**Philosophy 102: Contemporary Moral Problems[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Summer 2021 (A-Term) - M/T/W/Th/F 9:40am – 11:50am PT**

**Instructor:** Arthur Obst, M.A. **Email**: [aobst@uw.edu](mailto:aobst@uw.edu)

**Office Hours**: Tuesday and Thursday from 12:00 – 1:00 PT, or by appointment.

**Zoom Meeting IDs:**

*We will the following link for Lecture, Discussion, and Office Hours:*

990 8369 6207 (link: <https://washington.zoom.us/j/99083696207>)

**Course Description:**

Note: I reserve the right to change the syllabus, if needed.

Moral problems are ubiquitous in our lives. Some of these problems are obvious, and we can immediately see them as moral problems. We know, for example, that murder and the torture of innocent people are morally wrong. However, these are neither the interesting cases in morality nor are they the most common. For most cases answers are less forthcoming. Sometimes this is because the problem is itself too complicated, and our tools too blunt. In other cases, our failure is a product of not being able (or willing) to see something as a moral problem. We have blind-spots, socially or individually, that cause moral problems to go unnoticed. This class provides some of the tools for addressing these problems. We begin by learning some best practices when reasoning about morality, as well as two of the most common theoretical frameworks ethicists use to analyze moral problems. Then, we proceed to apply these tools to pressing contemporary moral problems.

First, we survey a range of pressing contemporary issues. In a world where charitable contributions can go a long way, how much does morality demand individuals contribute to altruistic causes? Should access to abortion be constrained? Can there be racism and sexism without sexists and racists; and, if so, what ought to be done to solve this more insidious form of oppression? What forms of protest are permissible to exercise as a means of fighting oppression? How ought vaccines for Covid-19 be distributed?

In the second part of the course, we take a deep dive into the moral problem of climate change, analyzing the developing crisis as a matter of global justice. What are the roots of the climate crisis? What are the ethical dimensions of climate denial? What moral obligations do *individuals* have to address climate change? What does a just international order look like in a warming world, and how should the burdens for achieving this world be distributed across nations? What role should technology play in addressing the climate crisis? Why have recent generations so far failed to take climate action, and how should future generations regard us?

If successful, you will leave this course with 1) better knowledge of moral reasoning; (2) an ability to critically analyze novel moral problems; and (3) a heightened sensitivity to the ethical blind spots that we all have.

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

***Class Participation (20%):*** You are expected to regularly attend & respectfully participate. Come having carefully done the reading, watched the lecture, & ready to contribute. Alternatively, fill out the make-up worksheets I will provide.

***Quizzes (20%):*** We will have daily quizzes on the reading and lecture.

***Mid-Term Paper (15%):*** You will write a 1000-1250 word critical summary on effective altruism, abortion, or the ethics of meat-eating. This is a relatively low-stakes assignment, and I will give substantive feedback. Due 7/6.

***Paper Abstract (10%)****:* You will submit an introduction and outline of your term paper and participate in the in-class peer review session. I will give substantive feedback. Due 7/15.

***Term Paper (35%):*** You will write a 2000-2500 word argumentative paper on responsibility for justice, immigration, or climate ethics. Due 7/21.

***Reflection (5% Extra Credit):*** You may write a 500 word reflection on the course. Due 7/23.

**Course Structure**

| Date | Topic | Reading (All Online) – Readings Abridged |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 6/21 | Introduction: Ethics by Authority | Mark Timmons – “Ethics by Authority”  Louis Pojman – “Subjective Ethical Relativism” |
| 6/22 | Introduction: Moral Reasoning | Barbara MacKinnon – “Ethics and Ethical Reasoning” |
| 6/23 | Effective Altruism | Peter Singer – “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” |
| 6/24 | Effective Altruism | Amia Srinivasan – “Stop the Robot Apocalypse” |
| 6/25 | No Class | No Reading |
| 6/28 | Abortion | Don Marquis – “Why Abortion Is Immoral” |
| 6/29 | Abortion | Judith Jarvis Thompson – “A Defense of Abortion” |
| 6/30 | Ethics of Meat-Eating | Alistair Norcross – “Puppies, Pigs, & People” |
| 7/1 | Ethics of Meat-Eating | Donald Bruckner – “The Vegan’s Dilemma” |
| 7/2 | No Class | No Reading |
| 7/5 | University Holiday | No Reading |
| 7/6 | Responsibility for Justice | Iris Young – “A Social Connection Model” (Midterm Due) |
| 7/7 | Responsibility for Justice | Malcolm X – “After the Firebombing”  Martin Luther King Jr. – *Playboy* Interview |
| 7/8 | Immigration | Joseph Carens – “Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders” |
| 7/9 | Immigration | Cody Dout – “At the Borders of Whiteness” |
| 7/12 | Nature of the Climate Change Problem | New York Times – “The Pandemic Has Split In Two”  *Dialogues on Climate Justice* – Chapter 1 |
| 7/13 | Individual Climate Responsibility | *Dialogues on Climate Justice* – Chapter 3 |
| 7/14 | International Climate Justice | *Dialogues on Climate Justice* – Chapter 4 |
| 7/15 | In-Class Outline Workshop | No Reading |
| 7/16 | No Class | No Reading |
| 7/19 | Office Hours | No Reading |
| 7/20 | Office Hours | No Reading |
| 7/21 | No Class | No Reading – Final Paper Due |

Due to the COVID outbreak, the entirety of this course will be held online through a combination of synchronous (ie by Zoom call) or, if need be, asynchronous (ie by recorded lecture and make-up worksheet) instruction methods. We will meet between 9:40am and 11:50am PT, 4 days a week. The first hour of class (until 10:40am) will for lecture. At this point, we will have a ten-minute break, during which students can take the daily quiz (due by the end of the day) or grab a snack.

Then, the last hour of class will be dedicated to discussion. This provides you a chance to work through the day’s philosophical ideas with your classmates. While discussion is an important element of most courses, it is especially integral for philosophy. Philosophy finds its roots in Socratic dialogue and is not an activity that is best done alone (though many people have tried). For this reason, your participation grade (20%) is determined by your regular attendance and engagement. You may miss up to three discussion meetings without penalty, but after that point you will be docked 5% of your total participation grade per absence. If you miss more than 6 discussion meetings (not counting the three freebies), you will receive an automatic zero for participation.  Outside deductions for absence, your participation grade will be determined by your consistent contribution in section (which can be demonstrated in large group discussion or small group discussion).

If, for whatever reason, you cannot attend discussion section and you have already used your three freebies, you may choose to fill out a make-up worksheet that I will post to the Canvas page. This worksheet will be based on the activities we do in class, and frequently other students will have already filled out a version of the worksheet in discussion groups. However, I will expect more thorough answers to the make-up worksheet, as you will not have the opportunity to elaborate verbally. This assignment must be returned within 48 hours by email, with the title “[Your Last Name] make-up worksheet [date of class material].”  *You may use this make-up option as many times as you wish.*

**Late Policy**

*Quizzes.* Quizzes must be completed by the end of the class-time for which it was assigned. No extensions are possible, for fairness reasons. However, there will be 20 quizzes (totaling to 20% of your grade), so missing a few will not cost you much.

*Written Assignments.* Due to the short length of summer courses, extensions are discouraged for written assignment. This said, I understand that life can get in the way sometimes. I will not deduct for lateness so long as you turn in your assignment by the time I start grading. However, due to summer’s quick turn-arounds, I will usually begin grading within 24 hours of the due date. If you do not wish to take the gamble that you will be able to submit your assignment before I go to grade it, you are free to ask for an extension. However, please come talk to me ***before the due date.*** If you do, my policy is to be accommodating: I offer 24-, 48-, and 72- hour extensions upon request.

Information For Students

*University of Washington, Department of Philosophy*

## Policies and resources

### Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct, including plagiarism, is prohibited by the [Student Conduct Code for the University of Washington](http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/policies/WAC/478-121TOC.html) and is taken very seriously by the UW. According to the student conduct code, academic misconduct includes:

1. "Cheating" which includes, but is not limited to:
   1. The use of unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations, or completing assignments;
   2. The acquisition, use, or distribution of unpublished materials created by another student without the express permission of the original author(s);
   3. Using online sources, such as solution manuals, without the permission of the instructor to complete assignments, exams, tests, or quizzes; or
   4. Requesting, hiring, or otherwise encouraging someone to take a course, exam, test, or complete assignments for a student.
2. "Falsification," which is the intentional use or submission of falsified data, records, or other information including, but not limited to, records of internship or practicum experiences or attendance at any required event(s), or scholarly research.
3. "Plagiarism," which is the submission or presentation of someone else's words, composition, research, or expressed ideas, whether published or unpublished, without attribution. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:
   1. The use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; or
   2. The unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or acquired from an entity engaging in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.
4. Unauthorized collaboration.
5. Engaging in behavior specifically prohibited by an instructor in the course of class instruction or in a course syllabus.
6. Multiple submissions of the same work in separate courses without the express permission of the instructor(s).
7. Taking deliberate action to destroy or damage another's academic work in order to gain an advantage for oneself or another.
8. The recording of instructional content without the express permission of the instructor(s), unless approved as a disability accommodation, and/or the dissemination or use of such unauthorized records.

(Source: [WAC 478-121 - Academic Misconduct](https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=478-121-107))

Plagiarism may lead to disciplinary action by the University against the student who submitted the work. Any student who is uncertain whether his or her use of the work of others constitutes plagiarism should consult the course instructor for guidance before formally submitting the course work involved.

### Incompletes

Incomplete grades may only be awarded if a student is doing satisfactory work up until the last two weeks of the quarter and has furnished proof satisfactory to the instructor that the work cannot be completed because of illness or other circumstances beyond the student’s control. *(Sources:* [*Office of the Registrar – Incomplete Grades*](https://registrar.washington.edu/students/incomplete-grades/)*),* [*UW General Catalog, Student Guide – Grading System*](http://www.washington.edu/students/gencat/front/Grading_Sys.html)*)*

### Grade Appeal Procedure

A student who believes that the instructor erred in the assignment of a grade, or who believes a grade recoding error or omission has occurred, shall first discuss the matter with the instructor before the end of the following academic quarter (not including Summer Quarter). If the student is not satisfied with the instructor’s explanation, the student, no later than ten days after their discussion with the instructor, may submit a written appeal to the chair of the Department of Philosophy with a copy of the appeal also sent to the instructor. The chair consults with the instructor to ensure that the evaluation of the student’s performance has not been arbitrary or capricious. Should the chair believe the instructor’s conduct to be arbitrary or capricious and the instructor declines to revise the grade, the chair, with the approval of the voting members of his or her faculty, shall appoint an appropriate member, or members, of the faculty of the Department of Philosophy to evaluate the performance of the student and assign a grade. The Dean and Provost should be informed of this action. Once a student submits a written appeal, this document and all subsequent actions on this appeal are recorded in written form for deposit in a School file*. (Source:* [*UW General Catalog, Student Guide – Grading System*](http://www.washington.edu/students/gencat/front/Grading_Sys.html)*)*

### Concerns About a Course, an Instructor, or a Teaching Assistant

If you have any concerns about a philosophy course or your instructor, please see the instructor about these concerns as soon as possible. If you are not comfortable talking with the instructor or not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact the chair of the program offering the course (names available from the Department of Philosophy, 361 Savery Hall).

If you have any concerns about a teaching assistant, please see the teaching assistant about these concerns as soon as possible. If you are not comfortable talking with the teaching assistant or not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact the instructor in charge of the course. If you are still not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact the chair of the program offering the course (names available from the Department of Philosophy, 361 Savery Hall), or the Graduate School at G-1 Communications Building (543-5900).

### Equal Opportunity

The University of Washington reaffirms its policy of equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or Vietnam-era veteran in accordance with University of Washington policy and applicable federal and state statutes and regulations.

### Access and Accommodations

Your experience in this class is important to the instructor. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to the instructor at your earliest convenience so you can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 (Voice & Relay) or [uwdrs@uw.edu](mailto:uwdrs@uw.edu) or [disability.uw.edu.](http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/)DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

### Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined as the use of one’s authority or power, either explicitly or implicitly, to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations or to punish another for his or her refusal, or as the creation by a member of the University community of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or educational environment through verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

If you believe that you are being harassed, seek help—the earlier the better. You may speak with your instructor, your teaching assistant, the undergraduate advisor (363 Savery Hall), graduate program advisor (366 Savery Hall), or the chair of the philosophy department (364 Savery Hall). In addition, you should be aware that the University has designated special people to help you. For assistance you may contact: [SafeCampus](#_UW_SafeCampus); [Office of the Ombud](https://www.washington.edu/ombud/) (339 HUB, 206-543-6028); [Title IX Investigation Office](https://www.washington.edu/compliance/tixio/) (for complaints that a University student has violated the sexual misconduct provisions of the Student Conduct Code); [University Complaint Investigation and Resolution Office](https://www.washington.edu/compliance/uciro/) (for complaints concerning the behavior of University employees, including faculty, teaching assistants, and other student employees).

### Integrity

The Office of Research Misconduct Proceedings (ORMP) coordinates the University’s handling of allegations of research misconduct against members of the University community, in consultations and cooperation with the University’s schools, colleges, and campuses.

University rules define scientific and scholarly misconduct to include the following forms of inappropriate activity: intentional misrepresentation of credentials; falsification of data; plagiarism; abuse of confidentiality; deliberate violation of regulations applicable to research.

Students can report cases of scientific or scholarly misconduct either to the ORMP, to their faculty adviser, or the department chair. The student should report such problems to whomever he or she feels most comfortable.

*(Sources:* [*Executive Order No. 61 – Research Misconduct Policy*](https://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/policies/PO/EO61.html)*;* [*Office of Research Misconduct Proceedings*](https://ap.washington.edu/ormp/)*; minutes of Grad School Executive Staff and Division Heads meeting, 7/23/98.)*

### SafeCampus

Preventing violence is everyone's responsibility. SafeCampus is the University of Washington’s Violence Prevention and Response Program. They support students, staff, faculty, and community members in preventing violence.

SafeCampus staff will listen to your concerns and provide support and safety plans tailored to your situation. Caring, trained professionals will talk you through options and connect you with additional resources if you want them.

If you're concerned, tell someone.

* Always call 911 if you or others may be in danger.
* Call 206-685-SAFE (7233) to report non-urgent threats of violence and for referrals to UW counseling and/or safety resources. TTY or VP callers, please call through your preferred relay service.
* Don't walk alone. Campus safety guards can walk with you on campus after dark. Call Husky NightWalk 206-685-WALK (9255).
* Stay connected in an emergency with UW Alert. Register your mobile number to receive instant notification of campus emergencies via text and voice messaging. [Sign up for UW Alert](http://www.washington.edu/alert) online.

For more information visit the [SafeCampus website](http://www.washington.edu/safecampus)

1. Much thanks to Michael Ball-Blakely for the significant assistance and resources he contributed to the design of this course. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)