

## ETHICS

**Code and section:** PHIL 2120 **Term:** Winter 2024

See WebAdvisor for dates/times.

Virtual office hours: Wednesday 1-2 pm or by appointment. Please email requests for appointments at [sdhanvan@uoguelph.ca](mailto:sdhanvan@uoguelph.ca)

## METHOD OF DELIVERY

This course is *blended*.

**We will meet in person on Wednesdays ONLY.** Monday classes will be held virtually and will be **ASYNCHRONOUS**. For students who cannot attend Wednesday classes in-person for any reason, Wednesday lectures will be held in a **HYBRID** format, **ALLOWING FOR VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE**. All recorded lectures will also be available on CourseLink. All readings, notes, and assignments will be posted on CourseLink. To be clear, any “in person” attendance of lectures is not required, but **tutorials** will be held as in-person meetings.

### Format of Delivery

- - **Audio Podcasts:** *Monday lectures are recorded and posted in the form of ZOOM video/audio recordings OR audio podcasts (which can be downloaded).* On the whole I recommend that you *listen* to the podcasts while being off internet and even off-screen. The point is to give you a break from Zoom and video, and to allow you to focus on the ideas. Listen while taking notes, or while taking a walk. Podcasts will vary in length depending on the subject-matter.
- - **One weekly in-person class (non-mandatory attendance):** Wednesday lectures will be in-person, but Zoom attendance is an option. Also, audio/video recordings will be posted on the course site. Attendance in person is not mandatory.
- - **One weekly (in-person) seminar with your TA:** You will be assigned to a tutorial and are expected to participate in the tutorial session, organized and taught by the teaching assistant. Please ensure that your participation in tutorials is *thoughtful, respectful, and responsive* to your fellow students and TA, as well as active and engaged.
- - Please check the announcements on *CourseLink* regularly, as this will be our primary mode of communication outside class.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on the study of ethics to think critically about social and political problems and dilemmas.

This course is divided into three parts. PART ONE will reflect on the ethics of the pandemic response. It will address several problems that arise in regard to public health policies and practices. It will pose questions related to the concept of public health and what justifies it. This section will also introduce students to critiques and analyses useful for reflecting on the persistent problem of colonialism, ableism, and eugenics in the pandemic response. We will engage in philosophical discussions on unequal psychic and physiological health burdens, the normalization of mass death and disability, and ongoing forms of social, political, and economic inequality and oppression.

PART TWO will cover some of the major approaches to ethical theory that assess the 'rightness' of intention and action, as well as the individual and collective character of responsibility, including virtue ethics, deontological ethics, existential ethics, and feminist ethics. The course will show how ethics can help students to reflect on and respond to injustice in the contemporary world. The study of ethics shows us the ways in which we tend to be ignorant of or not adequately self-aware of the ethical principles and institutions that orient our lives. A reading of classical western theory will help us to envision ethical concepts as tools to tackle today's ethical problems.

PART THREE will examine movements for anticolonial, decolonial, racial, and environmental justice. We will consider the ways in which ethical theories can help us to pose important and urgent questions vis-à-vis oppressive social and political structures that inhibit the advancement of ethical freedom. Throughout the course, we will read texts that address the multiple and convergent ethical dilemmas we face, with attention paid to the disconcerting eruptions of societal instability in the present world. We will conclude the course by reflecting on possible ethical approaches to today's problems and crises.

## **ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES**

Reading Responses 20% Midterm Paper 35%

Take-home Final Assignment 45%

### **READING RESPONSES**

You will write FOUR short, critical responses to the course readings. These responses should be roughly 150-200 words, and they should be critical: To receive full credit, your response must highlight an argument or claim made by the author with whom you're engaged and raise either a criticism of, or critical question about, that argument or claim. Reading responses are due before the start of your weekly tutorial, in the week that the readings are discussed. Each reading response will receive a grade out of five.

## **MIDTERM PAPER**

You will write a 5-page (double-spaced) philosophical paper. This paper will require you to explain and develop a critical response to one of the readings covered in the first part of the class. The purpose is to give you practice in writing philosophical, that is, critical and well-reasoned essays. (Guidelines for essays will be posted on *CourseLink* and explained in the tutorials).

## **TAKE-HOME FINAL ASSIGNMENT**

The take-home final will include two components: I/ A short essay (5 pages) along the same lines as your first essay assignment, but with a list of topics covering the second half of the course. II/ Short-answer questions, mainly expository, aimed to test your knowledge of readings and lectures from the entire course.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Course Requirements**

You are expected to attend virtual and/or in-person class meetings. You are also expected to attend in-person tutorials. You are expected to participate, either in-person or online.

Keeping up with your reading responses will help you to prepare for your tutorials. You will do four of these over the course of the semester, and they must be submitted before or at the beginning of the tutorial in which the material is taught. In addition, there are two assignments: a five-page analysis focused on the course readings from this first half of the term; and a final take-home assignment that covers all course readings. Guidelines for these papers will be made available on the course site and will also be discussed in your tutorials.

### **Course Objectives**

This course will introduce you to recent ethical reflections on the pandemic, some major European philosophical writings on ethics, and current theorizations related to ethical crises and dilemmas. More generally, the course aims to develop your critical thinking skills and to

help you navigate arguments related to ethical questions. It will also help you to write cogently and concisely on topics related to ethics.

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course, you should have a grasp of recent and ongoing social and political questions that demand a critical understanding vis-à-vis ethics. You should also have a grasp of some important texts in ethical philosophy. You should also have improved skills in critical thinking, and you should have an ability to critically read and analyze texts.

## Readings

This course uses book chapters and journal articles available through ARES.

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS *(subject to change)*

### *Introduction*

#### **Week One**

January

9 Introduction to Ethics: COURSE SYLLABUS, ASSIGNMENTS, TUTORIALS

Topic of Discussion: COVID, history of pandemics, and ethical questions

Optional:

Excerpt from "Introduction." Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/decameronintro.asp>

Siddhartha Mukherjee. "The Pandemic. *The Song of the Cell: An Exploration of Medicine and the New Human*. Scribener, 2022. 245-255.

### ***PART I: ETHICS AND THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE***

#### **11 Colonial Health Burden, Racial Justice, and the Pandemic**

Alia Al-Saji, "Weariness: Dismembered Time, Colonialism, Pandemics"

VAW Learning Network, "More Exposed & Less Protected" in "Canada: Racial Inequality as Systemic Violence During COVID-19" <https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/docs/Systemic-Racism-Covid-19-Backgrounder.pdf>

#### *Recommended*

Blume, A.W. (2022). Health Inequity and COVID-19. In *Colonialism and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. International and Cultural Psychology. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92825-4\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92825-4_6)

#### *Optional (podcast)*

Yolanda Wilson on health justice in the US <https://unmutetalk.podbean.com/e/episode-041-yolonda-wilson-on-health-justice/>

#### **Week Two: Public Health and Ethical Questions**

Sean A. Valles, "The Predictable Inequities of COVID-19 in the US: Fundamental Causes and Broken Institutions," pp. 1-20

### **The Public Health Crisis in Canada**

#### **GUEST SPEAKER: DR. T. RYAN GREGORY, DEPT OF INTEGRATIVE BIOLOGY**

Joe Vipond, Lisa Iannattone, T. Ryan Gregory. "Opinion: We don't know what's causing the tsunami of sick kids, but we'd better figure it out fast." *Calgary Herald*. Dec 15, 2022

<https://calgaryherald.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-we-dont-know-whats-causing-the-tsunami-of-sick-kids-but-wed-better-figure-it-out-fast>

"Researchers say that TB at residential schools was no accident"

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/researchers-say-that-tb-at-residential-schools-was-no-accident-1.5513755>

### **Week Three: Philosophical Reflections on the Pandemic**

23 Gregory Fernando Pappas, "Philosophical Meditations on the Covid-19 Pandemic" 25 Judith Butler, *What World Is This?: A Pandemic Phenomenology* (excerpt)

## ***PART II: THE WESTERN TRADITION***

### **Week Four: Virtue Ethics**

30 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2

Jules Holroyd & Daniel Kelly. "Implicit Bias, Character, and Control" (optional)

Feb

### **Week Five: Utilitarianism**

6 John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2 8 Mill cont'd

### **Week Six: Deontology**

13 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork*, Part I

15 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork*, Part I **MIDTERM PAPER DUE FEBRUARY 17, 2023, 5 PM**

## **Week Seven: WINTER BREAK**

## **Week Eight: Existential Ethics**

Feb

27 Existential Ethics, Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity* (Part II) March

1 Existential Ethics, Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity* (Part II)

## **Week Nine: Feminist Ethics**

6 Gilligan, Carol. 1987. "Moral Orientation and Moral Development." In *Justice and Care*, edited by Virginia Held, 31–46. New York: Routledge.

8 Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others"

## **PART III: RACISM / COLONIALISM / CLIMATE CRISIS**

## **Week Ten: Racial Justice**

13 Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (Chapter One)

15 Deva Woodly, Chapter 3, "The Politics of Care and the Idea of Healing Justice" IN

*Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*

(2021).

OPTIONAL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyE5nI1nRJI>

From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation | Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor | TEDxBaltimore

## **Week Eleven: Colonialism and Decolonization – Settler Colonialism**

20 Glen Sean Coulthard, "Seeing Red." *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. 105-129.

22 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "R-Words: Refusing Research"

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/557744ffe4b013bae3b7af63/t/557f2ee5e4b0220eff4ae4b5/1434398437409/Tuck+and+Yang+R+Words\\_Refusing+Research.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/557744ffe4b013bae3b7af63/t/557f2ee5e4b0220eff4ae4b5/1434398437409/Tuck+and+Yang+R+Words_Refusing+Research.pdf)

## **Week Twelve: Climate Crisis and Climate Justice**

27 Táíwò Olúfẹ̀mi O. *Reconsidering Reparations: Worldmaking in the Case of Climate Crisis*. Philosophy of Race. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022. (Chapter 5 "What's Next")

29 Continued

**Week Thirteen: Review**

April

3 & 5 Concluding lecture: Ethics, Critique, and Collective Responses to Global Crises

Both classes in the final week will be asynchronous.

**FINAL TAKE-HOME ASSIGNMENT (due date posted in Announcements)**

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/arts/system/files/CO%20Standard%20Statements.pdf>