UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Contemporary Moral Issues (Philosophy 140)

Term: *Summer 2023*
Professor: Cody Britson
Pronouns: He/Him/His
Course Dates: From July 10, 2023 – July 28, 2023

Email: Britson@umd.edu
Office Hours/Group Chat: M, Th, 2-3pm, or by appointment.

Sample Syllabus

Course Description

This course is meant to introduce you to how philosophical analysis can be applied to thinking well about some of the moral issues of contemporary life. Towards this end, we will examine three major which are currently shaping much of the moral conversation in our society: abortion, animal rights, and environmental ethics. The primary goal of this course is to help you have a better understanding of the moral complexity of these issues which you be able to demonstrate in speaking and writing about them.

Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate familiarity and facility with fundamental concepts in ethics, especially those concepts which are salient to the three domains of abortion, animal rights, and environmental ethics.
- Evaluate critically literature relevant to the practice of ethics in these three domains.
- Demonstrate an ability to crystallize and criticize moral arguments in these three domains.
- Apply, in a way authentic to the practice of ethics, its methods, including that of constructing moral arguments which entails identifying key premises which other philosophers employ in their arguments and reasons for which you disagree with them.

Required Resources

- Access to elms so you can utilize the course site
- A writing program such as word or pages for use in writing essays and which can convert documents to pdfs for submission.

Course Structure

This general daily routine for this course will be structured as follows: 1) read the assigned paper, 2) watch the recorded lecture, 3) attend class on zoom to ask any question you have, and 4) complete the short-answer quiz on the reading. Every Friday there will be an assigned 600-word essay to complete as well, but no quiz or class. The essay will have two prompts which will be based on the content covered in the weekly unit.

To make this course as convenient as possible for summer schedules while also making sure no one falls behind, each assignment will be posted at 9am and you will have until midnight two days later to submit it. For example, an assignment posted Monday at 9am will be due Wednesday at midnight (I will label this as 11:59 in ELMS to avoid confusion). If you cannot submit each assignment within approximately three days, you may not have sufficient time availability to succeed in this course. I am extremely unlikely to give extensions because it will be extremely hard to recover in this course if you fall more than three days behind, though I am willing to hear people out given an act of god or the like.

Tips for Success in an Online Course

1. **Manage your time.** Students are often very busy, and I understand that you have obligations outside of this class. However, it's important that I note that students do best when they have adequate time to devote to the class. Schedule time for your online learning and participation in discussions each week. Give yourself plenty of time to complete assignments including extra time to handle any technology related problems.
2. **Do not fall behind.** This class moves at a quick pace and each week builds on the previous content. If you feel you are starting to fall behind, check in with the instructor as soon as possible so we can troubleshoot together. It will be hard to keep up with the course content if you fall behind in the pre-work or post-work.
3. **Use ELMS-Canvas notification settings.** Pro tip! Canvas ELMS-Canvas can ensure you receive timely notifications in your email or via text. Be sure to enable announcements to be sent instantly or daily.
4. **Ask for help if needed.** If you need help with ELMS-Canvas or other technology, IT Support. If you are struggling with a course concept, reach out to me and your classmates for support.

Policies and Resources for Undergraduate Courses

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

Course Guidelines

Names/Pronouns and Self-Identifications:

The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering inclusive and equitable classroom environments. I invite you, if you wish, to tell us how you want to be referred to in this class, both in terms of your name and your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). Keep in mind that the pronouns someone uses are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity. Visit trans.umd.edu to learn more.

Additionally, it is your choice whether to disclose how you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and I ask you to do the same for all of your fellow Terps.

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Communication with Instructor:
Email: If you need to reach out and communicate with me, please email me at *Britson@umd.edu*. Please DO NOT email me with questions that are easily found in the syllabus or on ELMS (i.e. When is this assignment due? How much is it worth? etc.) but please DO reach out about personal, academic, and intellectual concerns/questions. While I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours, you will more likely receive email responses from me on week day mornings from 8:00am-10:00am EST

ELMS: I will send IMPORTANT announcements via ELMS messaging. You must make sure that your email & announcement notifications (including changes in assignments and/or due dates) are enabled in ELMS so you do not miss any messages. You are responsible for checking your email and Canvas/ELMS inbox with regular frequency.

Communication with Peers:
With a diversity of perspectives and experience, we may find ourselves in disagreement and/or debate with one another. As such, it is important that we agree to conduct ourselves in a professional manner and that we work together to foster and preserve a virtual classroom environment in which we can respectfully discuss and deliberate controversial questions. I encourage you to confidently exercise your right to free speech—bearing in mind, of course, that you will be expected to craft and defend arguments that support your position. Keep in mind, that free speech has its limit and this course is NOT the space for hate speech, harassment, and derogatory language. I will make every reasonable attempt to create an atmosphere in which each student feels comfortable voicing their argument without fear of being personally attacked, mocked, demeaned, or devalued.

Any behavior (including harassment, sexual harassment, and racially and/or culturally derogatory language) that threatens this atmosphere will not be tolerated. Please alert me immediately if you feel threatened, dismissed, or silenced at any point during our semester together and/or if your engagement in discussion has been in some way hindered by the learning environment.

Major Assignments

Participation

- Students are expected to attend each class to ask questions and interact with their peers.
- The point of doing so is to enhance clarity beyond reading the paper and watching a brief lecture on it. So please come to class with some questions which demonstrate that you did the reading and are intellectually engaging with the material.
- Participation will be scored primarily on attendance, though if you are dead silent for every class I may take off points for lack of engagement.

Quizzes

- There will be 4 quizzes each week, 12 in total, each worth 2 points.
- Their purpose is for students to be able to test their understanding of the materials and philosophical writing ability in a low stakes environment so that they can prepare for the weekly essay. You will have an hour for each quiz, though I imagine they can be finished in much less time. Students are permitted to consult the reading materials, though the challenge in philosophy typically lies in correctly re-stating what

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was written in a clear and succinct fashion as well as understanding the material well enough to sensibly critique it.

- There will also be an introductory quiz and a post-week 1 course review quiz, each worth .5 points.
- The purpose of the introductory quiz is to help me understand who you are and what your interests are. I will do my best to incorporate these into the lectures I record. The purpose of the post week 1 quiz is to invite you to let me know what is, and is not, working for you in the course such that I can amend problem spots as best as possible.

Essays

- There will be an essay assigned each Friday, 3 in total, each worth more than the last: 15, 20, and 25 points.
- Each essay will have two prompts. Students only need to write on one of them. The prompts will detail what exactly is required for the student to write. Generally, each essay will ask the student to reconstruct and critique an argument in one of the readings. Some further specifics may be requested such as using an example to explain an abstract argument.

Grading Structure

Assignment	Percentage %
Participation	**15%**
Quizzes	**25%**
Essay 1	**15%**
Essay 2	**20%**
Essay 3	**25%**
Total	**100%**

Academic Integrity

For this course, some of your assignments will be collected via Turnitin on our course ELMS page. I have chosen to use this tool because it can help you improve your scholarly writing and help me verify the integrity of student work. For information about Turnitin, how it works, and the feedback reports you may have access to, visit Turnitin Originality Checker for Students

The University's Code of Academic Integrity is designed to ensure that the principles of academic honesty and integrity are upheld. In accordance with this code, the University of Maryland does not tolerate academic dishonesty. Please ensure that you fully understand this code and its implications because all acts of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of this code. All students are expected to adhere to this Code. It is your responsibility to read it and know what it says, so you can start your professional life on the right path. **As future professionals, your commitment to high ethical standards and honesty begins with your time at the University of Maryland.** It is important to note that course assistance websites, such as CourseHero, are not permitted sources, unless the instructor explicitly gives permission for you to use one of these sites. Material taken or copied from these sites can be deemed unauthorized material and a violation of academic integrity. These sites offer information that might not be accurate and that shortcut the learning process, particularly the critical thinking steps necessary for college-level assignments. Additionally, students may naturally choose to use online

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forums for course-wide discussions (e.g., Group lists or chats) to discuss concepts in the course. However, collaboration on graded assignments is strictly prohibited unless otherwise stated. Examples of prohibited collaboration include: asking classmates for answers on quizzes or exams, asking for access codes to clicker polls, etc. Please visit the **Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies** and reach out if you have questions.

If you ever feel pressured to comply with someone else's academic integrity violation, please reach out to me straight away. Also, ***if you are ever unclear*** about acceptable levels of collaboration, ***please ask***! To help you avoid unintentional violations, ***the following table*** lists levels of collaboration that are acceptable for each graded exercise.

Grades

All assessment scores will be posted on the course ELMS page. If you would like to review any of your grades (including the exams), or have questions about how something was scored, please email me to schedule a time for us to meet and discuss.

Late work will not be accepted for course credit so please plan to have it submitted well before the scheduled deadline. I am happy to discuss any of your grades with you, and if I have made a mistake I will immediately correct it. Any formal grade disputes must be submitted in writing and within one week of receiving the grade.
Final letter grades are assigned based on the percentage of total assessment points earned. To be fair to everyone I have to establish clear standards and apply them consistently, so please understand that being close to a cutoff is not the same as making the cut. That being said, I will round grades up at the .5 margin. For instance, an 89.5% will round up to a 90% making it an A- rather than a B+, and so on.

All of the assignments taken together add up to 100%. None of them will be weighted further. I'm not yet sure if I will curve the grades, but it is possible given general student performance.

Final Grade Cutoffs									
+	96.5%	+	86.5%	+	76.5%	+	66.6%	+	
A	93.5%	B	83.5%	C	73.5%	D	63.5%	F	<59.5%
-	89.5%	-	79.5%	-	69.5%	-	59.5%	-	

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Course Outline

The format of this section will vary based on the design of your course and the semester, but our guidance is to aim for a clear and concise table that maps out all of the assignment assessments and deadlines and gives students a sense of the course's organization.

Day #	Readings	Assignments
	UNIT 1: Abortion	
July 10	**Thomson 1971, "A Defense of Abortion"**	**Quiz on Thomson**
July 11	**Warren 1973, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"**	**Quiz on Warren**
July 12	**Marquis, ""**	**Quiz on Tuskegee and Willowbrook**
July 13	**Moller 2011, "Abortion and Moral Risk"**	**Quiz on Research in Developing Countries**
July 14	**No Reading**	**Essay 1: Abortion**
	UNIT 2: Animal Rights	
July 17	**Taylor 2009, "Animals and the Moral Community"**	**Quiz on Taylor**
July 18	**Haman 2011, "The Moral Significance of Animal Pain and Animal Death"**	**Quiz on Harman**
July 19	**Kymlicka and Donaldson 2014, "Animals and the Frontiers of Citizenship."**	**Quiz on Kymlicka and Donaldson**
July 20	**Norcross 2004, "Puppies, Pigs and People"**	**Quiz on Norcross**
July 21	**No Reading**	**Essay 2: Animal Rights**
	Unit 3: Environmental Justice	
July 24	**Leopold 1987, "The Land Ethic"**	**Quiz on Leopold**
July 25	**Baxter 1974, "People or Penguins"**	**Quiz on Baxter**
July 26	**Watson 1983, "A Critique of Anti-Anthropocentric Ethics,"**	**Quiz on Watson**
July 27	**Weston 1985, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics"**	**Quiz on Weston**
July 28	**No Reading**	**Essay 3: Environmental Justice**

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.

THE THIRD ESSAY WILL COUNT AS YOUR FINAL EXAM FOR THIS COURSE.

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Resources & Accommodations

Accessibility and Disability Services

The University of Maryland is committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive educational, working, and living environment for people of all abilities. The University of Maryland is also committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of the University, or be subjected to discrimination. The **Accessibility & Disability Service (ADS)** provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals to provide equal access to services, programs and activities. ADS cannot assist retroactively, so it is generally best to request accommodations several weeks before the semester begins or as soon as a disability becomes known. Any student who needs accommodations should contact me as soon as possible so that I have sufficient time to make arrangements.

For assistance in obtaining an accommodation, contact Accessibility and Disability Service at 301-314-7682, or email them at **adsfrontdesk@umd.edu**. Information about **sharing your accommodations with instructors, note taking assistance** and more is available from the **Counseling Center**.

Student Resources and Services

Taking personal responsibility for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. I hope you will come talk to me so that I can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and I encourage you to visit **UMD's Student Academic Support Services website** to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you.

In particular, everyone can use some help sharpening their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting **UMD's Writing Center** and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center.

You should also know there are a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need (**UMD's Student Resources and Services website** may help). If you feel it would be helpful to have someone to talk to, visit **UMD's Counseling Center** or **one of the many other mental health resources on campus**.

Basic Needs Security

If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live, please visit **UMD's Division of Student Affairs website** for information about resources the campus offers you and let me know if I can help in any way.

Veteran Resources

UMD provides some additional supports to our student veterans. You can access those resources at the office of Veteran Student life and the Counseling Center. Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to the instructor.

Netiquette Policy

Netiquette is the social code of online classes. Students share a responsibility for the course's learning environment. Creating a cohesive online learning community requires learners to support and assist each other. To craft an open and interactive online learning environment, communication has to be conducted in a professional and courteous manner at all times, guided by common sense, collegiality and basic rules of etiquette.

Course Evaluation

Please submit a course evaluation through Student Feedback on Course Experiences in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. All information submitted to Course Experiences is confidential. Campus will notify you when Student Feedback on Course Experiences is open for you to complete

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your evaluations at the end of the semester. Please go directly to the **Student Feedback on Course Experiences** to complete your evaluations. By completing all of your evaluations each semester, you will have the privilege of accessing through Testudo the evaluation reports for the thousands of courses for which 70% or more students submitted their evaluations.

Copyright Notice

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Works Cited

Sample Syllabus