



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF ARTS
Department of Philosophy

PHIL 347 Lec 01
Contemporary Moral Problems
Fall 2022
Tue & Thu, 9:30-10:45am, MS319

COURSE OUTLINE

Instructor Name: Dr. Agnes Tam

Email: ngayin.tam@ucalgary.ca (Please expect a response in 24-48 hours. Please do not expect responses outside of regular business hours and on weekends. Emails will not be answered if the answer to your question can be found on the syllabus.)

Office: SS 1210

Office Hours: Tue 11-1pm

Office Phone:

COURSE INFORMATION

Moral problems pervade our everyday life. But we may not be aware of them. And even if we are aware of them, we may not fully understand their complexity and demands on us. This course takes students through five of them:

1. *Is it wrong to eat meat?*
2. *Is there a right to sex?*
3. *What rights should minorities have?*
4. *Why are we morally blind sometimes?*
5. *What are some of the challenges to truth and reconciliation?*

Each topic above raises questions as to how we should relate to others (a member or a group belonging to another species, sex, race, culture or nation) in terms of our beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Students will be introduced to a variety of philosophical concepts, ethical and political theories, and methods of inquiry to better understand the nature of these controversies, and articulate and defend their own views on them. No prior experience in philosophy is necessary, only the curiosity to understand the complexity of our moral lives and the courage to have our prior assumptions challenged.

PREREQUISITE(S): N/A

COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING OUTCOMES

The primary goals in the course are the following:

- (a) Sharpen your sensibility to moral demands in everyday life.
- (b) Think clearly and critically about controversial moral issues.
- (c) Engage meaningfully and respectfully with others who disagree with you.

The secondary goals in the course are as follows:

- (a) Introduce you to different philosophical concepts, key ethical and political theories, and diverse methods of inquiry that help tackle moral issues.
- (b) Identify someone's ideas and arguments, and summarize them in your own words.

(c) Reflect on, refine, and articulate your own views on the various topics we address.

REQUIRED/RECOMMENDED TEXTBOOKS, READINGS AND MATERIALS

Course readings will be available via D2L.

COURSE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Assessment Components and Grading Schemes

There are five components in the course assessment.

	Assessment	Weight	Date
1.	Reflection exercises x 5	15% (pass/fail)	Between Sep 13 and Nov 17.
2.	Online quizzes x 2	30%	Sep 29 & Oct 27.
3.	Group presentation x 1	30% (pass/fail)	Between Nov 22 and Dec 1.
4.	Peer review x 1	5% (pass/fail)	Between Nov 22 and Dec 3.
5.	Final Essay x1	20%	Dec 15.

1. Reflection exercises

What: Choose any five weeks of your choice (between Sep 13 and Nov 17) and submit your reflections on the required readings of the respective week. Each is worth 3% each. 15% in total. The questions will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis. Failure to submit your reading reflections or late submission will count as a Fail (no exceptions.)

When: Any five weeks between Sep 13 and Nov 17. For the weeks you've chosen to submit reflection exercises, please submit them no later than 11pm on Tuesdays. The reason for that it will give me enough time to review your reflections and select some common concerns or puzzles for class discussions on Thursdays.

How:

After completing the required readings, write brief responses to at least 2 out of the following 3 questions:

- 1. What are the main claims of the reading (1-2 sentences for each assigned item)?*
- 2. What did you find surprising or interesting? Why? (1-2 sentences)*
- 3. What did you find confusing? Why? (1-2 sentences)*

All assignments should be submitted via *Dropbox (Reflection Exercise)* under *Assessment* on D2L.

Why: The questions are used for assessment but also help me identify your interests and any concerns or questions that should be clarified during the lectures. Doing the reflection exercises prepares you for the quizzes as well.

2. Online quizzes, worth 15% each, 30% in total

What: There will be two quizzes, each worth 15% of the total grade. Each quiz will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions.

When: Tentatively, the first quiz will be posted on Sep 29 (Thu), 9:00 am, available until Sep 30, 9:00 am, and the second quiz will be posted on Oct 27 (Thu), 9:00am, available until Oct 28, 9:00 am. You will not be able to take a quiz at any time other than the time at which it is scheduled, without adequate justification (see Absence or Missed Course Assessments below). Missing assignments will receive an “F” (a numerical score of zero).

How: Each quiz will be posted on D2L under *Assessments (Quizzes)*. You will be given 24 hours to complete the quiz. You will submit your finished quiz to D2L.

Why: The quizzes test your basic understanding of the required readings and the lectures.

3. Group presentation

What: Each student will be assigned to a group of six to seven students once the add/drop period ends. Each group will be assigned one out of the five contemporary moral problems we study and give a 30-minute presentation on it to the whole class at the end of the course. (Students may swap groups upon mutual agreement and my approval.) Each presentation should do complete four tasks: (a) identify a piece of literature or art that engages with the particular moral problem; (b) articulate the moral view expressed or hidden in it; (c) explain why the view in the chosen piece is interesting, puzzling or troubling; and (d) respond to questions and suggestions from the audience.

Each group presentation will be assessed on a Pass/Fail basis by me. Upon demonstration of reasonable effort in identifying a relevant work of literature or art and engaging the course materials, the group will receive a pass. Each group presentation will further receive written peer review reports (more details below) from your classmates, but their feedback won't matter to the group's grade. If the group passes, all group members receive 30%. If the group fails, all group members receive 0%. In case of free-rider complaints, each member of the group is required to complete and submit a *Peer-Assessment Form* (see *Rubrics* under *Assessment* on D2L). Unlike the peer review report, the peer assessment form focuses on effort, not content. It is to be completed by all the members of the group which receives a complaint. It will be the evidential basis upon which I adjust the grade to fairly reflect individual contributions.

When: All the eight presentations will take place during weeks 11 and 12. A presentations schedule with specific timeslots will be announced shortly after the add/drop period ends. Each group should get my approval for their choice of literature or art by end of day Nov 3.

How: With regard to the choice of literature or art, students are encouraged to be creative here. You can select a movie, a documentary, a novel, a podcast, a commercial, a song, a news article or even a mural. But you are welcome to use one of the recommended readings as well. In some cases (say if it is a recommended journal article on the reading list), it would be clear how the chosen work engages a moral issue. But in most cases, the moral view is likely to be subtle or hidden. And you will have to justify why you think the work relates to the moral issue at hand.

The second task in the presentation is to articulate the moral view. Whether or not the chosen work has an explicit moral message, the content of the message is likely to be nuanced and somewhat different from the ones in the required readings. Your task is to explicate and articulate it as clearly as possible, back up your interpretation with evidence (e.g. texts, images, behavioral cues) from the work itself, using the philosophical concepts we have learned in the course.

The third task is evaluative in nature. You should explain why you choose that particular piece of literature or art by engaging the course materials. Does the work raise the same moral issue but in a different way? How does this shed light on a new dimension on the moral problem? Does it give a new answer to the same question? What is this new answer? Does it give the same answer to the same

question, but with the support of a different argument? How is the argument different? Do you find the view or the argument in the work compelling, interesting, puzzling or troubling, and why?

The presentation can be interactive throughout so long as you complete all the tasks. Or you can adopt a standard format, with 20-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute Q &A at the end. You should feel free to choose a format that best delivers your content and engages the audience. No matter what format you choose, you should be prepared to interact with the audience, by inviting and responding to questions or suggestions.

Why: There are multiple objectives in this group assignment. First, it tests your sensibility to the moral issues and encourages you to take a new look at some familiar works of literature or art around you with the philosophical concepts you have learned. Second, it tests your ability to understand someone else's moral view and explain it in the clearest and most charitable way possible. Third, it develops your ability to critically assess moral arguments by raising questions and objections. Fourth, it facilitates your collaborative reasoning skills, by exchanging ideas, sharing perspectives, and responding to peers' questions, suggestions, comments, and criticisms. Fifth, it provides you an opportunity to be active in learning, and to exercise your intellectual autonomy and curiosity. Sixth, it prepares you for writing the final essay.

4. Peer review

What: Each student will complete one peer review report for a group presentation other than their own. Once the add/drop period ends, I will assign a particular group to each of you. The peer review report will be assessed on a Pass/Fail basis, worth 5% of your total grade.

When: It has to be submitted within 48 hours the assigned group presentation is completed. Late or missing report will receive an "F" (a numerical score of zero), unless there is adequate justification (see Absence or Missed Course Assessments below).

How: Download the *Peer Review Report* sheet under *Assessment (Rubrics)* on D2L early in the course. Familiarize yourself with the criteria of assessment before the presentation day. Bring it to the presentation and make notes with the help of the guided questions therein. Tidy up your notes after and submit your report via *Dropbox (Peer Review)* on D2L. Once it is uploaded, I will forward your copy to the relevant group as soon as possible.

Why: The peer review exercise develops your evaluation and assessment skills. It further fosters a number of intellectual virtues, including attentiveness, charity and respect, helping you become better readers, writers, and collaborators.

5. Final essay

What: Each student will write a critical essay of 1300 to 1500 words on the topic you have presented. It is worth 20% of the total grade. Writing and the grading thereof is a factor in evaluation.

When: I will post all the essay questions on Nov 30 (Wed), 9:00am. The final essay is due on Dec 15 (Thu), 9:00am. Late papers are accepted, with a penalty of one full grade per 24-hour period late.

How: Each essay will involve two tasks: summary and critical assessment. Below is a sample essay question:

In his "Justice and minority rights", Will Kymlicka suggests that concerns about equality give us reasons to grant group-specific rights to some minority groups. Summarize and critically assess this argument.

The summary task should be fairly easy for you at this point, that is, if you have put in reasonable effort in your own group presentation. If you have gaps in the understanding of the topic, the presentation as well as the course of preparing it are opportunities for you to discover and fill them. As you write your paper, I highly encourage you to incorporate the feedback from me as well as your peers where appropriate.

For the critical assessment task, if you agree with the author, you should explain why; and if you disagree with the author, you should also explain why, and how your critical assessment would reach a different claim.

For more detailed criteria of assessment, consult the *Rubric for Essay Grading* on D2L under *Assessment (Rubrics)*.

Why: The final essay assesses four things. First, it tests your ability to think independently and critically about a controversial moral issue. Second, it assesses your knowledge of the required readings relating to the issue. Third, it tests your ability to identify someone's ideas and arguments, and summarize them in your own words. Finally, it gives you an opportunity to reflect on, refine, and articulate your own views on the particular issue.

Exams: N/A

Conversion of Number Grades into Letter Grades

A+ = 100-96; A = 95-90; A- = 89-85; B+ = 84-80; B = 79-75; B- = 74-71; C+ = 70-67; C = 66-62; C- = 61-59; D+ = 58-54; D = 53-50; F = 49-0.

IMPORTANT DEPARTMENTAL, FACULTY AND UNIVERSITY INFORMATION

Academic Accommodations

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures. The student accommodation policy can be found at ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Student-Accommodation-Policy.pdf.

Students needing an Accommodation because of a disability or medical condition should communicate this need to Student Accessibility Services in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Accommodation-for-Students-with-Disabilities-Procedure.pdf. Students needing an Accommodation in relation to their coursework or to fulfil requirements for a graduate degree, based on a protected ground other than disability, should communicate this need, preferably in writing, to their instructor.

Absence or Missed Course Assessments

Students who are absent from class assessments (tests, participation activities, or other assignments) should inform their instructors as soon as possible. If the reason provided for the absence is acceptable, instructors may decide that any arrangements made can take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.

Student Support and Resources

Full details and information about the following resources can be found at ucalgary.ca/current-students/student-services

- Wellness and Mental Health Resources

- Student Success Centre
- Student Ombuds Office
- Student Union (SU) Information
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information
- Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points
- Safewalk

Academic Advising

If you are a student in the Faculty of Arts, you can speak to an academic advisor in the Arts Students' Centre about course planning, course selection, registration, program progression and more. Visit the Faculty of Arts website at <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/current-students/undergraduate/academic-advising> for contact details and information regarding common academic concerns.

For questions specific to the philosophy program, please visit arts.ucalgary.ca/philosophy. Further academic guidance is available by contacting Jeremy Fantl (Undergraduate Program Director jfantl@ucalgary.ca) or David Dick (Honours Advisor dgdick@ucalgary.ca).

Writing Assessment and Support

The assessment of all written assignments—and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses—is based in part on writing skills. This includes correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.), as well as general clarity and organization. Research papers must include a thorough and accurate citation of sources. Students are also encouraged to use Writing Support Services for assistance. For more information, and other services offered by the Student Success Centre, please visit ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success.

Required Technology

In order to successfully engage in their learning experiences at the University of Calgary, students taking online, remote, and blended courses are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security, and malware updates;
- A current and updated web browser;
- Webcam (built-in or external);
- Microphone and speaker (built-in or external), or headset with microphone;
- Current antivirus and/or firewall software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection.

Most current laptops will have a built-in webcam, speaker and microphone.

Responsible Use of D2L

Important information and communication about this course will be posted on D2L (Desire2Learn), UCalgary's online learning management system. Visit <https://ucalgary.service-now.com/it> for how-to information and technical assistance.

All users of D2L are bound by the guidelines on the responsible use of D2L posted here: <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/commitment-to-the-responsible-use-of-d2l/>. The instructor may establish additional specific course policies for D2L, Zoom, and any other technologies used to support remote learning. Instructional materials, including audio or video recordings of lectures, may not be posted outside of the course D2L site. Students violating this policy are subject to discipline under the [University of Calgary's Non-Academic Misconduct policy](#).

Media Recording

Please refer to the following statement on media recording of students: https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Media-Recording-in-Learning-Environments-OSP_FINAL.pdf

Academic Misconduct/Honesty

Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is as an extremely serious academic offense, the penalty for which will be an F on the assignment or an F in the course, and possibly a disciplinary sanction such as probation, suspension, or expulsion. For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html.

Intellectual honesty requires that your work include adequate referencing to sources. Plagiarism occurs when you do not acknowledge or correctly reference your sources. If you have questions about referencing, please consult your instructor.

University Policies

The Instructor Intellectual Property Policy is available at ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Intellectual-Property-Policy.pdf

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act, as outlined at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/access-information-privacy>. The instructor (or TA) must return graded assignments *directly* to the student UNLESS written permission to do otherwise has been provided.

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Acceptable-Use-of-Material-Protected-by-Copyright-Policy.pdf>) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>).