



School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations

**PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMME**

**PHIL228: ETHICS AND GENETICS**  
**CRN 10177**

**Trimester 2, 2010**  
12 July to 13 November 2010

**Trimester dates**

Teaching dates: 12 July 2010 to 15 October 2010

Mid-trimester break: 23 August to 5 September 2010

Study week: 18 to 22 October 2010

Examination/ Assessment period: 22 October to 13 November 2010

Please note that this course will have an examination during the university examination period. You should make sure that you will be able to attend an examination at the University at any time during the examination period.

**Withdrawal dates**

Information on withdrawals and refunds may be found at

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/admisenrol/payments/withdrawalsrefunds.aspx>

**LECTURER:** Nicholas Agar

**ROOM:** MY601

**PHONE:** 4635046

**EMAIL:** [nicholas.agar@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:nicholas.agar@vuw.ac.nz)

**LECTURE TIME:** Thursday 11:00-1:50am

**VENUE:** HMLT001

**OFFICE HOURS:** By appointment only

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Information about any changes to the timetable or programme will be announced in lectures and posted on Blackboard. There will be separate hand-outs with information about the lecture outline, essay topics, and readings.

## COURSE AIMS

PHIL 228 explores a variety of issues that arise in connection with the modern scientific revelations about the alterability of human and nonhuman nature. We will begin by exploring the moral and scientific underpinnings of the Transhumanist movement. The transhumanists are a group of increasingly influential thinkers who think that we should be using available technologies to transcend our humanity by radically extending our life spans and enhancing our intellects. We then turn to the debate provoked by research into human stem cells. Does the prospect of a regenerative medicine that might cure hitherto poorly treated diseases justify the moral costs involved in conducting research on human embryos? The final topic is the debate over the genetic modification of food. Will GM feed the hungry and reduce humanity's burden on the environment – or are they another tool for the rich to exploit both the poor and nature?

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students who pass the course will have acquired a good understanding of some of the central ethical issues connected with the prospect of scientifically modifying human and nonhuman nature.

## LECTURE OUTLINE

Week 1: Introduction to principal themes – Enhancement, Stem Cells, and Genetically Modified Food

Week 2: Aubrey de Grey's plans to extend human lives.

Week 3: Philosophical responses to life extension.

Week 4: Ray Kurzweil and Uploading

Week 5: The debate about cognitive enhancement

Week 6: Performance-enhancing drugs in sport

Week 7: Introducing embryonic stem cell research

Week 8: Arguments from embryonic potential

Week 9: Placing embryonic stem cell research in context

Week 10: Introduction to genetically modified crops

Week 11: The precautionary principle and genetic modification

Week 12: The apparent case of morally obligatory genetically modified crops

## ESSENTIAL TEXTS

All of the reading materials for this course will be posted on "Blackboard."

## ASSESSMENT

There will be one essay (30%), three short answer tests (the best two marks to jointly contribute 10%) and an exam (60%).

i. Essay: The essay should be approximately 2500-3000 words long. The due date is September 17. **You must submit your essay electronically via Blackboard** (please consult *Blackboard* for instructions). **This electronic version will be sent to turnitin.com, an anti-plagiarism website, and is the version that will be graded.** However, as a back-up **you must also submit a hard copy of your essay to the Philosophy Department office (MY 518) by 4:30pm on the due date.**

Essays submitted after the due date will be accepted but they will receive only limited written comments. There will be no grade penalty for late essays. The final submission date is October 15. Essays submitted after this date will not be marked.

ii. In-class tests: The dates of the three short answer tests are as follows:

**Thursday 5 August,  
Thursday 16 September,  
and Thursday 7 October.**

The tests will take up the **final hour of the lecture**. Their purpose is to evaluate students' awareness of the topics covered in the course.

iii. Exam: There will be a closed-book three hour exam for this course. To be scheduled during the exam period (22 October to 13 November).

The University has a policy of reasonable accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities in assessment procedures.

#### **Relationship between assessment and course objectives:**

The essay gives students an opportunity for a relatively philosophically in-depth treatment of one of the issues covered in the course. The in-class tests should ensure that students are keeping up with the issues and literature as the course proceeds.

#### **Mandatory course requirements**

None

#### **Workload**

In accordance with Faculty Guidelines, this course has been constructed on the assumption that students will devote 15 hours per week to PHIL 228. This includes 4 hours of lectures.

#### **Return of assignments**

Essays and tests will be returned during lectures. The final essay and any other uncollected work may be collected from the Programme Office on the fourth/fifth floor between the hours of 2 and 3pm on Monday to Friday.

#### **Class Representative**

A class representative will be elected in the first class, and that person's name and contact details will be available to VUWSA, the Course Coordinator and the class. The class representative provides a communication channel to liaise with the Course Coordinator on behalf of students.

#### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. 'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or any other printed source
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organisation or structuring of any such material

Find out more about plagiarism, how to avoid it and penalties, on the University's website:  
<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism.aspx>

### **Use of Turnitin**

Student work provided for assessment in this course may be checked for academic integrity by the electronic search engine <http://www.turnitin.com>. Turnitin is an online plagiarism prevention tool which compares submitted work with a very large database of existing material. At the discretion of the Head of School, handwritten work may be copy-typed by the School and subject to checking by Turnitin. Turnitin will retain a copy of submitted material on behalf of the University for detection of future plagiarism, but access to the full text of submissions is not made available to any other party.

## **GENERAL UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND STATUTES**

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the *Victoria University Calendar* or go to the Academic Policy and Student Policy sections on:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy>

The AVC(Academic) website also provides information for students in a number of areas including Academic Grievances, Student and Staff conduct, Meeting the needs of students with impairments, and student support/VUWSA student advocates. This website can be accessed at:

[http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about\\_victoria/avcacademic/Publications.aspx](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/avcacademic/Publications.aspx)