

PHIL 390 A01  
CRN#12636

September – December 2024  
TWF: 10:30pm – 11:20pm

## Selected Topics: Ethics & Art

Instructor: Scott Woodcock [he/they]  
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Office Hours: Wed 1:30-2:30pm open hours + individual zoom meetings by appointment

**Provisional Draft:** This outline gives students a sense of what the course involves, but it is not the final, *official* outline.

### Course Description:

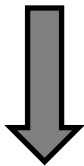
The aim of this course will be to offer a survey of some of the fascinating questions that arise at the intersection of art and ethical theory. We will begin by reading essays on the different perspectives on ethics and art across different cultural/historical traditions. We will then discuss how our analysis of art is related to contemporary debates in metaethics (e.g. motivational internalism) and how it relates to the three main positions in normative ethics: Kantian ethics, consequentialism, and virtue ethics. Next, we turn to a principal concern in the literature on ethics and art. This is the notorious *interaction* debate, which revolves around whether moral merits/deficits in art tend to affect their aesthetic qualities and vice versa. We will look at applications of the positions at stake in this debate when it comes to humour, race, and gender. Finally, we will discuss recent work on the ethics of video games and cultural appropriation. In general, the aim will be to provide a highly interactive lecture format that both (a) gives students an overview of the key issues found in the literature on ethics and art, and (b) allows them opportunities to critically reflect on their own preferred examples of artistic expression and consider them with new tools for understanding their moral and aesthetic properties.

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

**Texts:** *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics and Art*, edited by James Harold

Note: this handbook is currently available online via Uvic Library holdings

**Requirements:** Attendance/Participation (10%)  
Quote & Comment Assignments (10%)  
Two Case Study Reports (10% x2)  
Midterm Test (20%)  
Term Paper (40%)



**Note:** Due dates are posted below in the course schedule. *You are responsible for knowing these dates.* Plan ahead, and manage your workload accordingly.

**Important Dates:** Please consult Uvic [Academic Year Important Dates](#) for information about last dates to withdraw from courses without penalty, etc.

## 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.

**Late Policy:** Late assignments will be accepted for five working days after the posted due date but *will not receive written comments*. After five working days, late assignments would require [unexpected or unavoidable circumstances](#).

**Plagiarism:** Review the [University Policy on Academic Integrity](#) *very carefully*. Note that anti-plagiarism software may be used in this course, and students may be asked for oral explanations of their submitted written work. 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.

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

Sexualized violence is a serious issue on campus. You can learn more about how Uvic defines sexualized violence and its approach to prevention by visiting [www.uvic.ca/svp](http://www.uvic.ca/svp). If you or someone you know is impacted by sexualized violence and needs information, advice, and/or support, please contact the sexualized violence resource office in Equity and Human Rights (EQHR). Whether or not you have been directly impacted, if you want to take part in important prevention work on campus, you can reach out to: Sexualized Violence Resource Office in EQHR, Sedgewick C119; email: [svpcoordinator@uvic.ca](mailto:svpcoordinator@uvic.ca).

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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 WSÁNEĆ 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 listed are subject to change!* Regular class attendance is essential to stay informed about scheduling changes. Material should be read before the class in which it is discussed. Readings not found in our textbook are available online via *Brightspace*.

<u>Week</u>	<u>Readings</u>
<b><u>Week 1</u></b>	<b>Introduction to Art &amp; Ethics</b>
Sept. 4   Sept. 6	First Meeting  <i>Pierre Destrée: Ancient Greek Philosophers on Art and Ethics</i>
<b><u>Week 2</u></b>	<b>Historical Perspectives on Ethics and Art</b>
Sept. 10	Oliver Leaman: <i>Art and Ethics in Islam</i>
Sept. 11	Yuriko Saito: <i>The Ethically Grounded Nature of Japanese Aesthetic Sensibility</i>
Sept. 13	Barry Hallen: <i>The Knowledge That Joins Ethics to Art in Yorùbá Culture</i>
<b><u>Week 3</u></b>	<b>The Realm(s) of Ethics and Aesthetics</b>
Sept. 17	Moonyoung Song: <i>Distinguishing between Ethics and Aesthetics</i>
Sept. 18	Robert Stecker: <i>Why Artistic Value is not Aesthetic Value</i>
Sept. 20	Robbie Kubala: <i>Aesthetic Obligations</i>
<b><u>Week 4</u></b>	<b>Art and Metaethics</b>
Sept. 24	Alex King: <i>Meta-Ethics and Meta-Aesthetics</i>
Sept. 25	Don Loeb: <i>Gastronomic Realism – A Cautionary Tale</i>
Sept. 27	Alfred Archer: <i>Aesthetic Judgments and Motivation</i>
<b><u>Week 5</u></b>	<b>Art and Normative Ethics</b>
Oct. 1	Sandra Shapshay: <i>Kantian Approaches to Ethical Judgment of Artworks</i>
Oct. 2	Scott Woodcock: <i>Consequentialist Approaches to Ethical Judgment of Artworks</i>
Oct. 4	Nancy E. Snow: <i>Virtue Aesthetics, Art, and Ethics</i>

<p><b><u>Week 6</u></b></p> <p>Oct. 8</p> <p>Oct. 9</p> <p>Oct. 11</p>	<p><b>Ethics/Aesthetics Interaction - Autonomism</b></p> <p>Nils-Hennes Stear: <i>Autonomism</i></p> <p>James C. Anderson &amp; Jeffrey T. Dean: <i>Moderate Autonomism</i></p> <p>Adriana Clavel-Vazquez: <i>Rethinking Autonomism: Beauty in a World of Moral Anarchy</i></p>
<p><b><u>Week 7</u></b></p> <p>Oct. 15</p> <p>Oct. 16</p> <p>Oct. 18</p>	<p><b>Ethics/Aesthetics Interaction – Moralism</b></p> <p>Noël Carroll: <i>Moralism + Moderate Moralism vs Moderate Autonomism</i></p> <p>Amy Mullin: <i>Moral Defects, Aesthetic Defects, and the Imagination</i></p> <p>Mattia Cecchinato: <i>Double-Standard Moralism: Why We Can Be More Permissive Within our Imagination</i></p>
<p><b><u>Week 8</u></b></p> <p>Oct. 22</p> <p>Oct. 23</p> <p>Oct. 25</p> <p></p>	<p><b>Ethics/Aesthetics Interaction - Immoralism</b></p> <p>Daniel Jacobson: <i>Immoralism and Contextualism</i></p> <p>A.W. Eaton: <i>Robust Immoralism</i></p> <p>James Harold: <i>Immoralism and the Valence Constraint</i></p> <p><b>*** Case Study Report #1 Due ***</b></p>
<p><b><u>Week 9</u></b></p> <p>Oct. 29</p> <p>Oct. 30</p> <p>Nov. 1</p>	<p><b>The Ethics of Humour</b></p> <p>Paul Butterfield: <i>Humour Ethics</i></p> <p>Aaron Smuts: <i>Do Moral Flaws Enhance Amusement?</i></p> <p>Scott Woodcock: <i>Comic Immoralism and Relatively Funny Jokes</i></p>
<p><b><u>Week 10</u></b></p> <p>Nov. 5</p> <p>Nov. 6</p> <p>Nov. 8</p> <p></p>	<p><b>Art, Racism, and Feminism</b></p> <p>Adriana Clavel-Vázquez: <i>Art, Race, and Racism</i></p> <p>Luvell Anderson: <i>Why So Serious? An Inquiry on Racist Jokes</i></p> <p>Amy Mullin: <i>Feminism, Ethics, and Art</i></p> <p><b>*** Last Day to Submit Midterm Question Proposals ***</b></p>

<b><u>Week 11</u></b>	<b>Reading Break</b>
Nov. 11-3	<b>No Class</b>
Nov 15	Review
<b><u>Week 12</u></b>	<b>Video Games</b>
Nov. 19	<b>*** Online Midterm Test ***</b> to be completed before 11:59pm
Nov. 20	Christopher Bartel: <i>Ethics and Video Games</i>
Nov. 22	Erick Jose Ramirez: <i>How to (dis)solve the Gamer's Dilemma</i>
<b><u>Week 13</u></b>	<b>Cultural Appropriation</b>
Nov. 26	C. Thi Nguyen & Matthew Strohl: <i>Cultural Appropriation</i>
Nov. 27	James O. Young: <i>Profound Offense and Cultural Appropriation</i>
Nov. 29	Erich Hatala Matthes: <i>Cultural Appropriation Without Cultural Essentialism?</i>
	<b>*** Case Study Report #2 Due ***</b>
<b><u>Week 14</u></b>	<b>Immoral Artists</b>
Dec. 3	Erich Hatala Matthes: <i>Immoral Artists</i>
	<b>*** Last Day to Submit Q&amp;C Assignments ***</b>
Dec. 4	Class Discussion

**\*\*\* Term Paper Assignments Due Friday, December 6<sup>th</sup> at 5pm PST \*\*\***

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### A Note on Sensitive Content

Please be advised that many of the readings covered in this course address *very difficult subject matter*. The philosophical questions that arise in the study of art often focus on its controversial, if not conspicuously immoral, features. Our readings therefore contain specific examples of what is controversial/immoral, and this can be shocking to see on the page, e.g. authors citing the n-word, describing fictional rape, murder, etc. My aim will be to address this material in the most responsible way possible, but students might reasonably prefer to have advance warning that it will be present in the readings.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Do I need to read the material before class? It is very 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 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: In principle, yes, but in a large class it is not always feasible. It is preferable to send me a provisional outline of your argument so that I can make suggestions.

**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: When is the last day to start handing in Q&C's if I want to get full marks?**

A: This term it would be Nov. 1. Read the Q&C instructions so you understand why.

**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 am a hardcore relativist, and all I want to do is tell people "That's just your point of view!" and lecture them about the fact that any conclusions we might want to draw about ethics and art are nonsense. Should I take this course?**

A: No. I wish you well in whatever other courses you might enjoy.