

**Acknowledgement:**

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the *xwməθkənəyəm* (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

**Philosophy 235: Contemporary Moral Issues  
Winter Term 1 2020**

**Instructor:** Brooks Sommerville  
**Lecture Times:** MWF 3:00-4:00pm BUCH B213  
**Office Hours:** Mondays & Wednesdays 2:00-3:00pm or by appointment  
**Email:** brooks.sommerville@ubc.ca

**Course Description:**

This course will examine an array of contemporary moral issues and the broader philosophical puzzles they raise. It is divided into three parts. Part 1 is organized around the question, 'Who counts, morally speaking?' We will focus on the moral status of nonhuman animals. What, if anything, justifies the familiar practices of farming, hunting, and experimentation on nonhuman animals? Even among philosophers who agree that nonhuman animals have moral standing, and that much of our treatment of nonhuman animals is on that account morally indefensible, there is a broader disagreement about what grounds this moral status. We will explore these debates. Next, Part 2 asks the question, 'What should we do about injustice?' Again, even where philosophers tend to agree that certain grave injustices have occurred, there are competing answers about how to remedy these injustices. We will outline and evaluate policies of wealth redistribution, civil disobedience, Indigenous land claims, and righteous anger as remedies for historical injustices. Finally, Part 3 will focus on our moral obligations to past- and future generations. Do we have moral obligations to people who no longer exist, or who do not yet exist? If so, why? And do we have certain rights against *them*? We will investigate these puzzles as they arise in connection with reparations for slavery, reproductive rights, and environmental justice. Along the way we'll explore deontological- and utilitarian moral theories, and we'll consider competing theories of justice.

This course aims to provide you with the skills to (i) apply philosophical theories to a wide range of contemporary moral issues; (ii) formulate and defend competing positions on these issues; and (iii) evaluate the broader debate. Beyond this, it hopes to make you a better reader and writer of philosophy in general.

**Synchronous Instruction: Please note that students will be expected to participate in one hour of synchronous instruction per week. All remaining elements of instruction will be asynchronous, except for office hours.**

**Texts:**

Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: With A Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.

All other required texts will be available on Canvas.

### **Course Requirements:**

1. Homework Assignment 1 (1 page): **10%**
2. Homework Assignment 2 (1 page): **10%**
3. Essay Assignment 1 (4-6 pages): **15%**
4. Essay Assignment 2 (4-6 pages): **20%**
5. Quizzes (x5) **15%**
6. Final Exam: **30%**

### **Additional Information About Essay Assignments and Final Exam:**

#### Essay Assignments:

Essay Assignments must be written in 12 pt. font and double-spaced, with one inch margins and numbered pages. Make sure that your name and student number appear at the top of the first page. Title pages are not necessary.

Your introductory paragraph *must* include a clear thesis statement. A thesis statement has two main components: i) A clear statement of the position you will take in the paper; and ii) a brief, clear outline of the case you will make in support of that position.

Late Essay Assignments will be penalized at the rate of **one increment** of a grade per day late (i.e. an A becomes an A-), weekends included.

Final Exam: The final exam will consist of essay questions for which lectures and online activities should prepare you.

### **Course Policies:**

In-Term Concession Requests: Arts Students must contact Arts Advising as soon as you are aware you may need an in-term concession. Please review their website for concession criteria as well as process to follow:

<https://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising/academic-performance/help-academic-concession/>

Students in other Faculties should contact their Faculty advising office for direction.

Course Work: Failure to complete any major course work (Homework Assignments 1-2; Essay Assignments 1-2; final exam) will result in a grade of F.

#### Plagiarism:

*Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments.*

Please consult UBC's Learning Commons website: <http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/>

Individual Learning Needs: Students seeking accommodation because of disabilities are asked to contact the instructor as soon as possible. They should also contact the UBC Centre for Accessibility:

<https://students.ubc.ca/about-student-services/centre-for-accessibility>

*UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here: (<https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success>)*

### **Readings:**

Week 1: Introduction, Primer on Arguments

#### ***Moral Theories:***

Week 2: ●Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (selections)

Week 3: ●John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (selections)

#### **Part 1: Who Counts?**

Week 4: ●Immanuel Kant, "Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth"

●Peter Singer, "Equality for Animals?" (read only pp. 48-56)

Week 5: ●Tom Regan, "The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights"

●Mary Anne Warren, "Difficulties with the Strong Animal Rights Position"

#### ***Theories of Justice***

Week 6: ●John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (selections)

Week 7: ●Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (selections)

#### **Part 2: What Should We Do About Injustice?**

Week 8: ●Thomas Nagel, "Poverty and Food: Why Charity is Not Enough"

●Brian Slattery, "Aboriginal Sovereignty and Imperial Claims"

Week 9: ●Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From Birmingham Jail"

●Herbert Storing, "The Case Against Civil Disobedience"

Week 10: ●Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger"

### **Part 3: Intergenerational Ethics**

- Week 11:
- Derek Parfit, “Energy Policy and the Further Future”
  - Michael Ridge, “What We Owe to the Dead”
- Week 12:
- L. A. Paul, “What You Can’t Expect When You’re Expecting”
- Week 13: Review