

PHIL 232: Moral Problems of Contemporary Society



Instructor: Karen Brown
Email: klbrown@uvic.ca

Office Hours: Immediately
following class on Tuesdays,
Wednesdays and Thursdays

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, criminalizing drugs, 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.

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 **Brightspace** page. To access the page, go to bright.uvic.ca and log in with your regular network ID. Please let me know right away if you have any difficulty accessing the readings.

Course Requirements

(See schedule below for dates.)

Five Quizzes 6% each	First Paper 25%
Panel Discussion 15%	Second Paper 30%

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 Brightspace.

Help with Papers

We will discuss how to approach the paper assignment in class on May 13. Advice about how to write a philosophy paper is available now on the Brightspace page. Prior to the due dates for both papers Claire Jansen-Faught, the teaching assistant for the course, and I will have additional office hours to help you with your papers. 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/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/HJjAxiGO4?bc=true&bcCurrent=11%20-%20Academic%20Concessions&bcltemType=policies>.

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/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/Sk_0xsM_V?bc=true&bcCurrent=08%20-%20Policy%20on%20Academic%20Integrity&bcltemType=policies

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

The quizzes will be online quizzes given on Brightspace. On quiz days class will end early, giving you an opportunity to do the quiz during the scheduled class time. If you prefer, you can do the quiz later that day. You'll have until 8pm to complete each quiz. Quiz One is not a timed quiz — you can open it to read the questions and then come back to answer them later. All of the other quizzes are timed, so once you open the quiz a timer will start and you will not be able to reopen the quiz once you close it.

All of the quizzes are open-book and open-notes, but you must complete the quizzes on your own.

If you miss a quiz due to illness or accident, contact me immediately to schedule a make-up.

The panel discussion will be a group presentation applying ethical theories to a particular topic and leading class discussion of that topic. You'll sign up for a topic on Wednesday, May 11. Details about the assignment are available on Brightspace.

Grading

Grades for the course will be assigned using the UVIC Undergraduate Grading Scale:

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	N or F

A+, A, or A- is 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.

B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates **good** comprehension of the course material, good command of the skills needed to work with it, and full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application.

C+ or C is 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 is 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.

N indicates that the course requirements were not completed.

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/future/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/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/r1q0gofdN?bc=true&bcCurrent=10%20-%20Accommodation%20of%20Religious%20Observance&bcGroup=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations&bcltemType=policies>

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 Brightspace. Also on Brightspace you'll find information about which sections to focus on in some of the longer readings.

M 5/9	Singer <i>All Animals are Equal . . .</i>	
T 5/10	DeNicola Chapter Six: <i>Utilitarianism</i>	
W 5/11	DeNicola Chapter Seven: <i>Kantianism</i> Steinbock <i>Speciesism and the Idea of Equality</i>	SIGN UP FOR A PRESENTATION TOPIC TODAY
TH 5/12	Regan <i>The Case for Animal Rights</i> Varner <i>The Prospects for Consensus and Convergence in the Animal Rights Debate</i>	Quiz 1 11:50 am - 8 pm
F 5/13	DeNicola Chapter Nine: <i>Virtue Ethics</i> Driver <i>Individual Consumption and Moral Complicity</i>	INITIAL GROUP MEETING in CLASS TODAY

M 5/16	The Philosophers' Magazine <i>Would You Eat Your Cat?</i> Nussbaum <i>Discussing Disgust</i>	Quiz 2 11:50 am - 8 pm
T 5/17	Sandel <i>The Case Against Perfection: What's Wrong with Designer Children, Bionic Athletes, and Genetic Engineering</i> Kamm <i>What Is and Is Not Wrong with Enhancement</i>	Panel on Genetic Engineering
W 5/18	Jaggar <i>Contemporary Western Feminist Perspectives on Prostitution</i> Nussbaum <i>Whether from Reason or Prejudice</i> Klepper <i>Sexual Exploitation and the Value of Persons</i>	Panel on Sex Work
TH 5/19	Singer <i>Famine, Affluence and Morality</i> Igneski <i>Defending Limits on the Sacrifices We Ought to Make for Others</i>	Panel on Humanitarian Aid
F 5/20	—Paper Help Day— No Class Meeting Karen and Claire will be available to help you 10:00 am - 11:30 am and 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm	Quiz 3 11:50 am - 8 pm

M 5/23	— Victoria Day No Class Meeting —	
T 5/24	LaFollette <i>Licensing Parents</i> Thomson <i>A Defense of Abortion</i>	First Paper Due at 8 p.m.
W 5/25	Warren <i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i> Marquis <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i>	Panel on Abortion
TH 5/26	Dworkin <i>Life's Dominion</i> Little <i>Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate</i>	
F 5/27	DeNicola Chapter Eight: <i>Contractarianism</i> Gardiner <i>A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption</i>	Quiz 4 11:50 am - 8 pm

M 5/30	Gambrel and Cafaro <i>The Virtue of Simplicity</i> Husak <i>Four Points about Drug Decriminalization</i>	
T 5/31	Sher <i>On the Decriminalization of Drugs</i> De Marneffe <i>Against the Legalization of Heroin</i> Shapiro <i>Individual Rights, Drug Policy and the Worst-Case Scenario</i> Hunt <i>Epilogue: What Good are Drugs Anyway?</i>	Panel on Drugs
W 6/1	—Paper Help Day— No Class Meeting Karen and Claire will be available to help you 10:00 am - 11:30 am and 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm Last Day of the Course	Quiz 5 11:50 am - 8 pm
TH 6/2		Second Paper Due at 8 p.m.