

Philosophy 432-001: Topics in Social/Political Philosophy

Topic: Twentieth Century Ethical Philosophy Through the Work and Stories of Four Women Who Changed It

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:20, Buchanan B218

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<i>Office Hours</i>	Thursdays 1:00-3:00, and by appointment at other times. I will often be available after class on Tuesdays as well, but some Tuesdays are unavailable due to departmental meetings. Office hours are held simultaneously in person in Buch. E-373 and on Zoom (see room above).

Overview:

In 1938, a year before the start of World War II, Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret (G. E. M.) Anscombe, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch began undergraduate studies at Oxford University in the UK, followed a year later by Philippa Foot. At this time, women were a small fraction of the student body at Oxford (and had not yet been allowed to enroll at Cambridge University), and very few women had advanced into the faculties of higher education. But when WWII started, the male undergraduate and graduate students, and many faculty, had to abandon Oxford to go to war, creating a very different academic environment for these four women. Becoming friends as undergraduates, they would all eventually go on to pursue doctorates in philosophy, and become some of the most innovative and important philosophers of the 20th century. Anscombe and Foot in particular had major impacts on the study of ethics and action theory, while Murdoch went on to become a highly regarded novelist as well as occasional philosopher, and Midgley became a significant ethicist, though somewhat later than the others. Their lives, work, and friendship have also recently been the subject of two excellent recent books that put their stories into historical and philosophical context. This course will look at 20th Century ethics through the lens provided by the impact these four women had on it.

In the first half of the 20th Century, English-language ethical philosophy was strongly influenced by two significant trends: the domination of utilitarianism as a theory of ethics, and the development of “logical positivism” or “analysis” as the dominant method for doing philosophy. While there were other theories and methods in play, these two forces combined to provide a kind of scientific strategy for explaining ethical judgments, and avoiding “metaphysical” or mystical assumptions. Utilitarianism takes individual subjective experience of pleasure, pain, or other good and bad things, and makes ethics into a science of the production of such experiences. Logical positivism or the “analytic” method makes the study of ethics into the study of concepts, such as “good” or “right,” and aims to produce definitions of them in verifiable terms—terms that correspond to specific experiences people might have and recognize as examples of the concepts. This logical and empirical approach to ethical philosophy had the effect of turning ethical judgments into claims about subjective experience, and undercutting any appeal to metaphysical claims about good and evil, right and wrong, as being meaningless.

The horrors of WWII, especially the Nazi genocide and the US’s use of nuclear weapons on the civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, spurred Foot and Anscombe to reject the subjectivism and relativism they associated with “Oxford moral philosophy,” and to propose other approaches to ethics. Murdoch’s fascination with existentialists such as Sartre and de Beauvoir, and Midgley’s

study of animal behavior, provided other critical approaches. Together, they instigated a number of new (or revived some older) approaches to ethics, that remain influential today. We'll read some of the work these four thinkers responded to and rejected, and then some of their major writings that transformed 20th Century ethics. We'll rely on the two recent books about them for background and valuable outlines of the developments in the early parts of their careers (roughly 1955-1970 for Anscombe, Foot, and Murdoch, somewhat later for Midgley). Through this material, students will gain a strong understanding of trends in ethics, meta-ethics, and applied ethics during the 20th Century, as well as a picture of four extremely lively, brilliant philosophers who significantly changed ethical philosophy.

Prerequisites/Target audience

This course is aimed at advanced philosophy students, who have an interest in ethics or social and political philosophy. If you are not an advanced student majoring in philosophy, it may be possible to do well in this course without this background, but you are strongly encouraged to talk to me prior to continuing in this course; together we can determine whether you are likely to succeed in this course or not, and what you stand to gain or lose from trying to do so. Having taken PHIL 230 is highly recommended as preparation for this course.

Politically Sensitive Topics

This course may cover some politically sensitive topics. Given that this is a course in ethics, it will cover more ethically and politically sensitive material than some UBC courses will. These may include, but are not limited to topics such as nuclear war, genocide, murder, justice, abortion, euthanasia, eugenics, communism, fascism, and other historical or current geopolitical controversies. While there is nothing here that I expect would be a forbidden topic or reading in other countries, I cannot give any assurance that these topics and readings would be regarded as banal in every country. We recognize that students will have legitimate reason to exercise caution in studying certain subjects. If you have concerns regarding your personal situation, please let me know. For further information and support, please visit: <http://academic.ubc.ca/support-resources/freedom-expression>.

Course format

This course will be taught as a hybrid of lectures, large-group and small group discussions. Students will be expected to contribute significantly to the discussion of and explication of the readings for the course each week, both as part of open discussion and in group discussions. There will also be opportunities to contribute to online discussions.

This course involves a significant amount of reading: I anticipate that many weeks will require 4-5 hours of time to complete the readings in preparation for class. Some weeks will have more pages than others, but generally the longer readings will be easier, while some of the comparatively shorter readings may be more difficult. In some cases there will be more readings assigned than you are expected to complete, though there will be value in reading beyond the main readings. I will attempt to provide guidance as to what is most useful and what is more supplementary.

Course readings

The readings for this course are mostly available as electronic resources, either linked to or downloadable from the course's Canvas website. Students are requested to purchase one book (available from the UBC Bookstore): Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman: *Metaphysical Animals*. (There is another book you may wish to purchase independently: Benjamin Lipscomb, *The Women are Up to Something*, but it is also available electronically via the UBC Library.) Please take some time in the first week of the term to download the available readings on Canvas

(most or all of the readings for the course should be available in the first few days after the first meeting). Additional readings or resources may be added, as well as changes to the assigned readings, as the term progresses. So please check the Canvas website for updates, especially if you have been absent from class when such announcements might be made.

Attendance

The Academic Calendar says: “Regular attendance is expected of students in all their classes (including lectures, laboratories, tutorials, seminars, etc.). Students who neglect their academic work and assignments may be excluded from the final examinations. Students who are unavoidably absent because of illness or disability should report to their instructors on return to classes.”

Regular attendance is strongly recommended. It will be very difficult to do well in this course if you do not make use of readings and the discussions.

Illness and Absence: It is very important that you do not attend class if you are ill or have reason to believe you may be ill. Please do a self-assessment of your health before coming to campus/class, as described here: <https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en> . If you are unable to attend class because of illness or suspected illness, I will take steps to ensure that this does not adversely affect your mark for the course. I recommend that you attempt to find at least one, perhaps several fellow students who you can communicate with in case of missed classes, so that you can get notes and other relevant information from them in case you are unable to attend class. I do not intend to hold classes online on a regular basis; there will be one or two meetings that will occur online when I expect to be away from Vancouver, but otherwise students should expect to be present in the classroom for the remainder of the sessions.

Grading

I hope that you will find that the intellectual work required in this course is challenging and rewarding because of its very nature. Facing up to and tackling the kind of challenges philosophy presents is critical to higher education. The purpose of grading in a course like this is three-fold: First, it gives you a very rough measure of your progress in learning and using the material that is the subject matter of the course. Second, it gives others a very rough measure of the quality of your intellectual work while at the University. Third, it gives you some external incentive to perform the reading assignments, attend the lectures and discussion sections, and do the thinking that is part of studying philosophy, as well as to avoid some of the shortcuts or dishonest practices that undercut the value of attending a University. Grading is, however, only a blunt instrument in any of these areas, and it is, from my perspective, one of the least important aspects of this course or of a university education.

Grades for this course will be determined on the following basis:

Attendance and participation (participation includes activity in class, online via discussion fora, and performing peer critiques of short papers by fellow students): 25%

Two short papers (c. 1000 words each), out of three opportunities: $10\% \times 2 = 20\%$

Paper proposal for longer paper: 5%

Progress report on research toward final paper: 5%

Final paper (c. 4000-5000 words): 45%

Standards for grading this course will be in accordance with those given in the Academic Calendar and the grading guidelines published in the university calendar. See:

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,42,0,0>

The information below is copied verbatim from the above webpage:

In most faculties, individual courses are normally graded as follows:

Percentage (%)	Letter Grade		
90-100	A+	68-71	B-
85-89	A	64-67	C+
80-84	A-	60-63	C
76-79	B+	55-59	C-
72-75	B	50-54	D
***		0-49	F (fail)

Faculties, departments and schools reserve the right to scale grades in order to maintain equity among sections and conformity to university, faculty, department or school norms. Students should therefore note that an unofficial grade given by an instructor might be changed by the faculty, department or school. Grades are not official until they appear on a student's academic record.

The instructor hopes to be able to determine overall scores for the course by simply adding the scores from the individual components, but I reserve the right to scale the final scores for the same reasons mentioned in the Academic Calendar. (Please consult Canvas for a record of your grades.)

Students should retain a copy of their submitted written assignments, in case of loss. You should also save frequently, and to a variety of backup locations, in the process of writing your term paper, so as to avert difficulties in completing the assignment on time.

Canvas Website

By virtue of being registered for this course, you will have access to the “Canvas” course website, a web-based program (<https://canvas.ubc.ca>) we will use to supplement a number of areas of the course. Almost all of the readings for the course will be linked to via this site; in addition, you will frequently find optional reading assignments, bibliographies, suggestions for excelling in the course, paper assignments, feedback/grades, announcements, and general course and philosophical information. You will also be required to turn your papers in via the Canvas website. Please check it periodically to see what has been added. If you have trouble accessing Canvas, please let me know.

One caution, however: unless I have sent you one to which you are responding, please **do not send me instant messages (IMs) via Canvas**. I do not check messages regularly on Canvas; instead, please send any messages you have for me to my UBC mail account, **scott.anderson@ubc.ca**. This is also the email address that will be used if you send me an email from within Canvas, which is also ok, but it is preferred that you send it from your own email client, which will (probably) show the conversation in replies, whereas the Canvas email tool does not.

How to submit written work; policy on late or missing work

Written exercises, paper proposals, and final term papers will be accepted only in electronic form submitted to the assignment created for this purpose on the Canvas course website. They will be returned with comments in electronic form as well.

Academic honesty

I take academic honesty very seriously, as it is essential both to your ability to get full value from this course, as well as for treating fairly those who do their own work. I strongly encourage you to work together in reading and discussing the material, and thinking about the writing of your papers. Nonetheless, your work on the papers and other assignments must be

your own work. Cheating, copying, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty (including assisting others in dishonest activity) will be punished to the fullest extent provided for by the University. If you are unclear on what counts as honest or dishonest methods, you should read the Faculty of Arts' pamphlet on plagiarism (<http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/resource-guides/avoid-plagiarism/>) as well as the University's policy on academic misconduct (<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/?tree=3,54,111,959>), and ask me specific questions about what is and isn't allowed in this course. I will not think worse of you for wanting to be clear about this. I will, however, be vigilant in hindering, uncovering and punishing those who fail to take this warning seriously.

In this course you will be required to submit your papers in electronic form. I may elect to submit the anonymized text of your paper to a service to which UBC subscribes, called TurnItIn. This is a service that checks textual material for originality. It is increasingly used in North American universities.

As you may have heard about or even played with Chat GPT already, I say the following regarding its use for this course: it is best practice to avoid using it for purposes related to completing assignments for this course, and I strongly urge you to avoid it. The value of a course like this is largely in giving you practice in reading, thinking, and writing; Chat GPT will not help with any of those skills, and so will defeat the point of taking a class like this. And depending on how it is used, it may count as academic misconduct, since using it without giving it due credit is a form of academic dishonesty.

Office hours

I will hold regular office hours at the times noted at the top of the syllabus. I will be available both in my physical office (Buchanan E373) and on the Zoom room indicated at the top of the syllabus at those times; you may visit using either at your convenience. You are strongly encouraged to come visit me at office hours and/or to make time to talk with me outside of class. You may want to bring specific questions about material in this course, or you may want to show up just to talk about whatever school- or philosophy-related issues are on your mind. Getting to know the teachers at your university is one of the most valuable parts of your higher education; unfortunately, it is unlikely to occur here unless you take at least a small bit of initiative. I will do what I can to reciprocate in getting to know you.

Equity and special arrangements

I take seriously the importance of making sure all students are given equal and full opportunities to participate and learn. The University accommodates students with disabilities who have registered with the Disability Resource Centre. The University accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let me know as soon as possible, preferably in the first week of class, if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. Students who plan to be absent for varsity athletics, family obligations, or other similar commitments, cannot assume they will be accommodated, and should discuss their commitments with me before the drop date.

If you require any particular arrangements in the classroom to facilitate your participation or learning, please let me know, and I will do what we can to make things suitable for you.

If you encounter serious health or personal difficulties during the term, please let me know of these at your earliest opportunity. There are lots of things more important in life than this class, and when one of those things goes wrong, this class should not add to the burdens you

may then confront. Within reason, I will do what we can to work around any genuine, serious difficulties you may confront, but it will be helpful to know of them as soon as you are able to notify me.

The UBC-V Senate Policy V-130 mandates the inclusion of the following paragraph on course syllabuses:

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>)

Schedule of readings/topics/assignments for the term

Due to the nature of this seminar, the following schedule of readings is very tentative at present. Material may be added and/or subtracted and re-organized/re-scheduled as the term progresses. Suggestions for changes/additions/replacements to the reading list are welcome, and may well be acted upon. I may also refer in my lectures to the readings in the “secondary” column, but these will not be the focus of our discussions. They may, however, be very valuable for writing your final papers, so you are encouraged to do as many of them as you have time for.

All readings below will be made available for download from the Canvas page: “Schedule of Readings and Events.” There is one book required for this course: Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals* (available at the UBC Bookstore); in addition, you may wish to purchase privately Benjamin Lipscomb, *The Women Are Up to Something*, though it is available electronically via the UBC Library. I will also provide a list of additional books and readings on a separate Canvas page that may be of interest to you, including books you may wish to purchase.

(The following is a tentative reading list; a detailed schedule of readings will be available at the start of the term.)

Excerpts from **Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman:** *Metaphysical Animals*

Excerpts from **Benjamin Lipscomb:** *The Women Are Up to Something*

G. E. M. Anscombe:

“Mr. Truman’s Degree”

“Modern Moral Philosophy”

“On Brute Facts”

“Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt the Youth?”

“Contraception and Chastity”

“Who is Wronged?”

Philippa Foot

“Moral Beliefs”
“Moral Arguments”
“Virtues and Vices”
“The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”
“Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?”

Mary Midgley

Beast and Man ch 2 (“Animals and the Problem of Evil”)
“Biotechnology and Monstrosity”

Iris Murdoch

Selections from *Existentialists and Mystics*

A. J. Ayer

Language Truth and Logic ch. 6: “Critique of Ethics and Theology”

R. M. Hare

“Principles”

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Excerpts from the *Philosophical Investigations*

Other Important Dates

Monday, September 16, 2024: Last day for changes in registration and for withdrawal from most Term 1 courses without withdrawal standing of W recorded on a student's academic record.

Friday, October 25, 2024: Last day for withdrawal from most Winter Session Term 1 courses with withdrawal standing of W recorded on a student's academic record.

Finally

I hope that this course is a good experience for all of us, and that we all have the chance to learn from each other. If you have suggestions, complaints, or questions as the term goes along, please raise them with me; this course will work best if you take an active role in its direction and intellectual work. For my part, I will do my best to make this an enjoyable and rewarding study of some phenomenally interesting philosophy and philosophical thinkers. ☺