

## Phil 232 Moral Problems of Contemporary Society Spring 2023

Instructor: Peter Dietsch, PhD  
Lectures: TWF 1:30-2:20  
Office hours: tbd  
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### Course description

We will discuss ethical issues facing contemporary societies. Specifically, the course will touch on ethical questions regarding education, health, race relations, climate change, borders, natural resources, assisted dying, human enhancement, corporations, tax justice, money, and private debt markets. Students from all faculties are welcome.

### Course Website

Online materials will be made available via Uvic Brightspace. Access your customized Brightspace page by signing in to Uvic and clicking on Online Tools. You should see Brightspace as an option.

### Texts

Core readings will be available as a course pack for sale at the UVic Bookstore.

### 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 TA in a respectful, open-minded manner. If you are still not satisfied with your grade, you can ask for a re-correction of the copy by the instructor. The new grade will count, whether it is higher or lower than the original one.

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.

### **Graded student activities**

- 1500-word essay (40%) due on 1 March  
[5 percentage points penalty for each 100-word increment over 1500 words, excluding footnotes and bibliography – *everything* else counts; e.g. 1507 words => 5 percentage points penalty; 1623 words => 10 p.p. penalty]
- 2-hour final exam (50%)
- Weekly summaries of readings (400 words; 10 weeks out of 12; 10%)

### **Policy on Late Assignments**

5% per working day will be subtracted from grade unless students are delayed by 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 Services**

Many, if not most, students experience some difficulties with their mental health during their years as undergraduate students. Make sure you are familiar with [Uvic Counseling Services](#), which is an excellent resource you have at your disposal on campus. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, but if at any point you can benefit from help with mental health issues, please contact Counseling Services. They genuinely want to help, and why not take advantage of this free resource?

### **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.

### **Technology in Classroom**

Some students require laptops or voice recognition apps for their learning strategies, so I do not prohibit their use in the classroom. However, studies demonstrate that multi-tasking reduces the performance of other nearby students. Therefore, I strongly

discourage the use of computers in the classroom. Anyone caught on social media, internet surfing, etc. will be asked to leave and potentially subject to disciplinary action.

### **Uvic Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response**

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 in EQHR, Sedgewick C119; email: [svpcoordinator@uvic.ca](mailto:svpcoordinator@uvic.ca).

### **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 W SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. For information about support for indigenous students and efforts to foster reconciliation, visit the Uvic [Office of Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement](#).

### **Detailed course plan**

#### **Week 1 (Jan 10-13): introduction and equal opportunity in education**

##### **Tuesday, Jan 10: Introduction**

###### *Complementary literature*

- Dennis Thomson, “Philosophy and Public Policy”, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 14/2 (1985), 205-18.
- Jonathan Wolff, *Ethics and Public Policy – A Philosophical Inquiry*, Routledge, 2011, chapter 9.

##### **Wednesday, Jan 11 and Friday, Jan 13: Equal opportunity in education**

###### *Compulsory reading*

- Michael Walzer, “Education”, dans: Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, New York, Basic Books, 1983.

###### *Complementary literature*

- Amy Gutman, “Civic Education and Social Diversity”, *Ethics* 105/3 (1995): 557-79.
- Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, “Defending liberalism in education theory”, dans: *Journal of Education Policy*, 18/4 (2003), 355-73.
- Bernard Williams, “The Idea of Equality”, in P. Laslett and W.G. Runciman (eds.) *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, second series, Oxford, Blackwell, 1962.

#### **Week 2 (Jan 17-20): The allocation of health resources**

###### *Compulsory reading*

- Dan W. Brock, “Ethical Issues in the Use of Cost Effectiveness Analysis for the Prioritisation of Health Care Resources”, in: Sudhir Anand, Fabienne Peter, Amartya Sen (éds.), *Public Health, Ethics, and Equity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

###### *Complementary literature*

- Amartya Sen, “Why Health Equity?”, dans: Sudhir Anand, Fabienne Peter, Amartya Sen (eds.), *Public Health, Ethics, and Equity*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

- Norman Daniels, “Health-Care Needs and Distributive Justice”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10/2 (1981), 146-79.

### **Week 3 (Jan 24-27): Segregation and social inequality**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Elizabeth Anderson, “The Future of Racial Integration”, in Laurence Thomas, ed., *Social Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 229-249.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Iris Marion Young, “Residential Segregation and Regional Democracy”, in: Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, 2002, chapter 6.
- Charles Tilly, “Chain Migration and Opportunity Hoarding”, in: Charles Tilly, *Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties*, Routledge, 2006, chapter 10.

### **Week 4 (Jan 31 - Feb 3): The ethics of climate change**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Stephen M. Gardiner, “Ethics and Global Climate Change”, *Ethics* 114/3 (2004): 555-600.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Simon Caney, “Global Justice, Rights and Climate Change”, *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* vol.XIX no.2 (2006), pp.255-278.
- Peter A. Victor, *Managing Without Growth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Edward Elgar, 2019, especially chapters 1 and 2.

### **Week 5 (Feb 7-10): Borders**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Lea Ypi, “Justice in Migration: A Closed Borders Utopia?”, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 16/4 (2008): 391–418.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Michael Blake, “The right to exclude”, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* Vol. 17, No. 5 (2014), 521–537
- Joseph H. Carens, “Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders” dans : Ronald Beiner (ed.) *Theorizing Citizenship*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1995 [1987]), 229-253.

### **Week 6 (Feb 14-17): Natural resources**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Margaret Moore, “Natural Resources, Territorial Right, and Global Distributive Justice”, *Political Theory* 40/1 (2012), 84-107.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Cara Nine, “Rights to the Oceans: Foundational Arguments Reconsidered”, *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 36/4 (2019): 626-42.
- Leif Wenar, “Property rights and the resource curse”, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36/1 (2008), 2-32.

### *READING WEEK*

### **Week 7 (Feb 28 - Mar 3): Assisted Dying**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Physician-Assisted Suicide: Two Moral Arguments”, *Ethics* 109/3 (1999), 497-518.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapter 7.
- James Rachels, “Killing and Letting Die”, *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Lawrence Becker and Charlotte Becker (eds.), New York: Routledge, 2001, vol.2, pp.947-50.
- Dan W. Brock, “Medical Decisions at the end of life”, in: Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer (eds.), *A Companion to Bioethics*, Blackwell, 1998.

### **Week 8 (Mar 7-10): Human enhancement**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Michael J. Sandel, *The case against perfection*, Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, chapter 1.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Paul Robinson, “Prenatal Screening, sex selection and cloning”, in: Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer (eds.), *A Companion to Bioethics*, Blackwell, 1998.
- Dan W. Brock, “Cloning Human Beings : An Assessment of the Ethical Issues Pro and Con”, in: Martha C. Nussbaum and Cass R. Sunstein, *Clones and Clones : Facts and Fantasies about Human Cloning*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1998.

### **Week 9 (Mar 14-17): Private government**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government. How Employers Rule Our Lives (and How We Don't Talk about It)*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, chapter 2.

#### *Complementary literature*

- David Ciepley, “Beyond Public and Private: Toward a Political Theory of the Corporation”, *American Political Science Review* 107/1 (2013): 139-58.
- Joseph Heath, Jeffrey Moriarty and Wayne Norman, “Business ethics and (or as) political philosophy”, *Business Ethics Quarterly* 20/3 (2010): 427-52.

### **Week 10 (Mar 21-24): Tax justice**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Daniel Halliday, “Justice and Taxation”, *Philosophy Compass* 8/12 (2013): 1111–1122.
- Peter Dietsch and Thomas Rixen, “Tax Competition and Global Background Justice”, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 22/2 (2014): 150-77.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Liam Murphy and Thomas Nagel, *The Myth of Ownership: Taxes and Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, chapter 2.

- Adam Kern, “Illusions of Justice in International Taxation”, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 48/2 (2020): 151-84.

### **Week 11 (Mar 28-31): Normative dimensions of money**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Robert Hockett and Aaron James, *Money from Nothing. Or, why we should learn to stop worrying about debt and love the Federal Reserve*. Brooklyn/London: Melville House, 2020, chapters 2 and 3.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Peter Dietsch, “Money creation, debt, and justice”, *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 20/2 (2021): 151-79.
- Pavlina Tcherneva, “Money, power, and distribution: Implications for Different Monetary Regimes”, *Journal of Self-Governance and Management Economics* 5/3 (2017): 7-27.

### **Week 12 (Apr 5-6): Private debt markets**

#### *Compulsory reading*

- Lisa Herzog, “What Could Be Wrong with a Mortgage? Private Debt Markets from a Perspective of Structural Injustice”, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 25/4 (2016): 411-34.

#### *Complementary literature*

- Alex Gourevitch, “Debt, Freedom, and Inequality”, *Philosophical Topics* 40/1 (2012): 135-51.
- Marco Meyer, “The right to credit”, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26/3 (2018): 304-26.
- Boudewijn De Bruin, Lisa Herzog, Martin O’Neill, and Joakim Sandberg, “Philosophy of Money and Finance”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018.