

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE FRASER VALLEY

COURSE INFORMATION

DISCIPLINE/DEPARTMENT: Philosophy & Politics **IMPLEMENTATION DATE:** Winter 1999

Revised: _____

<u>PHIL 310</u>	<u>Ethics and Public Policy</u>	<u>3</u>
SUBJECT/NUMBER OF COURSE	DESCRIPTIVE TITLE	UCFV CREDITS

CALENDAR DESCRIPTION: Sometimes our ethics are about how we act individually, for example, whether to make a charitable donation for cancer research. Sometimes, our ethics are about our political practices, for example, whether to make our charitable donations tax deductible.

What role should ethics play in our social and political practices? Should our ethics—what we think is right—take into account the realities of politics—of how we collectively make decisions? Should we structure our social and political practices to meet ethical requirements?

In order to pursue these questions about diverse practices such as healthcare, international relations, business, employment relations, and government, we will look at various approaches to ethics that focuses on practical issues of forming, justifying and implementing political and social solutions.

RATIONALE: Much theoretical ethical thinking ignores problems of applying a moral theory to embodied persons engaged with specific issues such as deciding whether to cross a picket line, to buy goods produced by child-workers, to illegally avoid paying taxes. Even within practical, applied ethics, often there is little consideration of the realities of implementing a solution, for example, in the face of those who oppose certain prescriptions and may refuse to follow them even if they are made law.

On the other hand, and often in reaction to a merely theoretical morality, it is often argued that ethics has little place amongst the realities of our large-scale social and political practices, for example, assuming that whatever will be under capitalism, will be good. Consequently, it is claimed that the only important questions are empirical, such as describing demographic groups, assessing costs, making predictions. In contrast, this course will deal with theoretical issues only when they arise for embodied persons in the nexus of social relations. It will assume a commitment to living a morally good life, foregoing meta-ethical scepticism and amoral egoism. It will attempt to focus as much on what we can do on the basis of shared moral commitments as on problems raised by our moral disagreements about controversial issues. This course will consider the values and concepts—often unacknowledged—that underlie political and social practices while also including the problems of acting within an unavoidably uncertain empirical context. It will not assume that legislation or codes of ethics are the only public means for promoting ethical behaviour.

COURSE PREREQUISITES: 45 credits in Applied or Arts or Science programs, including 9 credits in Philosophy or Political Science; or permission of the instructor.

COURSE CO-REQUISITES: None

HOURS PER TERM FOR EACH STUDENT	Lecture	15	hrs	Student Directed Learning	hrs
	Laboratory		hrs	Other - specify:	
	Seminar	30	hrs		
	Field Experience		hrs		
				TOTAL	45 HRS

MAXIMUM ENROLMENT: 28

Is transfer credit requested? **9** Yes **:** No

AUTHORIZATION SIGNATURES:

Course Designer(s): Paul Herman Chairperson: E. Davis
Curriculum Committee

Department Head: Jeffrey Morgan Dean: J.D. Tunstall

PAC: Approval in Principle _____ PAC: Final Approval: March 25, 1998
(Date) (Date)

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SYNONYMOUS COURSES:(a) replaces N/A
(course #)(b) cannot take N/A for further credit
(course #)**SUPPLIES/MATERIALS:****TEXTBOOKS, REFERENCES, MATERIALS (List reading resources elsewhere)**

Readings will vary with the instructor, but could be drawn from texts such as:

- Babbitt, Susan E., *Impossible Dreams; rationality, integrity, and moral imagination*, Westview, 1996.
 Daly, Markate, *Communitarianism: a New Public Ethics*, Wadsworth, 1994.
 Habermas, Jurgen, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, MIT Press, 1990.
 Hampshire, Stuart, *Morality and Conflict*, Harvard University Press, 1983.
 Kymlicka, Will, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 1990.
 Nozick, Robert, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Basic Books, 1974.
 Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, 1971.
 Sandel, Michael, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.
 Sterba, James, *Justice: Alternative Political Perspectives*, Wadsworth, 1992.
 Walzer, Michael, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, Basic Books, 1983.
 Wilber, Charles K., *Economics, Ethics, and Public Policy*, Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.
 Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the politics of difference*, Princeton University Press, 1990.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To examine and adapt frameworks for making moral decisions.
2. To consider whether there is a need for ethics in social and political practices, or whether ethical considerations are rendered redundant by, for example, the workings of the free market.
3. To examine major theories of social and political morality, for example, those of Rawls, Walzer, Sandel, Habermas, Young as possibly expressing incommensurable modes of thinking representing different social perspectives.
4. To attempt to apply these theories to moral, social, political issues from the perspective of agents with varying degrees of power and knowledge within specific social contexts.

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METHODS:

The instructor introduces frameworks for examining issues and the major alternative positions on the issues, placing them in their historical context.

Students then investigate and develop these frameworks and alternatives and make presentations to the class.

Students then attempt to refine the frameworks and reach their own resolutions of the issues.

Students work cooperatively and individually to research and make presentations, write exams and essays.

STUDENT EVALUATION PROCEDURE:

Evaluation procedures will vary, but students are always evaluated on a variety of performances that may include essays, contributions to class, interviews, practicums, journals, presentation of reports, papers, and projects. A typical distribution of work would assign 20% to in-class presentations and contributions, 20% to research assignments, work, 30% to essays and 30% to projects which connect the work of this course to areas of interest in the student's career, major field of study, or social context.

COURSE CONTENT

Course content will vary with the instructor, Here is one example of a course schedule with three hours instruction per week:

Weeks 1 & 2: Diagnostic quiz on basic moral theories to check for students' background knowledge. Students having difficulty with the quiz will be expected to review a basic introduction to moral philosophy such as James Rachels, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*.

Frameworks for making moral decisions.

Weeks 3 & 4: The role of ethics in social and political practices.

Weeks 4 & 5: Liberal, modernist account (Rawls).

Weeks 6 & 7: Alternatives to liberalism: Libertarianism (Nozick).

Weeks 8 & 9: Liberal revisions (Rawls, Walzer, Hampshire).

Weeks 10, 11, & 12: Alternatives to liberalism: Marxism, Communitarianism (Sandel), Feminism (Young).

Weeks 13, 14 & 15: Final preparation and presentations of three or four group projects.