

PHIL 232 A01  
CRN# 12444

September – December 2020  
TWF: 1:30am – 2:20pm

# Moral Problems of Contemporary Society

Instructor: Scott Woodcock  
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Office Hours: Wednesday 10am-11am group hours + individual meetings by appointment

See final page of outline for details about online teaching due to COVID-19.

## Course Description:

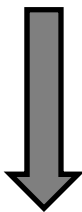
The aim of this course is to introduce students to a variety of controversial moral issues in contemporary society. In particular, students will be encouraged to carefully examine the *philosophical arguments* that arise in debates surrounding these controversial issues. The moral problems we will address in the course involve complex and often highly sensitive questions. The goal is to enable students to thoughtfully engage this subject matter and to learn how to articulate their opinions in the most persuasive way possible. The issues we will address in the course include the following: the moral status of non-human animals, the prospect of decriminalization of addictive recreational drugs, our obligations to protect the environment, the moral status of abortion, ethical questions related to pornography, the duty to help alleviate global poverty, and the distinctive wrongs of colonization. Class participation will be strongly encouraged in order to generate thoughtful discussion of the philosophical arguments proposed in the readings and their application to current events.

**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:** All readings available online via Uvic *Brightspace*.

**Requirements:**

- First Paper (10%)
- Mid-term Test (20%)
- Second Paper (20%)
- Final Exam (40%)
- Activist Letters (5%)
- Quote & Comment *or* News & Comment Assignments (5%)



**Note:** Writing assignment due dates and midterm test dates are posted below in the weekly schedule. *You are responsible for knowing these dates.* Plan ahead, and manage your overall personal workload accordingly.

## 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.

**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*, so 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).

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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 are subject to change!* Class attendance is essential to stay informed about scheduling changes. Material should be read *before* the class in which it is discussed so that students are prepared to contribute to class discussion.

<u>Week</u>	<u>Readings</u>
<b><u>Week 1</u></b>	<b>Introduction to Moral Problems</b>
Sept. 9	First Meeting
Sept. 11	Peter Singer: <i>All Animals are Equal...</i> pp. 1-9 + 15-21 [Suggested = Alastair Norcross: <i>Puppies, Pigs, and People</i> parts 1-2, 4-6]
<b><u>Week 2</u></b>	<b>Background Ethical Theory</b>
Sept. 15   Sept. 18	Louis P. Pojman: <i>Utilitarianism</i> Steven Luper: <i>Kantianism</i>
<b><u>Week 3</u></b>	<b>Our Treatment of Non-Human Animals</b>
Sept. 22	Tom Regan: <i>The Case for Animal Rights</i>
Sept. 23	Michael Pollan: <i>An Animal's Place</i> [Suggested = Bob Fischer & Josh Milburn: <i>In Defence of Backyard Chickens</i> ]
<b>Sept. 25</b>	<b>How to Write a Philosophy Paper</b>
<b><u>Week 4</u></b>	<b>The Prospect of Legalizing Highly Addictive Drugs</b>
Sept. 29	Gary Varner: <i>The Prospects for Consensus and Convergence...</i>
Sept. 30	Douglas Husak: <i>Four Points about Drug Decriminalization</i>
Oct. 2	Peter De Marneffe: <i>Against the Legalization of Heroin</i>
<b><u>Week 5</u></b>	<b>Environmental Ethics</b>
Oct. 6	Joseph DesJardins: <i>Biocentric Ethics and the Inherent Value of Life</i>
Oct. 7	Ben Bradley: <i>The Value of Endangered Species</i>

<p><b>Oct. 9</b></p> 	<p>Robert Elliot: <i>Faking Nature</i></p> <p><b>*** First Paper Due ***</b></p>
<p><b><u>Week 6</u></b></p> <p>Oct. 13</p> <p>Oct. 14</p> <p><b>Oct. 16</b></p>	<p><b>Collective Action Problems</b></p> <p>Garrett Hardin: <i>The Tragedy of the Commons</i></p> <p>[Suggested = Simo Kyllonen: <i>Climate Change, No-Harm Principle, and Moral Responsibility of Individual Emitters</i>]</p> <p>Review</p> <p><b>*** Midterm Test ***</b></p>
<p><b><u>Week 7</u></b></p> <p>Oct. 20</p> <p> </p> <p>Oct. 23</p>	<p><b>The Moral Status of Abortion – Part One</b></p> <p>Mary Anne Warren: <i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i></p> <p>Don Marquis: <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i></p>
<p><b><u>Week 8</u></b></p> <p>Oct. 27</p> <p> </p> <p>Oct. 30</p>	<p><b>The Moral Status of Abortion – Part Two</b></p> <p>Judith Jarvis Thomson: <i>A Defense of Abortion</i></p> <p>Margaret Olivia Little: <i>Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate</i></p>
<p><b><u>Week 9</u></b></p> <p>Nov. 3</p> <p>Nov. 4</p> <p>Nov. 6</p>	<p><b>The Moral Status of Pornography</b></p> <p>Judith M. Hill: <i>Pornography and Degradation</i></p> <p>[Suggested = Mary Kate McGowan: <i>On Multiple Types of Silencing</i>]</p> <p>A.W. Eaton: <i>Feminist Pornography</i></p> <p>Ellen Willis: <i>Feminism, Moralism, and Pornography</i></p> <p>[Suggested = Jennifer Moorman, “<i>The Hardest of Hardcore</i>”: <i>Locating Feminist Possibilities in Women’s Extreme Pornography</i>]</p>
<p><b><u>Week 10</u></b></p> <p>Nov 9-11</p> <p>Nov. 13</p>	<p><b>Sex Robots?!</b></p> <p><b>Reading Break – No Class</b></p> <p>John Danaher: <i>The Symbolic-Consequences Argument in the Sex Robot Debate</i></p>

<p><b><u>Week 12</u></b></p> <p>Nov. 17</p> <p>Nov. 18</p> <p>Nov. 20</p>	<p><b>Obligations to Relieve Global Poverty</b></p> <p>Peter Singer: <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality</i></p> <p>Jan Narveson: <i>We Don't Owe Them a Thing!</i></p> <p>Robert Noggle: <i>Give Till It Hurts? Beneficence, Imperfect Duties, and a Moderate Response to the Aid Question</i></p>
<p><b><u>Week 13</u></b></p> <p>Nov. 24</p> <p>Nov. 25</p> <p><b>Nov. 27</b> </p>	<p><b>The Wrong(s) of Colonialism</b></p> <p>Anna Stilz: <i>Occupancy Rights and the Wrong of Removal</i> [Parts I and III] [Suggested = Margaret Moore: <i>The Taking of Territory and the Wrongs of Colonialism</i>]</p> <p>Lea Ypi: <i>What's Wrong with Colonialism</i> [Parts I-III, VII-VIII, &amp; X, XI]</p> <p>Glen Sean Coulthard: <i>Seeing Red</i> (ch. 4 from <i>Red Skin, White Masks</i>)</p> <p><b>*** Writing Assignment #2 Due ***</b></p>
<p><b><u>Week 14</u></b></p> <p><b>Dec. 1</b></p> <p><b>Dec. 2</b> </p> <p><b>Dec. 4</b> </p>	<p><b>Structural Injustice &amp; Racism</b></p> <p>Todd Calder: <i>Shared Responsibility, Global Structural Injustice, and Restitution</i> [Suggested = Andrea Sangiovanni: <i>Structural Injustice and Individual Responsibility</i>]</p> <p>Neil Levy: <i>Am I a Racist? Implicit Bias and the Ascription of Racism</i> [Suggested = Kwame Anthony Appiah: <i>Racisms</i>]</p> <p><b>*** Last Day to Submit Q&amp;C Assignments ***</b></p> <p>Review</p> <p><b>*** Last Day to Submit Activist Letters ***</b></p>

**\*\*\*Note: There will be an Online Exam in December\*\*\***  
 Details TBA



See final page of outline for details about online teaching due to COVID-19.



## COVID-19 Online Teaching Information

This will be a strange and challenging year at the University of Victoria. Like most other courses this fall at Uvic, the course will be taught online. Here are some details related to how this will work:

### Lecture Format

The lectures will occur in the regular time slot for the course (TWF: 11:30am – 12:20pm) via Zoom. However, to promote accessibility for students facing challenges like variable wifi availability, living in other time zones, losing access to daytime childcare, etc., I will record the lectures and make them available via *Brightspace*. Students should therefore be aware that their participation in lecture discussions will be recorded.

If you can attend the lectures live via Zoom, then I strongly recommend it so you can ask questions as we discuss the material. It will take time to adjust to the online format, but my aim is to facilitate as much collaborative discussion as there would be in an ordinary lecture. We will work out the relevant Zoom conventions for making this happen during the first week of class. However, if at any point you find that you face challenges to fully participating in the course please let me know so that we can try to work out a solution.

### Online Testing

The midterm test will be run online during regular class time (1:30pm-2:20pm). If you are unable to write the midterm at that time, please contact me in advance to make other arrangements. The end of term exam will be online at a time TBA after classes are over.

### Technical Support

Most technical difficulties are best answered by the Uvic [Computer Help Desk](#), but if you find yourself facing persistent technical difficulties, please get in contact with me so I can help in whatever way I can.

### Intellectual Property of Course Materials

Note that all of the assignments, lectures and other materials posted to *Brightspace* are the intellectual property of myself and the University of Victoria. **Do not circulate this material** online without my permission. Posting course materials to secondary sites or otherwise circulating course materials online without the permission of your instructor violates the University of Victoria [Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Evidence of students circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

### University Policy + Updates

For general Uvic information about how the university is dealing with online teaching during the pandemic see the [COVID-19 information page](#) that they regularly update.