**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**
FACULTY OF ARTS
Department of Philosophy

PHIL 347 - L01

# CONTEMPORARY MORAL PROBLEMS

## COURSE OUTLINE

SUMMER 2023
TUES/THURS 9:00-11:45am — ES54

**INSTRUCTOR:** Steve Firth

**OFFICE LOCATION:** SS 1256

**E-MAIL:**
steven.firth@ucalgary.ca

**PRE-REQUISITES:** None

**ATTENDANCE:** Mandatory; In Person

**OFFICE HOURS:** Tuesdays 12:45-3:45; Thursdays 12:45-3:45
My door is always open (except, of course, when it isn't). I shall, however, even when not in my office, try to be available by e-mail (meaning I shall attempt to reply if an e-mail discussion permits). **Never** feel apprehensive about contacting me — I am more than happy to talk about our work and would sooner know of a difficulty you my be having with the course before I find out about it from the mid-term!

### COURSE/LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this course you will have surveyed several contemporary moral problems and have developed a general grasp of the diversity of philosophical, issues, problems, traditions, and views by (and through) which we approach them. You will be able to pars moral and non-moral arguments, and have a rudimentary understanding of basic ethical theories and in what way they differ from each other. You will be able to understand the difference between 'utilitarianism' and 'deontology', and be familiar with philosophical terms like 'consequentialism' and 'relativism'. You should expect to understand formative ethical debates as well as be familiar with contemporary dilemmas such as human-AI romantic relationships and disability.

A major goal of philosophy courses is to advance writing skills — however, *summer* time is *no* time for composing belaboured written didactics! Instead, this course will give greater focus to recognising aspects of moral concern in your environment, on skill-development, the ability to engage in constructive argumentation, and developing the patience required for measured debate. Hopefully, you will leave this course with a greater awareness of the complexities of moral issues — and be better equipped, with tools and strategies to respond effectively to them. I have every confidence that you will leave the course with a greater understanding of the relevance of philosophy to our every-day lives, a greater tolerance for difference, and an understanding that others may not share the same moral dispositions that you do — and that there are often good reasons for differing opinions. Most importantly, however, *my* primary course objective is that you **enjoy it**.

### COURSE TEXT:

Being a student is financially prejudicious; I prefer not to exacerbate that condition. Given that virtual bookshelves are swollen with the very latest — hot off the internet — 300 year old academic endeavours and I am pleased to provide all materials for this course online. I will assign mostly non-boring, thought-provoking, open-access material via e-mail or Bright Space (these will include films… because its wayyy more fun to chillax with a movie than read the *The Republic* — and who doesn't love Thrasymachus)?! In return for not requiring a text book, please 'pay it forward' in whatever way you can; we are here to help each other up.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Philosophy is unique amongst academic disciplines in that its primary goal is teaching you **how** to think not **what** to think. This course will be focussed on shifting your thinking away from 'things I can remember to pass the test' to 'what I think (supported by evidence)'. This course is *meant. to. be.* **scary.** In fact, the primary job of philosophy is to rock your world; to destabilise your beliefs and values; to force you to re-evaluate everything you learn in this course…. *and in every other course*! Philosophy encourages healthy skepticism and instils careful ways of thinking — and, by extension, acting. It asks not what is, but what can be; and in what way can it be better? Everything in space and time (all the wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff) is open for debate; *nothing* is off the table.

In this course, we shall investigate some of the leading moral issues, how they can be understood and analysed, and some potential ways of making them batter. We shall discuss what it is to know something and what sorts of things can be knowable. In addition, we shall learn to develop properly formed arguments and critically evaluate your own and others' arguments; by doing so, this course will help you to a better understanding of your own beliefs.

We shall look at what 'disability' is — focussing on an aspect of disability that is often overlooked: to the sexual citizenship of disabled people; we will survey the rise of AI — in particular, the rapid expansion in AI personal companions; and dip into the controversial pool of Antinatalism. In addition, and because this is your class, we will take a guided look at some contemporary moral problems which *you* think are most important. The course will help you to become familiar with ethical ideologies and how certain theories affect the way we approach ethical problems. We shall investigate our own intuitions about our moral beliefs and freedoms — what we think is right and wrong, and why! And finally, we shall probe our own beliefs on difficult concepts such as genetic enhancement, virtual companions, and first contact (with Aliens).

The course will not just overview the sort of questions mentioned above, philosophy seeks a greater depth of knowledge and so we will ask questions such as: for what do we need morals? Should people have the right to keep everything they earn? Are we approaching a Malthusian population crisis? We might look at questions like: Is it morally good to lie to your children? What should be our world's disposition be in a First Contact scenario? What is disability? And what are our environmental obligations to the planet? These questions are not easy to answer; in fact we shall even question whether or not we have the right to question them at all! Philosophers have wondered whether or not there is a right answer to these questions — but that doesn't mean we can't try to find out what is *wrong*!

## FORMAT:

I am a philosopher and philosophy is an **audience participation gig**. Consequently, *this course* will be an audience participation gig. If you *reeeeally* want to let me drone on for 3 hours, then fine, I can do that — but I'm pretty sure we'd all be happier if I didn't. So, *you* will have to talk; you will have to engage me and your classmates on the material, and you will have to *really* question your own thoughts and properly try to see other peoples' perspectives. In this class — perhaps above all others — you must be mindful that there are very few right answers.

This course will emphasis active learning through self-directed activities such as class debate, interactive simulations, and case studies — there may even be campus-wide scavenger hunts (weather depending)

Attendance in this class is mandatory, as participation in it is both formative in developing your skills and a assessed element of the course. It is important that you get to know your classmates and engage them in discussion (with in and out of class). You should also try to develop study-groups, as courses in summer go by far too quickly! Developing these resources will help you to talk about the material and work through areas on which you may be less clear. I am, of course, always available by e-mail (though I am usually more available at evening and night time than in the mornings).

Following due dates is required — not only because summer is short and there's less time to make things up, but also because its good practice! NO midterm or final submissions will be accepted past the

deadline (though I will be more tolerant with the reading questions — though the point is for you to read the material *prior* to class so we can talk about it!)

My job in this course is simple: to guide you in your thinking by helping you what to think and not what to think; to give you things to think about, and to help you think about those things. In short, I am a thinking thing thinking thinky things — and so should you be!

## CAVEAT EMPTOR:

I have been told that I have a unique teaching style: I tend to pick memorable examples if I can, and for this purpose, the weirder/louder/more peculiar the better. I find that students do better in chatty classes — the kind of classes where people ask a lot of questions. Consequently, I try to create an atmosphere of informality in the classroom so that people are comfortable speaking out. In an effort to achieve this, the more self-deprecating and/or memorable I can be the better. All of these practices are deliberate and are employed in an effort to help students get the most from the course (and they have the added benefit of making the course a bit more fun).

I am, though, a self-confessed grammar-grouch. In as much, the quality of your writing will be a component in grading any written submissions.

## EVALUATION:

The assessment for this course will be made up of:

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15% **Pecha Kucha** (*daily starting July 4th*),

15% **Participation Stuffs** (*throughout*),

20% **Reading Questions** (*one daily*),

25% **ChatGPT Thinky-Thingy** (*July 18th*)**,** aaaaand

25% **Super Detective-Thingy Final** (8th August, closes 10th August).

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**15% *Participation Stuffs:*** Moral debate is a process of hearing other people's views and being able to express your own. I cannot tell if you are advancing in these skills if you do not contribute to the material in the class by watching the videos, reading the readings, and by asking questions and being vocal in class. Accordingly, there's points involved! Points make prizes, and the weighting of this element is not by chance — I will make note of how you improve with respect to your argumentation, thought, positions, skilful deployment of the tools we use in class, and your contributions in the scavenger hunts (and, more importantly, the way you think while completing them). Not everyone is chatty, I get that — and many of you may be shy too. But your voice (your beliefs and perspectives) is important; you must get used to presenting it, as it will be an invaluable tool in the rest of your life — possibly your most valuable asset, and I am here to help you learn to grow it.

**15% *Pecha Kucha:*** (This assignment will be due daily according to the list generated by Brightspace and will commence on the 4th July). You will each need to design and present a pecha kucha (PK) on a moral problem or dilemma you find interesting (I need to see the chosen topic one week before you give your presentation). You will then have to present 20 slides which auto-scroll after 20 seconds which guide us through the moral problem and your perspective/analysis of it. Presentations will be given in class time and you are not permitted cue cards; I will need a copy of the presentation to be uploaded to Brightspace, as I will both assess the content for grading and will play the content for you on the computer to save time accessing the presentation. I will provide a randomised order of presentations based upon the class list when it is generated — so you need to get thinking about your pet moral dilemma stat!

**20% *Reading Questions:*** (I will assign a reading/viewing question every day starting June 29th). These questions will be uploaded to BrightSpace at the end of each class and relate to the readings for the following week (the **_whole_** purpose of the questions is to get you to read or watch the material). The questions are to be answered

in **one SHORT paragraph only** and submitted to Bright Space before class starts on the following day. DO NOT write me an essay (anything over 6 lines will be penalised)! You will end up giving me 12 answers over the course and I'll take the best 10 answers (permitting you to screw-up or forget to answer 2 of them). Perfect responses get 2 points, partially right answers get 1 point, and if you were floating down the Bow instead of reading your material then you will get 0! Do not use ChatGPT for this assignment.

**25% *Mid-Term Thinky-Thing:*** (This assignment is due July 18th and must be submitted via Bright Space). The thinky-thing will consist of reading a 2500 word essay — created by ChatGPT — on a certain moral problem. The mission, should you chose to accept it, is to analysis the content, delineate where (and in what way) ChatGPT's position is accurate/inaccurate, misleading, or convincing (and why); detail what you do and don't agree with; and write an extended reply providing some self-reflection on the subject by relating your own experiences and/or thoughts that are connected to the subject. You are free to use ChatGPT in this endeavour, but you must demonstrate which part of the content was sourced through ChatGPT. This assignment is focussed on helping you to adapt good working practices to the new technologies available, and to learn how to cross-reference information found there to ensure accuracy and objectivity.

**25% Super Detective-Thingy Final:** (Brightspace; released 8th August, closes 10th August). The final will consist of a number of short excerpts on topics we have covered in class, and will require you to dig into the material to provide (by quoting the text provided) examples of ethical theories, philosophical or moral terms, or sentences which demonstrate certain claims. In addition, you will need to demonstrate in short written paragraphs your perspectives on various aspects of the material and give examples of terms which cover concepts in the sections provided. The take-home exam (which will be available on Brightspace) will be released on the 8th August and run until the 10th August. I need you to show me how you have grown philosophically, so this final will be cumulative; you will need to pull all of the material you've learned together to solve the puzzles and questions in the final — you will need to demonstrate that by including stuff from throughout the course! *Exciting*, isn't it!?

I follow the following grading schema:

**A:** Excellent – superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.
**B:** Good – clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.
**C:** Satisfactory – basic understanding of the subject matter.
**D:** Minimal pass – marginal performance; insufficient preparation for later courses in the same subject.
**F:** Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.

**(A+) = 95 and above  A = 90 and above  A- = 85 and above**
**B+ = 80 and above  B = 75 and above  B- = 70 and above**
**C+ = 67 and above  C = 63 and above  C- = 60 and above**
**D+ = 55 and above  D = 50 and above**

***Grading Addendum***:
I'm not a 'hard marker', and I'm able to tell from your performance in class if you missed your morning caffeine fix. So I allow myself to take that into account when I work out your final grade. This is a summer course, and no-one does their best work in summer — accordingly, I am looking for skill development and overall development. In short, your grades are important to you, so I take them seriously.

## PLAGIARISM:

Don't do it.

*Please* don't do it.

The advent of ChatGPT and other resource tools makes plagiarising easier and more attractive. I have designed your assignments so that you can use such tools to advance your learning — but not deploy them as a mechanism to generate your answers. However, if I do find plagiarism in your work then there's all sorts of procedures and stuff that I then have to do: there a bazillion meetings; forms to fill out (in triplicate); and someone has to call the Spanish Inquisition![1] And after all that, we both have to go and chat with the Dean… who only speaks in Latin!

Curiously enough, the word 'plagiarism' comes from the Latin, *plagiarius, plagiarii,* meaning kidnapper, plunderer, or one who kidnaps and eats the child or slave of another. And you don't want to be a child eater, do you?

… ok, so I made up the bit about 'eating children', but the rest is true.

I'm guessing you all know what is and isn't plagiarism. If in doubt ask; I am here to help! If you want to look up the University's policy on it, information on plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct can be found here: https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/archives/2016/k-5.html

## ETIQUETTE:

Summer is a rubbish time to take a class (winter happens to be my favourite time of year… Booooo on summer!): There's all sorts of stuff going on outside and we're all stuck in here (my dog tells me that I would much sooner be outside too, but that I have to bring a frisbee). But, degrees have to be earned, and so here we are. Fun, isn't it…

Do try not to come to class late — and if you have to leave early try to let me know (so I won't wonder if something's upset you!) Please do **not** begin to pack up your books until I indicate class is over, as my last few lines are usually my best and you'll miss them! Most importantly, however, the content of the readings (or viewings) is what we discuss in class — if you haven't read (or watched) them, you won't know what's going on and you will find it harder to contribute to the class. This course is **not** a course where I *teach* stuff to you, but one in which we *discuss* it together.

## 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.

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[1] And no-one expects the Spanish Inquisition.

**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 organisation. 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 offence, 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).