

## **Philosophy 301: Special Topic “Anger”**

Time and Location: M and W: 2:10 PM - 4:00 PM, Erhart Agriculture 231

Professor Robert Wallace

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-5PM or by appointment. I will be in my office (Bldg. 47, Room 36P) but am happy to meet over zoom as well: [Link](#)

**The information contained in this course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policies, may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.**

### **Course Description**

This is a course on anger (obviously). But what does it mean to approach anger from a *philosophical* point of view? This course will primarily engage with moral psychology, an increasingly active and interdisciplinary subfield of philosophy that deals with how human psychology and morality are related. This course would serve as an introduction to this important subfield. Anger is a major focus of current work in ethics and moral psychology, and it is an increasingly talked about feature of our moral and political lives. Recently, anger has become a central topic in feminist and anti-racist ethical theorizing as a potential tool for social and moral change. But it also has been the subject of historical and contemporary critique; anger is dangerous, delusional, and possibly even morally corrupting!

In this course, will ask questions about whether anger is rational, whether anger is good or bad from a moral point of view, whether anger is ever justified, and whether we could replace anger with other ways of responding to wrongdoing.

We will rigorously examine these issues in the mode of contemporary analytic philosophy. Our readings will be extremely recent, and many of them could be described as analytic humanism, combining core analytic philosophy with humanism, feminism, and anti-racism. But far from a narrow analytic, academic, or even Western context, the value or disvalue of anger is an important and longstanding human question. We will look at anger cross-culturally. We will examine work from journalists, psychologists, communication theorists, and more in our quest to examine anger.

This is a 4-Unit lecture-discussion course, and you should expect to commit 12 hours per week on this course. A typical class will begin with a lecture-ish overview of the material in question with transitions to a seminar-style format as questions arise. Given the nature of the course, I expect there to be much less lecture and much more discussion. We will take a break halfway into class.

### **Course goals**

You might have thought that the goal of this course was for me to offer definitive answers to these questions. But it isn't. Instead, the goal of the course is to provide you with the tools to think critically, for yourself about these questions, and for you to develop good answers to them. This course will help you develop your own thoughts on these matters. I'm looking forward to hearing what you think!

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe and evaluate the core features of philosophical views about anger ranging from critical traditions in Buddhist and Stoic thought to recent support for anger based on social justice concerns.
- Describe the contributions of contemporary philosophers about the nature and value of anger (e.g., Myisha Cherry, Owen Flanagan, Martha Nussbaum, Amia Srinivasan, David Shoemaker, Antti Kauppinen, Amy Olberding, Marilyn Frye, Derk Pereboom).
- Identify philosophical positions about the relationship between morality and the emotions, like rationalism and sentimentalism.
- Evaluate the arguments in defense of the value of anger as well as arguments in favor of its elimination, containment, or replacement.

## Required Text

Readings from *On Anger* (OA), 2020, a *Boston Review* Forum publication. All other readings posted on Canvas.

## Grading and Assignments

### **Grade Breakdown:**

Attendance: 5%

Reading Responses: 15%

Exam 1: 20%

Exam 2: 20%

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 20%

(Alternative Term Paper: 40%)

Due dates for assignments can be found in the “course outline” section of the syllabus.

**Attendance and Participation:** Attending class is an essential part of succeeding in this course. You will not do well in this course if you don’t show up. The default for attending class is keeping your camera on. You will lose two points for each unexcused absence. Obviously, life happens. Please get in touch with me as soon as you are able if something comes up. Please be aware that religious holidays are “excused absences” for students according to [Cal Poly’s Class Attendance Policy](#).

**Reading Responses:** Each week (excluding week 1), you'll be asked to write up a short response to one of that week's reading assignment. For example, you might challenge an argument, raise a difficult question, or compare the ideas in this reading to something we have already talked about in class. I will use them to structure our discussions. You can write about any of the assigned readings. You will post them to the discussion board for the week's responses, and they will be due at 11:59 PT. Please turn in your posts the evening before the class we are scheduled to discuss the reading that you have responded to. I encourage you to thoughtfully reflect and reply to your fellow student's responses.

**Exams:** We will have two exams, both of which will be available for you to take on Canvas. Exams will consist of multiple choice and short answer sections. They will be open book. (Consider this to be the digital equivalent of a take home exam). You can take these exams anytime during the week they are assigned. Once you start the exam you will have 2 hours to complete it.

**Papers:** You will write two papers during the quarter. Each paper will ask you to describe an argument for a view and then critique that argument. These will not be research papers insofar as you will not need materials from outside our course readings. My job is to help you write these papers. I am more than happy to read drafts and outlines, or simply talk through the ideas with you. Your aim in writing these papers is to be clear and concise.

You may, with permission of the instructor, write a single term paper for the course of equivalent length as the two shorter papers. Please reach out to me **early** in the quarter if you are interested in this option. This option is primarily intended for philosophy majors who are interested in preparation for 400 level courses and the senior project. (Notice how much of your grade will be determined by the single paper).

The instructions for the papers and the outline are on our Canvas website. We will discuss in class. I will also post a writing guide.

**Late Work:** Work that is handed in after the day after the deadline has passed will be marked down one full letter grade, and so on. For instance, an A paper that is received within 24 hours of the deadline will receive a B, 48 hours late will receive a C, and so on. The following *do not count* as legitimate excuses: failure to read the syllabus, sleeping in, or forgetfulness. If you require an extension, please contact me as soon as possible.

If Canvas goes down, everyone will get an extension for 1 day for every outage period.

**Rounding and Curving:** I will not round any grades in the course. Standing policy is that no grades will be curved in the course, but I reserve the right to curve when needed. Please do not rely on this possibility!

**Syllabus Acceptance:** Before I record any grades for a student in this course, they must complete the "syllabus acceptance" assignment on Canvas.

**COVID-19 Compliance, Classroom, and Campus Safety**

Cal Poly is committed to protecting the health and safety of the campus community. Taking preventative steps, as well as monitoring your health and staying home if you are feeling unwell, will help protect the entire Cal Poly community. By participating in this course, you agree to abide by all campus safety protocols. Please note that safety protocols may change throughout the quarter. You must follow all protocols as outlined in the most recent [campus updates](#).

**Vaccination:** All students, faculty, and staff who access campus, or any CSU facilities, are required either to be fully vaccinated or to qualify for a medical or religious exemption.

**Face Coverings:** Per Cal Poly policy, you must always properly wear a face covering in the classroom, regardless of vaccination status. If you are seen in class without a face covering or are wearing it improperly, you will be invited to put one on or be reminded to wear it properly. Acceptable face coverings must:

- Completely cover the nose and mouth.
- Fit snugly against the side of the face with secured ties/ear loops.
- Allow breathing without restriction.
- Be clean and undamaged. Wash your hands before putting on a face covering.

If you do not have a face covering with you, you will be asked to visit the nearest sanitation station to get one and then return to class. If you refuse to wear a face covering in the classroom, you will be asked to leave and will be counted absent for the day. Students not in compliance with face covering requirements also may be reported to the [Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#). While campus policy states, “Individuals do not need to wear a face covering while alone in their residence or personal/private office, or while eating or drinking,” eating and drinking [will] not be permitted in the classroom. More information on face covering requirements is available on the [Face Coverings](#) webpage.



**Testing and Compliance:** Unvaccinated students must participate in ongoing COVID-19 testing and reporting as required by the University. Check the COVID-19 Info tab on your portal daily to determine your testing requirement and compliance status. If you are required to participate in ongoing testing, be reminded that it is your responsibility to do so. More details are available on the [COVID-19 Testing](#) webpage.

Failure to comply with testing requirements may result in restrictions from campus services, spaces, and applications, including access to the Cal Poly Portal, Canvas, and Zoom. You will receive several notifications *before* restrictions occur; please heed those notifications and alert me in advance of restrictions from campus applications. Be reminded that [University policy](#) states, “campus email is an official method of campus communication to students and may be used as the sole method of communication for some campus matters.” Campus policy will be followed, and communications will be initiated through Cal Poly email. An absence, including any late or missed work, due to testing non-compliance restrictions [may be] considered unexcused and is subject to the course attendance and make-up work policies.

**Daily Symptoms Screening:** You must complete the daily health screening by noon (12 p.m.) or before arriving on campus, whichever comes first, to receive a campus pass, regardless of vaccination status. Upon completion of the daily health screening, you will receive a daily campus pass. I will be utilizing the campus pass as a safety measure for our classroom community; please be prepared to show your pass upon entry to class. Only students with a green pass will be allowed to attend the day's class session. Note that having a blue pass does not fall within the [University's attendance guidelines for excused absences](#). Absences due to a blue pass are therefore subject to course attendance and make-up work policies. Please visit the [COVID-19 Daily Self-Screening](#) webpage for more information on the campus pass.

Please follow current health and safety guidelines, monitor yourselves for COVID-19 symptoms, stay home if you have any COVID-19 symptoms, and get tested if you are symptomatic or learn that a close contact has been infected. Learn more about protecting your health and well-being while on campus by visiting the university's [Coronavirus Information](#) webpage.

**Hygiene:** Everyone will need to adhere to all health and safety signage and continue following good pandemic hygiene, including washing hands often. Cal Poly is taking several steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on campus. Along with increased cleaning and sanitation, the university is also placing hand-sanitizing stations around campus to promote behaviors that reduce transmission; please take advantage of the university's sanitation stations.

Following the safety protocols above will help to protect your safety, the safety of our classroom, and the safety of the entire Cal Poly community. If you believe that you cannot comply with any of the COVID-19 related health/safety measures due to a medical condition or disability, please contact the [Disability Resource Center \(DRC\)](#). The DRC will then engage in an interactive process with you to determine whether an accommodation is appropriate under the circumstances.

In the unfortunate circumstance that you test positive for COVID-19 and/or are subject to quarantine, please contact me so that we can work together on a plan for how you can maintain course engagement and complete assignments. In the case of a positive test result, I will contact [Environmental Health and Safety \(EHS\)](#) to begin the exposure investigation process. If you cannot attend class due to a COVID-19 related issue (e.g., a positive test or quarantine order), please note that I will follow the policies in my syllabus for [other absences due to illness](#) and may ask to see your campus pass (or a screenshot) for the day(s) of your absence. In addition to contacting me, you may also want to work with the Disability Resource Center to begin the academic accommodation process for general accommodations.

### **Academic Integrity**

Students are encouraged to share intellectual views and discuss freely the principles and applications of course materials. However, graded work/exercises must be the product of independent effort unless otherwise instructed. Ignorance of the academic integrity policies is not a viable excuse. Please thoroughly familiarize yourself with the [Office of Students' Rights and Responsibilities page on Academic Integrity](#), as well as the information found on [Academic Programs and Planning website regarding cheating and plagiarism](#).

Bottom line: do your own work!

If you have any questions about academic integrity, please do not hesitate to ask me!

### **Inclusion and Classroom Behavior**

As in any course, you must be respectful to myself and the other students during this class. Beyond this, as philosophers in training, you have special reason to treat each other's thoughts and ideas charitably. Each of you (and myself) will be coming at these fundamental questions with different backgrounds, belief systems, intellectual strengths, and interests. Our class is a place where thoughts can be expressed without fear of bullying or discrimination. Aristotle thought that the best kind of friendship was one where friends make each other more virtuous people; in this class, we should strive to be friends-in-thinking, helping each other to think more clearly about the problems at hand.

Please be aware that you can update your pronouns on Canvas in the user settings. If you would like more information on pronouns, visit Cal Poly's [Pronouns Matter](#). If your preferred name or pronouns change during the quarter, please let me know. Mistakes in addressing one another may happen. If you make a mistake or are corrected, please briefly apologize and correct yourself. (I will do the same if I make a mistake!)

### **Accessibility and Accommodations**

We can't be friends-in-thinking unless the learning experience is as accessible as possible for everyone. If you anticipate or experience physical, technical, or academic barriers to your learning experience, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options. You can always contact the [Disability Resource Center](#). They are located in Building 124, Room 119. I'd be happy to help you with this. I have also set up a page in our Canvas site that has a comprehensive list of student resources with links. You can find it here: [Student Resources Page](#). If your documentation status presents obstacles to engaging in this class, you may request confidential accommodations. You may consult with [RISE](#) or the [Dream Center](#) for examples of possible accommodations. Such arrangements will not jeopardize your student status, your financial aid, or any other part of your residence.

### **Student Care Resources**

If you face challenges securing food, housing or other basic needs, please be aware that many resources are available to support you through [Cal Poly's Basic Needs](#) initiative or by contacting the [dean of students](#). An extensive list of critical care resources is also listed and updated on the Cal Poly Coronavirus information pages [Student Care Resources](#) page.

Mental health is an important part of your overall well-being. Students experiencing personal problems or situational crises during the quarter are encouraged to contact Counseling Services (805-756-2511) for assistance, support and advocacy. This service is free and confidential. Check out the [Campus Health and Wellbeing](#) website for more information.

If you have specific questions about the Covid-19 pandemic, please visit the [Cal Poly Coronavirus website](#). For specific information on frequently asked questions about Cal Poly classes and programs, visit the [Classes and Programs](#) section of this website. If you have concerns about accessing the tools that you need to continue with your studies, including technology, please contact [retention](#).

If I can help you in any way to access the resources above, or if you have any questions about student care resources, please contact me so that I can assist you. I am committed to ensuring that all students have the resources they need to be able to participate in this course.

### **Course Materials and Intellectual Property**

Please note that all course materials, provided by the instructor and/or other sources, are covered by copyright protections. Students are not authorized to record, share, repost, and/or redistribute these materials in any form(s) (such as, but not limited to, hard copy and electronic forms) in any venue(s) (such as, but not limited to, social media platforms and online study material sites). In some cases, sharing, re-posting, recording, and/or redistributing course materials constitutes a violation of Cal Poly academic integrity policies, while in other cases such actions constitute a violation of copyright protections.

### **Outline of the Course:**

Below please find an outline of the course, subject to change. Required readings are just that: required. You have to read these for the class session. Further readings are additional readings to help develop your views on a particular topic. They are not required reading.

#### **Week 1: Introduction to Anger**

Agnes Callard, “The Philosophy of Anger” (OA), 2020

#### **Weeks 2: The Connection Between Anger and Morality**

Barbara Herman “What’s Past is Prologue” (OA), 2020

Daniel Konstan, “A History of Anger” (OA), 2020

Michal Gill, “Moral Rationalism vs. Moral Sentimentalism: Is Morality More Like Math or Beauty?”, 2007

#### **Week 3: The Rationality of Anger**

Paul Bloom, “Choosing Violence” (OA), 2020

Jesse Prinz, “When Anger Goes Wrong” (OA), 2020

Myisha Cherry, “The Errors and Limitations of Our “Anger-Evaluating” Ways”, 2017

First short paper due.

#### **Week 4: Problems with Anger**

Martha Nussbaum, “Victim Anger and It’s Costs” (OA), 2020

Owen Flanagan, *The Geography of Morals* excerpts, 2016

Owen Flanagan, *How To Do Things With Emotions* excerpts, 2021

Suggested Reading: Martha Nussbaum, “Beyond Anger”, 2016

### **Week 5: The Value of Anger**

Oded Na’aman, “Against Moral Purity” (OA), 2020

Antti Kauppinen, “Valuing Anger”, 2017

David Shoemaker, “In Defense of Angry Blame”, 2017

### **Take Home Exam 1**

### **Week 6: Replacing Anger: Forgiveness and Protest**

Elizabeth Bruenig, “The Kingdom of Damage” (OA), 2020

Rachel Achs, “Accountability Without Vengeance” (OA), 2020

Derk Pereboom, *Wrongdoing and The Moral Emotions* excerpts, 2021

### **Week 7: Anger and Oppression**

Desmond Jagohan, “Anger and the Politics of the Oppressed” (OA), 2020

Myisha Cherry, “More Important Things” (OA), 2020

Marilyn Frye, “A Note on Anger”, 1983

Amia Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger”, 2018

Further Reading: Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage* excerpts, 2021

### **Second short paper due.**

### **Weeks 8: Anger and Public Discourse**

Whitney Phillips, “Whose Anger Counts?” (OA), 2020

Amy Olberding, “Righteous Incivility” (OA), 2020

Sukaini Hirji, “Anger and the Bounds of Empathy” (Forthcoming)

### **Week 9: Anger and Free Will**

P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment", 1962

Derk Pereboom, "Free Will, Love, and Anger", 2009

**Week 10: Concluding Reflections**

Agnes Callard, "The Wound Is Real" (OA), 2020

Take Home Exam 2 during Finals Week.