

## PHIL 232: Moral Problems of Contemporary Society



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Office Hours on Zoom:  
T, W, Th 1:00–1:30

### Course Description

William James once described philosophy as "the unusually stubborn attempt to think clearly." In this course we will take a philosophical approach to a variety of controversial and sometimes emotionally charged moral issues facing us today. Topics we will address include the treatment of non-human animals, genetic engineering, criminalizing drugs, abortion, our handling of the environment, sex work, and our response to human starvation and suffering. As we approach each of these issues, we will consider what various philosophers have said makes an act right or wrong and see whether their theories help us in solving moral problems. We will make a determined effort to develop well-reasoned positions on these issues, articulating and evaluating arguments on both sides of the debates. In short, we will be thinking in a philosophical way about how we should live our lives.

### Class Meetings

All of our class meetings will be conducted over Zoom during the scheduled class time. That's 10:30 to 12:20 Pacific Time. Most days we will not stay on Zoom for that full time. Typically we will be live for about an hour and additional videos with essential course content that we don't get to live will be posted on Brightspace. You'll find the link to join the meetings on the Brightspace page. The same link will work for the duration of the course. The class meetings will be recorded and posted on Brightspace.

It's best to attend the class meetings live if you can so that you can be involved in the class discussion and get answers to your questions right away. Attendance at the live class sessions is generally not required but you do need to be present for **your group's panel discussion** — so make sure you sign up for a presentation date that you are sure you can be there for. You should also make a special effort to be in class on **Friday, May 14** to meet with your group.

### Texts

You'll need this book: Daniel DeNicola. **Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction**. Broadview Press. 2018. You can buy a digital copy direct from Broadview Press [here](#). It's also available as a paperback through the UVic Bookstore.

All of the other readings for this course will be available through the **Brightspace** page. To access the page, go to [bright.uvic.ca](http://bright.uvic.ca) and log in with your regular network ID. Please let me know immediately if you have any difficulty accessing the readings.

**Technical Help**

You'll find help with Brightspace, Zoom and online learning in general at UVic's *Learn Anywhere* site. That site is designed to help students navigate all aspects of UVic's online learning environment. Here's a link to it: <https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/TeachAnywhere/start-here/student-help/> You can also find it in the main help menu on Brightspace. Don't hesitate to ask me for help with any technical issues you run into. If I can't help I'll find someone who can.

**Course Requirements** (See schedule below for dates.)

Five Online Quizzes	7% each	First Paper	25%
Panel Discussion	10%	Second Paper	30%

**The papers** will be opportunities for you to develop and defend a position on one of the issues we have been discussing in class. The first paper will be 1300 words maximum. The second will be 1500 words maximum. Due dates for the papers can be found on the schedule below. Detailed instructions for the papers are available on Brightspace.

Help with Papers

We will discuss how to approach the paper assignment in class on May 14. Advice about how to write a philosophy paper is available now on the Brightspace page. Prior to the due dates for both papers Di Yang, the teaching assistant for the course, and I will have additional office hours to help you with your papers. It is wise to start work on your paper early enough to take advantage of this extra help.

Late Papers

If you have a legitimate reason for submitting your paper late, please notify me immediately. Unexcused lateness will result in a 5% reduction in the grade for that assignment each day. No essay will be accepted for grading after **June 7** unless academic concession has been granted. For policies concerning academic concession see <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/HJjAxiGO4?bc=true&bcCurrent=11%20-%20Academic%20Concessions&bcltemType=policies>.

Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with the University Policy on Academic Integrity. It will be enforced in this course. You can find it online in the UVIC Calendar at Help with proper citation for your papers is available through the CourseSpaces page. [https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/Sk\\_0xsM\\_V?bc=true&bcCurrent=08%20-%20Policy%20on%20Academic%20Integrity&bcltemType=policies](https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/Sk_0xsM_V?bc=true&bcCurrent=08%20-%20Policy%20on%20Academic%20Integrity&bcltemType=policies)

**Please Note: Anyone who does not write both of the two assigned papers will receive a grade of N for the course.**

**The Panel Discussion** will be a group presentation applying ethical theories to a particular topic and leading class discussion of that topic. You'll sign up for a topic on Wednesday, May 12. You'll find details about the assignment on Brightspace.

**The Quizzes** will be timed online quizzes given on Brightspace. You will have a 7 hour window to do each quiz. The timer will start for you when you open the quiz. Quizzes are open-book and open-notes, but you must complete the quizzes on your own. If you miss a quiz due to illness or accident, contact me immediately to schedule a make-up.

**Grading**

Letter grades for the course will be assigned using the standard university scheme:

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

**Equity**

Uvic is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive, supportive and safe learning and working environment for all its members. Information about Uvic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are available at <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/HkQ0pzdAN> If you have any particular concerns about equity in our course please don't hesitate to contact me.

**Religious Accommodation**

Information regarding accommodation of religious observance can be located in the UVIC Calendar at <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/future/undergrad/index.php#/policy/r1q0gofdN?bc=true&bcCurrent=10%20-%20Accommodation%20of%20Religious%20Observance&bcGroup=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations&bcItemType=policies>

**Territory Acknowledgement**

The University of Victoria acknowledges with respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

**Course Schedule**

Please note that this schedule is tentative.  
 Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class and posted on Brightspace.  
 Also on Brightspace you'll find information about which sections to focus on in some of the longer readings.

M 5/10	Singer <i>All Animals are Equal . . .</i>	
T 5/11	DeNicola Chapter Six: <i>Utilitarianism</i>	
W 5/12	DeNicola Chapter Seven: <i>Kantianism</i> Steinbock <i>Speciesism and the Idea of Equality</i>	SIGN UP FOR A PRESENTATION TOPIC TODAY
TH 5/13	Regan <i>The Case for Animal Rights</i> Varner <i>The Prospects for Consensus and Convergence in the Animal Rights Debate</i>	Quiz 1 1-8 p.m.
F 5/14	DeNicola Chapter Nine: <i>Virtue Ethics</i> Driver <i>Individual Consumption and Moral Complicity</i>	INITIAL GROUP MEETING in Zoom CLASS TODAY

M 5/17	The Philosophers' Magazine <i>Would You Eat Your Cat?</i> Nussbaum <i>Discussing Disgust</i>	Quiz 2 1-8 p.m.
T 5/18	Sandel <i>The Case Against Perfection: What's Wrong with Designer Children, Bionic Athletes, and Genetic Engineering</i> Kamm <i>What Is and Is Not Wrong with Enhancement</i>	Panel on Genetic Engineering
W 5/19	Jaggar <i>Prostitution</i> Nussbaum <i>Whether from Reason or Prejudice</i> Klepper <i>Sexual Exploitation and the Value of Persons</i>	Panel on Sex Work
TH 5/20	Singer <i>Famine, Affluence and Morality</i> Igneski <i>Defending Limits on the Sacrifices We Ought to Make for Others</i>	Panel on Humanitarian Aid
F 5/21	<b>—Paper Help Day—</b> No Class Meeting Help will be available through the Zoom Office Hours Link 10:00 am - 11:30 am and 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm	Quiz 3 1-8 p.m.

M 5/24	— Victoria Day No Class Meeting —	
T 5/25	LaFollette <i>Licensing Parents</i> Thomson <i>A Defense of Abortion</i>	<b>First Paper Due at 8 p.m.</b>
W 5/26	Warren <i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i> Marquis <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i>	Panel on Abortion
TH 5/27	Dworkin <i>Life's Dominion</i> Little <i>Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate</i>	
F 5/28	DeNicola Chapter Eight: <i>Contractarianism</i> Gardiner <i>A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption</i>	<b>Quiz 4 1-8 p.m.</b>

M 5/31	Gambrel and Cafaro <i>The Virtue of Simplicity</i> Husak <i>Four Points about Drug Decriminalization</i>	
T 6/1	Sher <i>On the Decriminalization of Drugs</i> De Marneffe <i>Against the Legalization of Heroin</i> Shapiro <i>Individual Rights, Drug Policy and the Worst-Case Scenario</i> Hunt <i>Epilogue: What Good are Drugs Anyway?</i>	Panel on Drugs
W 6/2	<b>—Paper Help Day—</b> No Class Meeting Help will be available through the Zoom Office Hours Link 10:00 am - 11:30 am and 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm <b>Last Day of the Course</b>	<b>Quiz 5 12-8 p.m.</b>
TH 6/3		<b>Second Paper Due at 8 p.m.</b>