Phil 232 Moral Problems of Contemporary Society
Spring 2027

Instructor: Peter Dietsch, PhD
Lectures: MR 10:00-11:20
Office hours: Wednesdays, 2-4pm, Clearihue Building, office B309
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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 artificial intelligence. Students from all faculties are welcome.

Learning outcomes
This course is designed to provide you with the following:
- Introduce you to ways in which we can analyse important contemporary challenges our societies face from the perspective of morality
- Provide an overview of moral questions in diverse social contexts, ranging from education and health, via climate change, to economic issues
- Improve your ability to think critically about arguments presented in these contexts
- Improve your writing skills

Course Website
Online materials will be made available via Uvic Brightspace. Access your customized Brightspace page by singing in to Uvic and clicking on Online Tools.

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

Graded student activities
- Mid-term exam* on February 11 (25%)
- 1500-word essay (20%) due on March 11
  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*, date tbd (30%)
- Once a week (when we start a new topic), you are expected to participate in a short (7-8 minutes) in-class writing assignment based on the weekly reading, 8 out of 11 will count towards your grade (2% each; 16% total; no extensions, no make-up exams, no accommodations since evaluation is based on pass/fail)
- Attendance (9%)

The instructor reserves the right to ask for and discuss with the student preparatory material for any formal assignment such as take-home exams. Failure to respond to questions about this material will result in an 'F' for the assignment in question.
* Exams missed for ineligible reasons will not be rescheduled. Deferred exams will have a more limited choice of questions.

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 **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.
85 – 89	A	8	
80 – 84	A-	7	
77 – 79	B+	6	A B+, B, or B- is 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.
73 – 76	B	5	
70 – 72	B-	4	
65 – 69	C+	3	A 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.
60 – 64	C	2	
50 – 59	D	1	A 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.
0 – 49	F	0	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is **inadequate** 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.

Policy on Late Assignments

5% per working day will be subtracted from grade unless students are delayed by illness or family emergency. No late submissions are accepted for weekly quote & comments.

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.

Academic Integrity and Professional Conduct
Chat GPT and similar technologies are not permitted for this course. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. It is each student's responsibility to know the University's regulations in this regard. The Policy on Academic Integrity is published in the University Calendar. You can also consult the Libraries' plagiarism guide or the Tri-Faculty Standards for Professional Behavior for Students, which draws together a number of existing UVic policies in one place for ease of reference. Professionalism is expected from all students enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Humanities. As part of professionalism, students, faculty and staff are expected to be familiar with University policies, including the Tri-Faculty Standards.
Assignments using AI will receive a zero grade and may further be reported for academic dishonesty.

Technology in Classroom
Laptops, tablets, and mobile phones are not allowed in the classroom unless students *either* have an accommodation letter from the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) *or* have been granted an exception in response to a written request to the professor. Using electronic devices is a source of distraction for the student using them as well as for others in the classroom. More importantly, studies show that note taking by hand leads to better learning outcomes.

Uvic Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response
Learn more about preventing sexualized violence by visiting 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.

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, visit the Uvic Office of Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement.

Other Resources
a. UVic Learn Anywhere. UVic Learn Anywhere is the primary learning resource for students. It offers many learning workshops and resources to help students with academics and learning strategies.

b. Library resources. Information for students wishing to use the UVic library.
c. Indigenous student services
d. Academic Skills Centre
e. Learning Strategist Program
f. Academic Concession Regulations
g. Academic Concessions and Accommodations
h. Academic accommodation & access for students with disabilities – Policy AC1205
i. Student wellness resources.
j. Ombudsperson. A resource to help resolve disputes or complaints.
k. Other student groups and resources.

Detailed course plan

Jan 7: 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.

Jan 11 and 14: Equal opportunity in education

Compulsory reading

- Michael Walzer, "Education", dans: Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, New York, Basic Books, 1983, pp.197-226.

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.

Jan 18 and 21: 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, pp.201-23.

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.

Jan 25 and 28: 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.

Feb 1 and 4: The ethics of climate change

Compulsory reading

- Simon Caney "Two Kinds of Climate Justice: Avoiding Harm and Sharing Burdens", *Journal of Political Philosophy* 22/2 (2014): 125-49.

Complementary literature

- Stephen M. Gardiner, "Ethics and Global Climate Change", *Ethics* 114/3 (2004): 555-600.
- 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*, 2nd edition, Edward Elgar, 2019, especially chapters 1 and 2.

Feb 8: 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.

Feb 11: mid-term exam

February 22 and 25: 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.

March 1 and 4: Assisted Dying

Compulsory reading

- Tania Salem, "Physician-Assisted Suicide: Promoting Autonomy or Medicalizing Suicide?", *The Hastings Center Report* 29/3 (1999): 30-36.
- Naïma Hamrouni and Jocelyn Maclure, "Between precedent autonomy and the patient's best interests: a reasonable path for advance medical assistance in dying requests", in: Ben P. White (ed.), *Research Handbook on Voluntary Assisted Dying Law, Regulation and Practice*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2025, pp.211-28.

Complementary literature

- Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Physician-Assisted Suicide: Two Moral Arguments", *Ethics* 109/3 (1999), 497-518.
- Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapter 7.
- James Rachels, "Killing and Letting Die", *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2nd edition, Lawrence Becker and Charlotte Becker (eds.), New York: Routledge, 2001, vol.2, pp.947-50.

March 8 and 11: 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.

March 15 and 18: Tax justice

Compulsory reading

- Daniel Halliday, "Justice and Taxation", *Philosophy Compass* 8/12 (2013): 1111–1122.
- Peter Dietsch, "Should International Tax Competition be Regulated?" in: Conrad Heilmann & Julian Reiss (eds.), Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Economics, Routledge, 494-503.

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.

March 22 and 25: 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.

April 1 and 5: The ethics of artificial intelligence

Compulsory reading

- John Danaher, "The Threat of Algocracy: Reality, Resistance and Accommodation", *Philosophy & Technology* 29 (2016): 245-68.

Complementary literature

- Deborah G. Johnson, "Algorithmic accountability *in the making*", *Social Philosophy & Policy* 38/2 (2021): 111-27.
- Martin Gibert, "The case for virtuous robots", *AI and Ethics* (2022), https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-022-00185-1.