Moral Problems of Contemporary Society
Ph 232 A01 Spring 2020
CRN 22328

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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.

Texts and Coursespaces readings
Required text: A Coursepack, plus selected texts to be downloaded from Coursespaces (see details on the schedule of lectures below). Be attentive to announcements in class and on Coursespaces. 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. Students are responsible for materials covered if classes are missed and are expected to ask classmates about any announcements while absent. Everyone is encouraged to be self-reflective about his or her own beliefs, and to constructively contribute to class discussion. Class time will be devoted to brief presentation of key points from the material assigned, and 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, and do weekly assignments.
• Come to class, and constructively participate in class discussion.
• Speak to the instructor if failing to understand the material.

Graded student activities
1. Participation, including weekly assignments 10%
2. Experiential group project and presentation 20%
3. Mid-term test 30%
4. Final take-home exam 40%
1. **Participation.** Assessed on the basis of a) *regular attendance*, b) *constructive participation in class discussion*, c) *weekly assignments* based on the course readings and analysis of the issues under discussion. *Class attendance will be taken*, and is particularly encouraged in the case of guest speakers (justified absences on those days should be discussed with the instructor ahead of time).

**Weekly assignments**
You are expected to write on each week’s readings to help you to engage with the material and concepts before the lecture. Answers should be about a paragraph long, and handed in on the first day of classes every week (usually Tuesdays). 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 2018), c) the particular readings discussed (e.g. Singer and Taylor). Feedback will be given on the first sets of assignments, and occasionally thereafter (dependent on availability of TA support). At the end of the semester the total of the assignments minus two will be graded on a pass or fail basis. *Both quantity and quality of assignments will be taken into account in grading.* Further information will be found on Coursespaces.

2. **Experiential group project.** This group project is to provide *experiential context* for students to develop skills in reflecting on ethical issues by viewing them through real world settings. (This is *not* an exercise in research processes and involves no human subjects.) Groups of 4-6 students (depending on class size) visit an emblematic site in the Victoria area from the list provided and produce a brief group report (worth 50% of the grade) on their reflections and analysis, followed by a presentation in class (worth another 50% of the grade).

 schedule: By the end of the fourth week groups need to be set up and have selected a site to visit and have it approved by the instructor. By the end of the ninth week reports on realised visits are to be handed in. Group presentations will be scheduled for a date within the last two weeks of the course. Presentations will be evaluated on 1) care in the presentation of relevant ethical principles, 2) care shown in the discussion of those ethical principles in relation to the real world setting, 3) completeness and engagement in the research (on site and background), and 4) clarity, neatness and organisation of the presentation to the class. For further information, see the handout that will be placed on Coursespaces.

3. **The mid-term test** will cover both readings and further points raised in lectures. Both understanding and recall of material covered, and reflective analysis, will be expected. Test questions will likely consist of a combination of shorter and longer answer questions.

4. **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 brought to the Department of Philosophy by **NOON, five (5) days after the last day of classes**. Late exams will **NOT** be accepted (they will receive 0%). Exams also have to be submitted simultaneously through Coursespaces (unless otherwise indicated). 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) explanation of key points, (2) well-developed discussion of points presented, (3) clarity, neatness, and organisation of points.

**Grading scale and interpretation**
Percentages will convert to a letter grade according to the standard University scheme:

- A+ = 90-100
- A = 85-89
- A- = 80-84
- B+ = 77-79
- B = 73-76
- B- = 70-72
- C+ = 65-69
- C = 60-64
- D = 50-59
- F = 0-49

**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.

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 assignments, extensions and plagiarism**
Late weekly assignments will not be accepted and the test will not be rescheduled (no make-up exams). If a test is missed 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 an exam and an explanatory statement in writing have to be received no more than ten days after the deadline or exam missed.

**Academic integrity**
The University Calendar states that “Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. … 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, and aiding others to cheat. Penalties for these violations vary, with first violations generally resulting in a failing grade on the work. Please familiarise yourselves with the policies at [http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2016-09/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html#](http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2016-09/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html#).

**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. Further information regarding UVic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are located in the UVic calendar (p. 15). If you have any particular concerns in our course please do not hesitate to contact me.
Counselling Services
Many, if not most, students experience some difficulties with their mental health during their years as undergraduate students. 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 UVic Counselling Services, which is an excellent resource at your disposal on campus. They genuinely want to help, so 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 the 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, so anyone caught on social media, internet surfing, etc. will be asked to leave and potentially subject to disciplinary action.

Academic Advising
For information about declaring a program, academic concessions or interpreting your UVic CAPP report, please visit Undergraduate Advising or make an 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. Weekly reading assignments will be confirmed in class, so please be attentive to announcements both in class and on Coursespaces. Informed participation in class discussion will be expected, so please read the assigned texts in advance. Readings are from the Coursepack, unless otherwise indicated.

Week 1 6-12 Jan
The origin of ethics, suffering and happiness, humans and animals
Rachels, James, “Utilitarianism”
Crisp, Roger, “Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism”
Optional recommended: Silberbauer, George, “Ethics in small-scale societies” (Coursespaces),

Week 2 13-19 Jan
Pleasure and happiness and rights: humans and animals (cont’d)
Singer, Peter, “Animal Liberation”
Regan, Tom, “The Case for Animal Rights”
**Film, The Business of Hunger**
Explore topics for group visits to Victoria sites
**Assignments are due from this week onwards**

Week 3 20-26 Jan
Rights and treating others as ends: hunger and poverty
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 27 Jan-2 Feb
Rights and the value of life: the questions of euthanasia aand abortion
Rachels, James, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”
Krutzen, Rudy, “The Case of Robert and Tracy Latimer”
Marquis, Don, “Why Abortion is Immoral”
**31 February: Last Day for Withdrawing without Penalty**
Friday 31 Jan: final date for groups to form and select sites to visit**

Week 5 3-9 Feb
The value of life and rights: the question of abortion, care and feminist ethics
Thomson, Judith Jarvis “A Defense of Abortion”
Manning, “Care Ethics”
Shiva, Vandana, “Development, Ecology and Women”

**Friday: final date for groups to form and to select sites/projects to visit**

**Week 6**
10-16 Feb

Fairness: refugees, Review and mid-term

Extract from “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (Coursespaces)
Parekh, Serena, “Our Moral Responsibility to Refugees Goes Beyond Resettlement” (Coursespaces)

Review for Mid-term

**14 February: Mid-term**

**Week 7**
17-23 Feb

**READING WEEK**

No new readings, no assignments

*17 February: Family Day*

*20 February: Louis Riel Day*

**22 January: Last day for adding courses**

**Week 8**
24 Feb - 1 Mar

Rights and Indigenous people: First Nations and settler peoples

Locke, John, “Creation of Property”

Trudeau, P.E. “Remarks on Indian Aboriginal and Treaty Rights”

McDonald, Michael, “Aboriginal Rights”

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Coursespaces)

*29 February: Last day for withdrawing from courses without penalty of failure*

**Week 9**
2-8 Mar

Justice and fairness: nuclear mining and wastes

*Film: Uranium*

Brook, Andrew, “Ethics of Wastes: The Case of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle”


**Friday 6 March: deadline for handing in reports on realised visits**

**Week 10**
9-15 Mar

Ethics and the value of the earth: land community and climate change

Leopold, Aldo, “The Land Ethic”

Garvey, James, “Doing Something”, “Individual Choices” and “Epilogue”

*Film: This Changes Everything*

**Week 11**
16-22 Mar

Ethics and the value of sexual pleasure: aspiration, satisfaction or sociality

Presentation of experiential group projects

Punzo, Vincent, vs. Goldman, Alan, “Must sex involve commitment?” (Coursespaces)

Shpancer, Noam, “Why do we have sex?” (optional, Coursespaces)

**Week 12**
23-29 Mar

Presentations of experiential group projects + Course Experience Survey (CES)

No new readings

**Week 13**
30 Mar-5 Apr

Presentations and summary-conclusion

**Friday 3 April: Last day of classes and Final take-home exam questions handed out**

**Week 14**
6-12 Apr

Exams hand-in and online submission

**By NOON Wednesday 8 April: Final exam submission (hardcopy AND on Coursespaces)**