

CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES – COURSE SYLLABUS

1. Instructor Information

Tyson Cain
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567-408-0991 (phone/text)
Office Hours: by appointment, in person or online

2. Student Hours

Student hours are routine opportunities to visit with your instructor about the readings, course requirements, or anything else that may be on your mind. These hours are also good opportunities to practice dialoguing philosophically. Please take advantage of them.

3. Course Description

Contemporary Western culture is notable for being the product of rapid socio-political change. Since the eighteenth century, science and the scientific mindset have transformed how we live and think about our environment, human relations, and the nature of human existence. These changes have fomented a re-evaluation of what it means to live well and do good – questions that in prior ages had relatively straightforward answers.

In this course, we will use the tools and methods of moral philosophy to address some of the most challenging puzzles brought on by the aforementioned changes. What has consumerism done to our understanding of truth? What obligations do we have towards the natural world? Towards animals? Is abortion always wrong, or ever? What immigration policy is best? How has the average person's self-understanding been altered by social media?

Using important texts from the past several decades, we will carefully consider possible answers to these and other related questions of our time, uncovering their complexity with systematic, respectful, and intellectually rigorous debate.

4. Course Goals & Learning Outcomes

- To help you develop a basic understanding of what philosophy is – its analytical techniques and favored topics
- To practice applying philosophy's analytical techniques to discourse about contemporary moral issues
- To improve your ability to read texts closely and describe their main arguments in your own words
- To enhance your ability to think conceptually and independently by critically evaluating arguments

- To achieve a deeper appreciation for the complexity and diversity of philosophical issues, techniques, and beliefs
- To be able to speak competently and confidently about important moral issues that affect everyday life

These goals and outcomes parallel those described by the Bowling Green Perspective (BGP) Humanities and Arts requirement, which this course fulfills.

5. Required Texts

There is nothing you need to purchase. I will post all required reading to Canvas as Adobe Acrobat files (PDFs) or as links to blogs, videos, or other content. Please see the latest version of the document, “Contemporary Moral Issues – Course Schedule,” for further information.

6. Instruction Mode & Delivery

As you may already know, all classes will be live and “in-person.” However, the course is not delivered without technology; your instructor will upload PowerPoint presentations to Canvas as well as hyperlinks to other content. Additionally, you will complete your weekly quizzes and exams online through Canvas. Please become familiar with the course’s Canvas page, returning to it frequently for updates and for critical course content and information.

In addition to a stable Internet connection, you should be able to open PowerPoint files and Adobe Acrobat documents, stream YouTube content and other videos, and use the digital tools found in Canvas.

7. Student Evaluation

This course is designed around a selection of valuable philosophical texts concerning topics of contemporary interest and key importance. I will assign reading from these texts and regularly quiz you about them. These quizzes will be predominantly, although not exclusively, multiple-choice.

Participation in class discussions is important to our learning, particularly in philosophy. As such, I expect you to attend every class if possible. I will take attendance at random using a variety of methods, allowing 3 absences without penalty. (Absences due to military service, athletic participation at BGSU-sponsored sporting events, and for other bona fide reasons for which BGSU requires accommodation will not count. No other excuses are permitted.)

You will take a final exam consisting of multiple-choice, short answer, and short essay questions. More information forthcoming.

You will write a term paper of approximately 1,200 words on a topic from a list I will provide. The purpose is to allow you to practice writing an extended philosophical argument using the knowledge you acquire from the readings. No additional research will be necessary.

I will post to Canvas all readings, guides, instructions, questions, quizzes, videos, exams, and other course content. (You may take the final in-person exam using a blue book, if you

wish. Please tell me in advance if this is your preference.) Each module will contain the material you need for the weeks in question. Please familiarize yourself with our Canvas page and consult it frequently for announcements and new content.

8. Assessment & Grading

Attendance and Participation . . .	150 pts (15%)
Quizzes	350 pts (35%)
Final Exam	250 pts (25%)
Term Paper	250 pts (25%)
TOTAL POINTS:	1,000

FINAL GRADE	POINT EQUIVALENT
A	900-1,000
B	800-899
C	700-799
D	600-699
F	< 600

Late Assignment Policy:

- Except as noted below or required by BGSU policy, the following penalty will be imposed for the late term paper:
 - 2% of the total possible points for each day late, counted in whole days. For example, a paper worth 250 points earning a raw score of 230 but 3 days late would have 15 points deducted ($3 \times .02(250)$), and the assignment's final score would be 215 or 86%, down from 92%.
 - The past-due time will be determined by rounding to the nearest 24-hour period. For instance, a paper turned in 1-12 hours late will count as on time. Assignments turned in 13-36 hours late will be counted as 1 day late, 37-60 hours beyond time as 2 days late, and so on.
- Except as required by BGSU policy or noted below, **I will not accept any late quiz for credit.** In exchange for this rigidity, I will drop each student's lowest 2 quiz scores, such that these will not count toward their final course grades.
- If you have trouble completing an exam or the term paper because you do not understand the course material or find my instructions confusing or unclear, please visit me during student hours (or at another time by appointment) to gain the knowledge you need to complete and submit your work on time. Please do this well *before* the assignment or exam is due!

- If you cannot complete an exam or the term paper due to a personal health issue or some other serious unforeseen situation, please tell me as soon as practicable so that appropriate arrangements can be made for the completion of your work. With timely notice (where timely notice is possible), I will extend deadlines as necessary and as warranted by the circumstances, working with a student to secure the resources and accommodations the student may need.

Supporting Your Success:

I want you to be successful – in this course, in your other courses, and in all your sincerely pursued endeavors. Although success is primarily your responsibility, everyone needs help now and then. If you find yourself in need of assistance, here are a few options:

- **Meet with me** during student hours, or at some other more convenient time you schedule with me in advance. One-on-one conversation can be surprisingly effective at helping you comprehend the material and retool.
- If you have persistent learning trouble that may warrant attention by BGSU's Accessibility Services, please let me know right away so that **appropriate accommodations can be made**. Please also contact the Office of Accessibility Services at (419) 372-8495, or visit its office during regular business hours, or as advised on its webpage:

<https://www.bgsu.edu/accessibility-services.html>

- **Seek help from Learning Commons** in Jerome Library. Tutoring and other services are available at no additional charge. Information about the Learning Commons and other student resources is available here:

<https://www.bgsu.edu/accessibility-services/students.html>

9. Technology Help

Information Technology Services (ITS) offers students technical support. Please contact them if you experience difficulties related to Internet connectivity, website or account access, or the hardware or software that you are using or need to use. Visit their service desk at 110 Hayes Hall or chat with them online or by calling 419-372-0999. Self-help guides and other information may be viewed at <https://www.bgsu.edu/its.html>.

10. Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty refers typically to plagiarism, which means presenting another's work as your own or, in some cases, recycling your own work without permission. Plagiarism often occurs when a student copies other writers' texts word-for-word or paraphrases them without giving credit to the source. Plagiarism can also mean helping someone else submit copied or paraphrased text without providing due credit.

It is also plagiarism to use Grammarly, ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, or any similar AI resource to draft the language you submit for any written assignment.

Plagiarism is a grave matter. In fact, BGSU requires me to report all reasonable suspicions of it to your academic dean, with escalating academic consequences for the student in question for each instance. I will also penalize all verified instances of plagiarism by withholding credit for the quiz, paper, or exam that contains plagiarized text, assigning to all such work a score I deem appropriate under the circumstances. If the plagiarism is sufficiently egregious, the assignment or exam that contains it will receive a score of 0 points.

You are fully responsible for knowing what BGSU counts as plagiarism and for making sure that neither your academic dean nor I have any reason to believe you have plagiarized. For details about this topic, and for information about how to ensure your work is properly and fully referenced, see BGSU's official policy at:

<https://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/catalog/academic-honesty/official-policy.pdf>

11. Respectful Discourse Required

As is common in the study of philosophy, discussing some topics may evoke strong feelings in and between interlocutors. Examples include discussions about abortion, euthanasia, religious practices, and the death penalty. Since these responses are common (and perfectly normal), we all have the responsibility to recognize them to treat each other respectfully, encouraging each other to do the same. Philosophy is about honest, constructive, and disciplined dialogue about the most fundamental questions we can think to ask about human existence. As such, policy debates can generally be set aside. In no event is there a place for accusations, personal attacks, demeaning language, or other inappropriate conduct by or between students or between a student and the student's teacher.

12. Ownership of Instructor-Designed Materials

The content of the presented PowerPoint slides and lectures, together with all tests, exams, quizzes, outlines, and other instructor-designed materials (hereafter "Materials") is protected by U.S. copyright law and by BGSU's policies. Your instructor is the exclusive owner of the copyright in these Materials. You may download, open, print, and otherwise access and use these Materials to review, study, learn and take notes in order to successfully complete the requirements of this course. You may also share these Materials with another student, tutor, instructor, or other person who in good faith and at your request wishes to advance your comprehension and learning of the course content.

All other reproduction, distribution, or display of these Materials, whether or not for a fee, is expressly prohibited without your instructor's prior and express written consent. Also, you may not allow another Student to do so, per the BGSU Code of Student Conduct, the terms of which apply to you.

Similarly, you own the copyright in all your original work. Thus, your instructor will always obtain your prior and express written consent before using this work for any purpose other than that which you originally intended.

13. Accommodations for Military Service and Religious Observance

BGSU respects the military service of its students. If you have challenges related to your status as a veteran or active duty military, please notify your instructor about any accommodations you may need.

Likewise, BGSU desires to make every reasonable effort to allow students to observe their religious holidays without incurring any academic penalty for doing so. If a religious holiday observance will conflict with any responsibility you have because of enrollment in this course, please inform your instructor so that accommodations can be made.

14. Right to Modify and Amend Course Syllabus

Your instructor reserves the right to modify or amend this syllabus at any time or times.

15. Schedule

Please refer to the document entitled “Contemporary Moral Issues – Course Schedule” for details concerning work to be accomplished.