

# PHIL 150H: CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES

Spring 2022

**Location:** Administration Building Room 101

**Time:** MWF 12:00pm - 12:50 pm

**Instructor:** Blake Francis

**Office:** PAHB 467

**Email:** [bfrancis@umbc.edu](mailto:bfrancis@umbc.edu)

**Office Hours:** TTh 1-2pm; by appt

**Functional Competency Satisfied by this Course:** Critical Analysis and Reasoning

## Course Description and Rationale

We are constantly confronted with moral issues that people strongly disagree about: Is abortion permissible? Should a university invite a speaker with racist views to campus? Should I donate to charities that mitigate global poverty (and if so, how much)? Do our individual greenhouse gas emissions do harm? What should colleges do to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds flourish? This course applies the tools of moral theory to better understand these disputes. There are many disputed issues, but this semester we will concentrate on the following:

- The Ethics of College and Upward Mobility
- Freedom of Speech
- Abortion
- The Environment and Climate Change
- World Hunger and Poverty

To improve our understanding and engagement with these difficult topics, we will utilize the tools of philosophy. We begin the course with a brief introduction to the philosophical study of moral issues, including what is called moral (or ethical) theory. As we proceed, we will approach specific moral issues by applying different moral theories to each problem. (That's why what we will be studying is sometimes called applied ethics.)

By studying the application of moral theory to contemporary moral issues, students will not only gain insight into moral concepts and the issues at hand but will learn and practice valuable skills, including constructing arguments, analyzing concepts, raising objections, and applying moral principles. One of the aims of the course is to help students develop and defend their own reasoned positions on the issues covered.

## Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- understand and articulate the moral controversies surrounding the above-listed topics
- display a familiarity with the central concepts and questions of moral theories, including consequentialist moral theory, Kantian moral theory, rights-based moral theory, virtue ethics, and care ethics
- do close readings of philosophical texts to identify premises and conclusions of arguments and critically analyze these arguments
- develop your own reasoned position and respectably defend it against opposing views
- write papers that critically evaluate philosophical arguments

## Course Requirements:

**Readings:** Readings will be assigned for most course meetings. Readings are available in the course textbook and on Blackboard. Please do the readings indicated on the syllabus before coming to class. We will discuss reading strategies in class.

**Textbook:** [Mark Timmons, \*Disputed Moral Issues: A Reader\*, Fifth Edition, Oxford University Press.](#) (required)

I highly recommend purchasing the 5th edition of our textbook. Many readings assigned in this class are not available in earlier editions. **If you choose to purchase an earlier edition, you are responsible for acquiring all assigned readings.** Please be in touch with me, if you need assistance.

## Methods of Evaluation:

Assessment in this class will be based on participation, "Philosophy Practice Assignments," writing workshops, and papers. Writing is the primary mode of evaluation for this class.

## Participation:

Your **participation** grade includes both attendance and preparation. In order to be a full participant in our class, it is important that you arrive to class on time having read and reflected on the material assigned before each lecture. Also, keep in mind that material will be presented in class that is not in the readings. If you must be late or miss a class, ask another student for notes, and you are always encouraged to discuss course materials with me.

On-time attendance in this course is required. Attendance will be taken using Qwickly, which will require students to enter a unique code generated for each class session. You will not be able to log your attendance through Qwickly if you are more than 5 minutes late. Contact me directly to discuss excused absences.

## Philosophy Practice Assignments:

Tourist: "Excuse me, how do you get to Carnegie Hall?"

New Yorker: "Practice, practice, practice."

Everyone knows that if you want to learn how to play a musical instrument, you have to practice. The same goes for thinking about ethics in a philosophical way. Over the the semester, I will assign short assignments that ask you to respond to readings, practice working with arguments, and applying philosophical concepts. Philosophy Practices provide opportunities to practice and receive feedback as you apply the skills of philosophy to contemporary moral issues. A total of 10 Philosophy Practices will be assigned as homework or in-class assignments over the course of the semester. Philosophy Practices will be assigned through BlackBoard.

## Writing Workshops:

We will do several writing workshops. In these workshops, we will read drafts of student writing to help us understand what makes for good philosophical writing. Peer-to-peer writing workshops will give students the opportunity to read each other's writing and provide peer feedback.

## Papers:

The **four paper assignments and the final paper** are designed to give you the opportunity to write philosophically, develop argumentative skills as well as to develop and defend your own position on an issue. For each paper, you will be given a list of prompts to choose from and asked to defend a thesis. We will spend time in class learning about philosophical writing to prepare for the paper assignments. Papers will be submitted in .docx or .pdf format over email to [bfrancis@umbc.edu](mailto:bfrancis@umbc.edu). Please prepare your papers for blind grading by including a pagelisting your name at the end of the document.

## Grading:

This course will be graded on a 1,000 point scale.

1000 - 900 =A

899 - 800 =B

799 - 700 =C

699 - 600 =D

599 - 0 =F

## Evaluation of Assignments:

Participation	= 100 points
Philosophy Practices	= 100 points
Writing Workshops	= 50 points
Paper 1	= 50 points
Paper 2	= 100 points
Paper 3	= 150 points
Paper 4	= 200 points
Final Paper	= 250 points
Total	= 1,000 points

## Course Policies and Expectations:

### Classroom Culture:

A positive learning environment requires creating an atmosphere where diverse perspectives can be expressed. It is especially important that we foster a positive environment in this course, which focuses on controversial issues that we are bound to strongly disagree about. Each of us is expected to respectfully engage with points of view that we strongly disagree with during in-class discussion and in written assignments. Learning how to do philosophy is just learning how to engage openly, respectfully, reasonably, and critically with ideas that challenge. The range of views you hold and the experiences you bring into the classroom will make our learning experiences much more interesting and enriching. **In order to ensure an environment for robust intellectual debate, please do not video or audio record in class without prior authorization.**

### Late Assignments:

Unless you have a valid excuse (serious illness, death in the family, etc.) and you notify me before the assignment is due, late papers will be graded down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late. For example, if your work earns an A-, but you submit the paper 1 day late, you will receive a B+.

Late Philosophy Practices and Writing Workshop assignments will not be accepted. These assignments are designed to facilitate learning in class and are time-sensitive.

If you are ill, please do not come to class. Be in touch, preferably before class, so that we can make arrangements for you to make up any coursework you missed.

### Email:

I welcome emails raising any questions you may have about the reading, writing assignments, or course logistics. However, please note some questions may be more appropriate for office hours. I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours Monday thru Friday.

**Office Hours:**

I encourage all students to come to office hours to discuss any aspect of this course. I hold office hours in-person twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1pm. During in-person office hours, I will also be available virtually on Webex (<https://umbc.webex.com/meet/bfrancis>). Please stop by in-person or virtually any time on Tuesdays or Thursdays between 1pm and 2pm. You can also make an in-person or virtual appointment by emailing me.

## Course Schedule

Week	Day	Topic	Readings
1	M 1/31	General Introduction	None
	W 2/2	What is moral theory?	"A Moral Theory Primer" (DMI pp.1-5)
	F 2/4	Moral Relativism	Timmons, "Why I am Not a Moral Relativist (and Neither are You)" (DMI pp.42-9) Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy" (BB)
2	M 2/7	Ethics of College	Morton, <i>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way: The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility</i> , pp. 1-16 (BB)
	W 2/9	Ethics of College	Morton, <i>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way: The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility</i> , pp. 17-32 (BB) Frankfurt, <i>The Reasons of Love</i> pp. 1-32 (optional) (BB)
	F 2/11	Ethics of College	Morton, <i>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way: The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility</i> , pp. 32-42 (BB) Chang, "Hard Choices," pp. 1-21 (optional) (BB)
3	M 2/14	Ethics of College	Morton, <i>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way: The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility</i> , pp. 120-133 (BB)
	W 2/16	Ethics of College	Morton, <i>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way: The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility</i> , pp. 133-149 (BB)
	F 2/18	Ethics of College	The Pink Guide, How to Write a Philosophy Paper (BB) <b>Paper 1 due Sunday 2/20 at 11:59</b>
4	M 2/21	Freedom of Speech	Introduction to Chapter 4 (DMI pp.149-57)
	W 2/23	Freedom of Speech	Mill, "Utilitarianism" (DMI pp. 49-54) Mill, "On Liberty" (DMI pp.157-160)

Week	Day	Topic	Readings
	F 2/25	Freedom of Speech	Richardson-Self, "Woman-Hating: On Misogyny, Sexism, and Hate Speech" (DMI pp.160-71) <i>CW: Strong language, including reference to sexual assault on page 166</i>
5	M 2/28	Freedom of Speech	Gelder and Brison, "Digital Dualism and the "Speech as Thought" Paradox," (pp.12-27) (BB)
	W 3/2	Freedom of Speech	Altman, "Speech Codes and Expressive Harm" (DMI pp.172-81) "Kantian Moral Theory" (DMI pp.14-19)
	F 3/4	Freedom of Speech	Whittington, <i>Speak Freely: Why Universities Must Defend Free Speech</i> , pp.77-95 (and optionally pp.1-8) (BB)
6	M 3/7	Freedom of Speech	In-Class Writing Activity
	W 3/9	Abortion	Introduction to Chapter 9 (DMI pp.413-21)
	F 3/11	Abortion	Singer, <i>Practical Ethics</i> (pp.138-56) BB <b>Paper 2 Due Sunday 3/13 at 11:59</b>
7	M 3/14	Abortion	Lee and George, "The Wrong of Abortion" (DMI pp.421-32) Singer, <i>Practical Ethics</i> (pp.169-74) BB
	W 3/16	Abortion	"Natural Law Theory" (DMI 11-14)
	F 3/18	Abortion	Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" (DMI pp.443-47) "Ethics of Prima Facie Duty" (DMI pp.24-26) Bodenner, "Trisomy 21" (DMI p.67) <b>Enjoy Spring Break! 3/21-3/27</b>
8	M 3/28	Abortion	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (DMI pp.448-56) "Rights-based Moral Theory" (DMI pp.19-24)
	W 3/30	Abortion	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (DMI pp.448-56) (cont.)

Week	Day	Topic	Readings
	F 4/1	Abortion	Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion" (DMI pp.433-42) "Virtue Ethics" (DMI pp.29-30)
9	M 4/4	Abortion	Little, "The Moral Complexities of Abortion" (DMI pp.457-66) "The Ethics of Care" (DMI pp.30-34)
	W 4/6	Abortion	In-Class Writing Activity
	F 4/8	The Environment	Introduction to Chapter 15 (DMI pp.722-28) <b>Paper 3 Due Sunday 4/10 at 11:59 pm</b>
10	M 4/11	The Environment	Baxter, "People or Penguins: The Case for Optimal Pollution" (DMI pp.729-33)
	W 4/13	The Environment	Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (DMI pp.734-38)
	F 4/15	The Environment	Gardiner, "A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics, and the Problem of Moral Corruption" (DMI pp.746-53) Steffan, "Flying Planes to Fight Climate Change" (DMI pp.780-81)
11	M 4/18	The Environment	Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not <i>My</i> Fault: Global Warming and Individual Obligations" (DMI pp.754-68)
	W 4/20	The Environment	Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not <i>My</i> Fault: Global Warming and Individual Obligations" (DMI pp.754-68) (cont.)
	F 4/22	The Environment	Hourdiquin, "Climate, Collective Action, and Individual Ethical Obligations" (DMI pp.769-779) Revisit "The Ethics of Care" (DMI pp.30-34)
12	M 4/25	The Environment	Writing Workshop. <b>Paper 4 Outline due before class today.</b>
	W 4/27	World Poverty	Introduction to Chapter 13 (DMI 624-26) Singer, "The Life You Can Save" (DMI pp.633-47) Revisit "Consequentialism" (DMI pp.6-11)

Week	Day	Topic	Readings
	F 4/29	World Poverty	<p>"The Life You Can Save" (cont) (DMI pp.633-47)</p> <p><b>No in-person class today.</b> See BB for instructions.</p> <p><b>Paper 4 Due Sunday 5/1 at 11:59</b></p>
13	M 5/2	World Poverty	Narveson, "We Don't Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-minded but Soft-hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy," (pp.420-433) (BB)
	W 5/4	World Poverty	Arthur, "World Hunger and Moral Obligation" (DMI pp. 647-55)
	F 5/6	World Poverty	Wenar, "Poverty is No Pond" (pp.1-32; skim pp.15-20 (section on Evaluation and Checking Mechanisms)(BB)
14	M 5/9	World Poverty	<p>Pogge, "World Poverty and Human Rights" (DMI pp.565-61)</p> <p>Cohen, "Philosophy, Social Sciences, Global Poverty," pp18-25; 37-41 (BB)</p>
	W 5/11	World Poverty	Shue, <i>Basic Rights</i> , pp.35-40; 51-64) (BB)
	F 5/13	World Poverty	Ashford, "Severe Poverty as Unjust Emergency" (DMI pp.662-71)
15	M 5/16	World Poverty	<p>Writing Workshop. <b>Draft Due Before Class Today.</b></p> <p><b>Final Paper Due Sunday 5/22 at 11:59 pm</b></p>

## University Policies and Resources:

### UMBC Statement of Values for Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the UMBC Student Handbook, or the Office of Undergraduate Education.

### Disclosures of Sexual Misconduct and Child Abuse or Neglect

As an instructor, I am considered a Responsible Employee, per [UMBC's Policy on Prohibited Sexual Misconduct, Interpersonal Violence, and Other Related Misconduct \(https://oei.umbc.edu/files/2020/08/View-as-a-PDF.pdf\)](https://oei.umbc.edu/files/2020/08/View-as-a-PDF.pdf). While my goal is for you to be able to share information related to your life experiences through discussion and written work, I want to be transparent that as a Responsible Employee I am required to report disclosures of sexual assault, domestic violence, relationship violence, stalking, and/or gender-based harassment to the University's Title IX Coordinator.

As an instructor, I also have a mandatory obligation to report disclosures of or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect (<https://oei.umbc.edu/child-protection/>). The purpose of these reporting requirements is for the University to inform you of options, supports and resources; you will not be forced to file a report with the police. Further, you are able to receive supports and resources, even if you choose to not want any action taken. Please note that in certain situations, based on the nature of the disclosure, the University may need to take action.

If you need to speak with someone in confidence about an incident, UMBC has the following Confidential Resources available to support you: The Counseling Center: 410-455-2472 University Health Services: 410-455-2542 (After-hours counseling and care available by calling campus police at 410-455-5555)

Other on-campus supports and resources: The Women's Center, 410-455-2714 Title IX Coordinator, 410-455-1606 Additional on and off campus supports and resources can be found at: <https://oei.umbc.edu/>.

### Student Disability Services (SDS)

UMBC is committed to eliminating discriminatory obstacles that may disadvantage students based on disability. Services for students with disabilities are provided for all students qualified under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the ADAAA of 2009, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act who request and are eligible for accommodations. The Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) is the UMBC department designated to coordinate accommodations that would allow students to have equal access and inclusion in all courses, programs, and activities at the University.

If you have a documented disability and need to request academic accommodations, please refer to the SDS website at [sds.umbc.edu](https://sds.umbc.edu) for registration information and to begin the process, or alternatively you may visit the SDS office in the Math/Psychology Building, Room 212. For questions or concerns, you may contact us through email at [disAbility@umbc.edu](mailto:disAbility@umbc.edu) or phone (410) 455-2459.

If you require accommodations for this class, make an appointment to meet with me to discuss your SDS-approved accommodations.

### **Spring 2022 Safety Protocols and Compliance Statement:**

“UMBC has set clear expectations for masking while on campus that include the requirement that you must wear a KN95 face mask or equivalent that covers your nose and mouth in all classrooms regardless of your vaccination status. For information on masks equivalent to KN95s please click the following link:

<https://covid19.umbc.edu/masks/>

This is to protect your health and safety as well as the health and safety of your classmates, instructor, and the university community. Anyone attending class without a KN95 mask or wearing one improperly will be asked by the instructor to put on a KN95 mask or fix their mask in the appropriate position. Any student that refuses to comply with this directive will be asked to leave the classroom immediately and failure to do so may result in the instructor requesting the assistance of the University Police. Students who refuse to wear KN95 masks may be referred to Student Conduct and Community Standards and may face disciplinary action for violations of the Code of Student Conduct, specifically, Rule 2: Behavior Which Jeopardizes the Health or Safety of Self or Others and Rule 16: Failure to Comply with the Request of a University Official. UMBC’s on-campus safety protocols, including masking requirements, are subject to change in response to the evolving situation with Covid-19.”