

Phil 235, Contemporary Moral Issues
Term 2 2024-25
T, Th 11am-12.30pm

Instructor	TA
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Course Description and Aims

This is a course in contemporary moral issues. We will not attempt to cover general theories of ethics in any detail. Instead, we will adopt a philosophical frame of mind toward some controversial moral issues of the day. As heated as some of the discourse can be, we will try to make it boring. That is, we will have a dispassionate, analytic approach. This includes a willingness to entertain sometimes disagreeable views with an open mind and reply not with the passion of an advocate nor the dismissiveness of a dogmatist, but with the measured argumentation of a truth seeker. I want you to think clearly, identify key claims, identify the reasons given for those claims, pick apart (what you take to be) bad arguments, and build (what you take to be) good arguments.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will

- have a broad appreciation of the questions and concerns surrounding some contemporary moral issues.
- be able to explain texts and positions accurately, identify and apply philosophical research methods consistently, articulate and defend various controversial positions, and anticipate and rebut objections to those positions.
- acquire philosophical content, synthesize it, summarize it, analyze it, criticize it, and communicate it.

Learning Expectations

Students are expected to do the readings in advance, attend class, stay focused and undistracted during the class, and to actively participate in discussions. Students are also required to submit all assignments on time.

Piazza

This term we will be using Piazza for class discussion. The system is highly catered to getting you help fast and efficiently from classmates, the TA, and the instructor. Rather than emailing questions to the teaching staff, I encourage you to post your questions on Piazza. If you have any problems or feedback for the developers, email team@piazza.com.

Find our class signup link at: https://piazza.com/ubc.ca/winterterm2025/phil_v2350012024w2

Structure of Class Time

I want to use class time in two ways. First, for all but the first session, we begin by reflecting on the material from the last session, often breaking into discussion groups. This gives you time to think about the material from the last session, to look up any additional material you think is relevant, etc. The second half of the class is where we begin a discussion of the material assigned for that day. In all cases, the class is more discussion based than lecture based. We will be relying on your input.

Assessments of Learning

Your final mark will be determined by

- 1) signing up with Piazza by classtime, Thursday Jan 9th (2% - effectively, extra credit)
 - 2) class participation (10%)
 - 3) weekly written responses posted on Piazza (15%)
 - 4) short midterm paper (35%)
 - 5) short final paper (40%)
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- 1) Class participation. Students are expected to do the readings before class, and to contribute positively and regularly to class discussion. Attendance is mandatory and unexcused absences will result in a 0 participation score for the day.
 - 2) Weekly written responses posted on Piazza. At the end of each week, students should prepare a brief (200-400 word) written response to the readings from that week. These will be submitted on the class Piazza site by midnight each Sunday night. This work must be your own. You can discuss the material with other students, but please do not use AI to help you. There is not a fixed assignment question for these responses; appropriate topics include:
 - Clarifying a particularly interesting argument in the reading
 - Raising an objection to a reading
 - Drawing connections between the ideas in the reading to broader themes
 - Reporting how the reading has changed your mind
 - 3) Short midterm paper. Students will produce a short midterm paper, between 2000 and 4000 words, engaging a major theme of the course. Students are encouraged to discuss topics with me in advance, or gather feedback on Piazza. This is a philosophy research paper. It should address the positions and arguments found in the assigned material. No research outside of the readings is required. No AI help for this except to proof read.
 - 4) Short final paper. This will be the same as the midterm paper, but on a different topic. It is worth slightly more because your philosophical skills will develop over the term.

I will not accept late work except with a valid excuse from Arts Advising. Any request to re-grade work must be submitted in writing, detailing reasons for awarding a higher grade and indicating the new grade being requested.

Relationship between percentages and letter grades:

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

A Range: Exceptional Performance. Mastery of the subject matter; strong evidence of original thinking; good organization in written work; impressive capacity to analyze; insightful critical evaluations.

B Range: Competent Performance. Evidence of grasp of subject matter; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues.

C Range: Adequate Performance. Understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material; acceptable but uninspired work; not seriously faulty but lacking style and vigour.

D Range: Problematic Performance. Some incomplete understanding of the subject matter; limited evidence of critical and analytical skills; lack of original thinking.

F Range: Inadequate Performance. Little or no evidence of understanding of the subject matter; little or no evidence of critical and analytical skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.

Electronic Devices in the Class

I allow the use of computers and electronic devices but only to take notes and access class-related material. Above all, do not use your electronic devices in ways that might disturb other students. If you, as a student, are disturbed by another's use of electronic devices, please let me know. Violation of this policy can lead me to revise it.

University Policies

Academic Concession

[UBC's academic concession policy](#) "articulates the University's commitment to support students in their academic pursuits through the application of academic concessions in the event that students experience unanticipated events or circumstances that interfere with their ability to accomplish academic work." An academic concession may be granted for a student when an unexpected situation or circumstance prevents them from completing graded work or exams.

Students may request an academic concession for the following three reasons:

- Unanticipated changes in personal responsibilities that create a conflict
- Medical circumstances
- Compassionate grounds

If students have a disability or ongoing medical condition that affects their studies for more than one term, they may request an [academic accommodation](#).

Requests should be made as early as reasonably possible. Normally, the academic advising office will manage student's request.

Academic Integrity

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences. A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University's policies and procedures, may be found under [Discipline for Academic Misconduct](#) in the Academic Calendar.

Resources to Support Student Success

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 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 on the UBC Senate website: <https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success>

Learning Resources

Some learning resources are available on the Canvas website, such as links to helpful information about writing philosophy papers. I also want to bring your attention to the Philosophy Essay Clinic: <https://philosophy.ubc.ca/undergraduate/philosophy-essay-clinic/>

Reading Schedule

Rather than fix a schedule in advance, let us discuss topics and choose among them. I have starred the ones I'm pretty interested in.

Free speech (Mill)

*And liberal values

*And self-censorship

*And social justice

*And academic freedom

*Color blindness vs color consciousness

And affirmative action

*Decolonization

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

And wokeness
*Effective altruism
Social identity and social institutions
Meritocracy
*Income inequality
*Post-liberal neo-conservatism
Reproductive issues (abortion/surrogacy/reproductive autonomy)
And *screening ethics