <i>The Identity Objection to the Future-like-ours Argument</i>
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>The Moral Status of Abortion – Part Two</b>
Oct. 25 	Judith Jarvis Thomson: <i>A Defense of Abortion</i>
Oct. 28	Margaret Olivia Little: <i>Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate</i>  Suggested = Fiona Woollard: <i>Mother Knows Best: Pregnancy, Applied Ethics, and Epistemically Transformative Experiences</i>
<b>Week 9</b>	<b>The Moral Status of Prostitution + Sex Robots</b>
Nov. 1	Martha Nussbaum: “ <i>Whether from Reason or Prejudice</i> ”
Nov. 2	Scott A. Anderson: <i>Prostitution and Sexual Autonomy</i>
Nov. 4	John Danaher: <i>The Symbolic-Consequences Argument in the Sex Robot Debate</i>

<p><b>Week 10</b></p> <p>Nov. 8</p> <p>Nov. 9-11</p>	<p><b>Obligations to Persons in Need of Aid</b></p> <p>Peter Singer: <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality</i> + Peter Singer: <i>What Should a Billionaire Give—and What Should You?</i></p> <p><b>Fall Reading Break – No Class</b></p>
<p><b>Week 11</b></p> <p>Nov 15</p> <p>Nov. 16</p> <p>Nov. 18</p>	<p><b>Global Poverty and Just Restitution</b></p> <p>Robert Noggle: <i>Give Till It Hurts? Beneficence, Imperfect Duties, and a Moderate Response to the Aid Question</i></p> <p>Suggested = Elizabeth Ashford: <i>Obligations of Justice and Beneficence...</i></p> <p>Judith Lichtenberg: <i>Negative Duties, Positive Duties, and the “New Harms”</i></p> <p>Suggested = Thomas Pogge: <i>“Assisting” the Global Poor</i></p> <p>Todd Calder: <i>Shared Responsibility, Global Structural Injustice, and Restitution</i></p>
<p><b>Week 12</b></p> <p>Nov. 22</p> <p>Nov. 23</p> <p><b>Nov. 25</b></p> 	<p><b>The Wrong(s) of Colonialism</b></p> <p>Anna Stilz: <i>Occupancy Rights and the Wrong of Removal</i> [Parts I and III]</p> <p>Suggested = Margaret Moore: <i>The Taking of Territory and the Wrongs...</i></p> <p>Lea Ypi: <i>What’s Wrong with Colonialism</i> [Parts I-III, VII-VIII, &amp; X-XI]</p> <p>Glen Sean Coulthard: <i>Seeing Red</i> (ch. 4 from <i>Red Skin, White Masks</i>)</p> <p><b>*** Writing Assignment #2 Due ***</b></p>
<p><b>Week 13</b></p> <p>Nov. 29</p> <p>Nov. 30</p> <p><b>Dec. 2</b></p> 	<p><b>Racism and The Decriminalization of Drugs</b></p> <p>Douglas Husak: <i>Four Points about Drug Decriminalization</i></p> <p>Suggested = Dan Baum: <i>Legalize it All</i></p> <p>Peter De Marneffe: <i>Against the Legalization of Heroin</i></p> <p>Suggested = Brian D. Earp: <i>Racial Justice Requires Ending the War on Drugs</i></p> <p>Neil Levy: <i>Am I Racist? Implicit Bias and the Ascription of Racism</i></p> <p><b>*** Last Day to Submit Q&amp;C Assignments ***</b></p> <p><b>*** Last Day to Submit Activist Letters ***</b></p>

<b>Dec. 5</b>	Review [Note: this is a <b>Monday</b> that Uvic scheduled to replace Sept 30 <sup>th</sup> .]
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**Warning:** there will be a **Registrar Scheduled Exam in December**. I do not control the date of this exam, and I don't have the power to change this date once it is scheduled. Therefore, *do not book travel during the exam schedule* until you know this date.

## Class Discussion

We will try to include as much interactive discussion in class as we can while at the same time staying on schedule. Our goal will be to create an environment in class where ideas are discussed with a *common goal* of thoughtful engagement and learning as much as we can about arguments that can be put forward in favour of different viewpoints.

Establishing this kind of cooperative environment is not always easy. The topics we will be discussing are controversial, and they are sometimes associated with sharp divisions in the different perspectives at stake. Moreover, these divisions are amplified by incentives from social media to view moral debate in ruthlessly competitive terms. This course will aim to provide an entirely different opportunity for discussion compared to those hostile forums. Rather than trying to 'win' debates against perceived enemies, class discussion will be organized to encourage students work together to learn as much as possible about different perspectives.

What will this mean in practice? It means that we will try to get participation from many different students in class, and we will expect all contributions to discussion to remain as *respectful* as possible. If you are someone who finds the modern emphasis on promoting equity, diversity and inclusion too much of a 'hindrance' on your right to free speech, this is not the course for you. Conversely, if you find it too difficult to engage with opposing viewpoints you find offensive no matter how respectfully they are articulated, this will be a difficult course for you to endure. Our will be to promote an environment in which all students can work together to examine controversial topics in a cooperative manner.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Please read these over so you can anticipate common issues before it is too late. If you have any further questions about the answers provided here please don't hesitate to ask.

**Q: Do I really need to read the material before class? It's hard to understand.**

**A:** Yes, *make the effort*. We can sort things out in class, but reading the material on your own first will prepare you for class and help you to understand the content at stake.

**Q: Do I need to complete each of the course requirements to pass the course?**

A: No, in this particular course (unlike some other courses at Uvic), I do not require each of the various tests/assignments to be completed for an overall pass. So, for example, if you are unable to complete a certain assignment, you can still pass the course.

**Q: I'm having a difficult week in terms of workload in my other courses and hours at my job (that I need to pay for school). Can I have an extension?**

A: No. I genuinely sympathize with these requests, but I do not grant extensions based on workload rather than illness or family emergency so **please do not ask me this**. As stressful as workload issues are for students, I can't compare the workloads different students in the class might be facing without my knowledge. All I can do is give due dates well in advance and recommend that students plan accordingly.

**Q: I'm over the word count. Does this really matter?**

A: Would I include it in the instructions if it didn't? If you are only a few words over I won't give you a zero, but still: use the opportunity to work on *editing* your writing.

**Q: Are you willing to look over drafts of our assignments?**

A: I'm not against it in principle, but in a large class it's not always feasible. Still, if you finish early enough I'll do my best to make time. More often it's helpful to send me a provisional outline of your argument so that I can make suggestions.

**Q: I didn't read the instructions for the Q&C Assignments. Now it's the last week of class. Can I hand in retroactive assignments on readings we already covered?**

A: No. It defeats the point of the assignment. Read instructions. Read course outlines.

**Q: I'm not feeling well, but *maybe* I'm ok to write the test. Should I just try and see what happens? I can always just quit and write it again later, right?**

A: No. I respect students trying to tough things out, but think it over procedurally from the perspective of the university: it is 100% reasonable to delay a test due to student illness, but it is another thing entirely to let a student see the contents of that test and then have a second try at it. Therefore, if you think you might not be well enough to write an exam, then *do not write that exam*. Contact me instead.

**Q: There are so many great courses on the MAE list of electives. How do I choose?**

A: I don't know! There are just so many options. ☺