

**Acknowledgement:** UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the *xwməθkwəy̓əm* (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 will explore some ethical issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. What are an ordinary person's moral obligations in the current pandemic? What restrictions on our personal choices are permissible in these circumstances? These are some of the questions we will investigate. Part 2 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 standing. We will explore these debates. Finally, Part 3 asks, 'What should we do about injustice?' Again, even among philosophers who 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 reparations, wealth redistribution, civil disobedience, Indigenous land claims, apology, and righteous anger as remedies for historical injustices. 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 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:**

All required texts will be available through Library Course Reserves on Canvas.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Homework Assignment 1 (1-2 pages): **10%** due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on **Sept. 21**
2. Homework Assignment 2 (1-2 pages): **10%** due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on **Oct. 5**
3. Essay 1 (4-6 pages): **20%** due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on **Oct. 19**
4. Essay 2 (4-6 pages): **20%** due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on **Nov. 23**
5. Quizzes (x5) **10%**
6. Final Exam: **30%**

**Additional Information About Course Work:**

Homework Assignments:

You must submit two homework assignments, each worth 10% of your final grade. You will receive instructions for each homework assignment at least **a week** before the deadline. For homework assignments, a thesis statement is not necessary. Each homework assignment should not exceed one page, single-spaced, in

12 pt. font. Make sure that your name and student number appear at the top of the first page. Title pages are not necessary.

#### Essays:

You must submit two essays, each worth 20% of your final grade. You will receive instructions for each essay at least **two weeks** before the deadline. Essays must be 4-6 pages, 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.

For essays, 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.

In your essays, make sure to explain any technical terms you use. What constitutes a technical term? Ask yourself the following question: 'Would a friend of mine who has never taken a philosophy course readily understand what the term means?' If the answer is no, then it's a technical term. Explain it.

In your essays, use direct quotations (i.e. "\_\_\_\_") only on those rare occasions when you want to call attention to the author's precise wording. Otherwise, explain the reading in your own words and cite accordingly in parentheses or footnotes. Any standard citation style (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago) is acceptable, but please remain consistent in your paper. If you have any questions about citations, ask the instructor.

You are *not* expected to consult any secondary sources in writing your homework assignments and essays. If you do consult any material beyond the required texts, you should do so sparingly and give appropriate citations.

Late essays and homework 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.

Please retain an electronic copy of all homework assignments and essays until you receive a final grade for the course.

Quizzes: There are five quizzes in the course, worth a combined total of 10% toward your final grade. All quizzes will be accessible through Canvas. Please see the reading schedule below for quiz deadlines.

Final Exam: The final exam will consist of essay-style questions, for which lectures, course work, 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; essays 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>)*

### **Topics and Readings**

Week 1 (Sept. 9): Introduction, Primer on Arguments

#### **Part 1: Pandemic Ethics**

Week 2 (Sept. 14):

- Alison Hills, "Can I Sunbathe in the Park?" is Now A Deep Moral Question"
- Alberto Giubilini, "Why You Should Not (Be Allowed To) Have That Picnic in the Park, Even If It Does Not Make A Difference"

**Quiz #1 due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on Monday, Sept. 14**

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

Week 3 (Sept. 21):

- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (selections)

**Homework Assignment 1 due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on Monday, Sept. 21**

Week 4 (Sept. 28):

- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (selections)

**Quiz #2 due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on Monday, Sept. 28**

#### **Part 2: Who Counts?**

Week 5 (Oct. 5):

- Immanuel Kant, "Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth"
- Peter Singer, "Equality for Animals?" (read only pp. 48-56)

**Homework Assignment 2 due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on Monday, Oct. 5**

**Monday, October 12: Thanksgiving Day – University Closed**

- Week 6 (Oct. 14):
- Tom Regan, “The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights”
  - Christine M. Korsgaard, “1.2.1-5: Reasons to Treat People & Animals Differently”

***Theories of Justice***

- Week 7 (Oct. 19):
- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (selections)
- Essay 1 due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on Monday, Oct. 19**

- Week 8 (Oct. 26):
- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (selections)
- Quiz #3 due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on Monday, Oct. 26**

**Part 3: What Should We Do About Injustice?**

- Week 9 (Nov. 2):
- Thomas Nagel, “Poverty and Food: Why Charity is Not Enough”
  - Brian Slattery, “Aboriginal Sovereignty and Imperial Claims”

- Week 10 (Nov. 9):
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
  - Herbert Storing, “The Case Against Civil Disobedience”
- Quiz #4 due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on Monday, Nov. 9**

**Wednesday, November 11: Remembrance Day – University Closed**

- Week 11 (Nov. 16):
- Amia Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger”
- Quiz #5 due before midnight (Pacific Time) on Monday, Nov. 16**

- Week 12 (Nov. 23):
- Michael Ridge, “Giving the Dead Their Due”
- Essay 2 due by 11:59pm (Pacific Time) on Monday, Nov. 23**

- Week 13 (Nov. 30):
- Janna Thompson, “The Apology Paradox”