



Philosophy 1304: Morality and Justice (Spring, 2018)

Contact Information (and Policy):

Professor:

Daniel Wodak Email: dwodak@vt.edu Office: 217 MWH
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2.00 – 3.00 pm, Wednesdays 11:00 am – 12 pm.

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs):

Jarrold Blair Email: jarrod5@vt.edu Office: 212 MWH
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:15 pm – 1:15 pm.

Jodell Ulerie Email: jodell95@vt.edu Office: 212 MWH
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday from 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm.

You are encouraged to go to office hours in Major Williams Hall (MWH). If you would like to meet but cannot attend office hours, email myself or your GTA to request an appointment, listing three possible meeting times.

Feel free to email your GTA or myself about any issues, so long as you:
a) first look for the answer on the syllabus, Canvas, and/or vt.edu; and,
b) clearly state your request or question, being as specific as possible.

Course Description:

We face philosophical questions about morality and justice in our everyday lives. Are you morally obligated to give away a large portion of your income to charity, or to stop eating meat? Is it morally permissible to abort fetuses? These are some of the familiar questions that we will consider in this course, along with prominent theories that seek to justify our judgments about these issues by appealing to utility or rights.

This course also aims to teach you the skills to understand, evaluate, and develop philosophical arguments. You will apply those skills to see whether particular views about morality and justice can be justified.

You may well find that you start out with strong commitments that do not stand up to critical scrutiny. You may even find that it hard to reconcile your answers to what seem at first glance to be quite separate questions. This is all part of the challenge (and the fun!) of philosophy. Our central goal is not to reach a consensus or to settle any of these matters decisively; it is to better understand some of the central questions in moral philosophy, and learn how to use philosophical tools to address them.

Meetings and Course Materials:

Meeting times

Lecture: Monday and Wednesday, 1:25 pm – 2:15 pm, MCB100

Section:

16998	Friday	8:00 – 8:50 AM	GOODW241	Jarrold Blair
16999	Friday	11:15 AM – 12:05 PM	GOODW115	Jodell Ulerie
17000	Friday	10:10 – 11:00 AM	PAM3001	Jarrold Blair
17002	Wednesday	5:45 – 6:35 PM	GOODW115	Jodell Ulerie
17003	Wednesday	4:40 – 5:30 PM	MCB218	Jodell Ulerie
17004	Friday	1:25 – 2:15 PM	MCB113	Jarrold Blair

Required text: James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 8th edition (McGraw-Hill Education, 2015).

I>clickers: If you do not own one already, you must purchase an i>clicker. You must register it on Canvas. i>clickers allow everyone to register their views about issues easily and anonymously, and allow me to gauge your understanding of course material. From week three onwards, I will monitor i>clicker responses to keep track of your attendance.

Prerequisites: This course is open to all students.

Expectations for Classroom Conduct:

This class will discuss some very controversial issues, and within each section there will be a wide variety of moral, political, and religious commitments, some of which may be radically opposed to your own views. Questions we discuss may have special personal significance to someone in the class: perhaps they, or a loved one, faced a similar dilemma in the past. And especially since philosophers and your fellow students are also intelligent and thoughtful people, be open to the possibility that when you disagree with their views you may well be the one who's wrong. So always frame your comments in ways that are:

1. Charitable – take the most plausible and sympathetic interpretation of classmates' (and authors') comments, positions, or arguments.
2. Sensitive – respect that the issues we discuss could have a special political, religious or personal significance to others in the room.
3. Impersonal – evaluate positions and arguments, not people.
4. Humble – are open to the possibility that you are wrong.

Assessments:

This table provides a snapshot of the assessment schedule, including when you can expect assessments to be returned with feedback by your GTA:

Due Date	Assessment	% of Grade	Date Graded/Returned
Ongoing	Participation	10	May 8
Weekly (on Canvas)	Canvas Quizzes	20	Weekly
February 4 (on Canvas)	Opt-in Essay I	0 or 5*	February 18
March 4 (on Canvas)	Essay I	15 to 20*	March 18
April 4 (in class)	In-class Exam	20	April 18
April 18 (on Canvas)	Opt-in Essay II	0 or 5*	May 2
May 7 (on Canvas)	Essay II	25 or 30*	May 11

There is no final exam for the course.

Participation

You are expected to attend both lecture and discussion section, prepared to discuss the week's material and actively participate in discussion.

Canvas Quizzes

Every Sunday from January 21 to April 29 you will be expected to complete a short quiz on Canvas. These quizzes are designed to assess your understanding of the *following* week's course materials, and your ability to apply the main philosophical skills discussed in the course. Each quiz is worth 2%. You will be graded on your best ten (10) quizzes.

In-class Exam

The in-class exam will test your mastery of the ideas and skills discussed in the readings and in class. The exam will be a mix of true and false, multiple choice, and short answer questions, with one argument task.

Opt-in Essays I and II

The aim of these assessments is to provide you with opportunities to practice writing philosophy papers that analyze an author's argument (Essay I) or develop an original argument (Essay II). These "opt-in" essays are not compulsory. These essays should be 400-500. Opt-in Essay I will be worth 5% of your final grade if you do better on it than Essay I; otherwise, it will be worth 0%. Ditto for Opt-in Essay II and Essay II.

Essay I

You are expected to write a 1,000-word essay analyzing and evaluating an argument from one of the texts that we consider in weeks one to seven.

Essay II

You are expected to write a 1,500-word essay defending a position on one of the philosophical issues that we consider in the final four weeks of the course. You will be expected to compose a valid argument for your position, defend its premises, and consider and respond to an objection.

Five Simple Tips for How to Improve

1. Improve your research habits.

If you mostly rely on Wikipedia and blogs, you'll do badly. These sources *might* contain some good philosophical analysis. But they're just as likely to contain simple philosophical mistakes. *Rely on peer-reviewed sources.* Use google scholar instead of google. Try the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (www.plato.stanford.edu) or the journal *Philosophy Compass*.

2. Read about reading and writing about philosophy.

I strongly recommend that you read Jim Pryor's '[Guidelines on Reading Philosophy](#)' and '[Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper](#)'. They're short, and will save you much time and stress in the long run.

3. Practice makes perfect.

Learning philosophy for the first time involves learning some new skills. Like learning to ride a bike, that takes time and involves trial and error. It also becomes easier and easier the more you do it. Practice analyzing and developing arguments throughout the course, and it'll become easy.

4. Take notes.

Perhaps the simplest thing you can do to improve in philosophy is to take notes *for every reading and lecture and discussion section*. You will absorb more of the material if you actively read and listen. And you will *not* be given lecture notes in this course—so your notes will be a crucial resource.

5. Philosophy is a social activity.

An easy and fun way to improve is to talk about the key arguments and ideas from course with your friends, and/or with other students from the course. Consider creating a study group. They will help you understand material that you are struggling with. And you will reach a deeper understanding yourself when you explain ideas and arguments to others.

Honor Code Procedures:

This is an ethics course. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will be treated very seriously. The normal sanction I will recommend for a violation of the Honor Code is an **F*** sanction as your final course grade.

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states: “As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation.

Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit <https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/> or contact honorsys@vt.edu.

The Virginia Tech honor pledge for assignments is as follows: “I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this assignment.” It must be written out and signed on every assignment in this course.

Any of the following acts constitute academic misconduct: cheating, plagiarism, falsification, fabrication, multiple submissions, complicity, or violation of university, college, department, program, course, or faculty rules. Misuse of i>clickers can also constitute academic misconduct.

Other Administrative Issues:

Electronics Policy

No electronics can be used in class (including phones and laptops), except for i-clickers. Exceptions will be made for students with disabilities, or volunteer notetakers with SSD, or for similar causes. This is a strict rule.

Lateness Policy

Late assessments will be penalized at the rate of 5% per day, unless (a) you have a documented illness or other extenuating circumstance, and (b) you have explicit prior authorization to hand in the assignment late, from your GTA or the Professor, to be granted at their discretion. If you foresee a conflict between an assessment due date and another commitment, please email your GTA well in advance so that they can provide a fair alternative.

Absences

“Students who miss class due to circumstances beyond their control can request to have the absence verified. Each faculty member will make the final determination in allowing the request to make-up missed academic work. Verification of absence does not override the authority of a faculty member. For family or personal emergencies, contact the Dean of Students Office (109 East Eggleston Hall, 231-3787). For absence related to mental health, contact Cook Counseling Center (McComas Hall, 231-6557). For absence related to physical health, contact Schiffert Health Center (McComas Hall, 231-6444). Please note, Schiffert Health Center will only verify absences resulting from prolonged illness (at least 5 days). In addition, Schiffert does not notify faculty of one-time student appointments in the Health Center. Relevant documentation is required for any verification of absence. The Dean of Students office does not verify absences related to religious and ethnic holidays.”

Disabilities

I wholeheartedly endorse Tech’s policy and practice of creating inclusive learning environments for all students, including students with disabilities. If aspects of this course – such as time limited exams or inaccessible web content – result in barriers to your inclusion or your ability to meet course requirements please notify your GTA as soon as possible. We will adapt methods, materials or testing in order to offer fair terms of participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Services for Students with Disabilities office to discuss and arrange reasonable accommodations. Please visit www.ssd.vt.edu/students.htm for more information.

Class Schedule:

Date	Topic	Readings
January 17	Introduction I	
January 22 & 24	Introduction II	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 1; Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs, and People', pp. 229-236
January 29 & 31	Cultural Relativism	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 2
February 5 & 7	Subjectivism	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 3
February 12 & 14	Divine Command Theory	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 4
February 19 & 21	Egoism and Social Contract Theory	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 5; Rachels and Rachels, ch. 6
February 26 & 28	Aid & Altruism	Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality', pp. 229-235; Mo Tzu, 'Against Music', pp. 110-113; https://www.givewell.org/giving
March 12 & 14	Utilitarianism I	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 7
March 19 & 21	Utilitarianism II	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 8
March 26 & 28	Deontology I	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 9
April 2 & 4	Deontology II	Rachels and Rachels, ch. 10 IN-CLASS EXAM—APRIL 4
April 9 & 11	Abortion I: Pro-Life Views	Marquis, 'Why Abortion Is Immoral', pp. 183-193; Rogers, 'Personhood, Potentiality, and the Temporarily Comatose Patient', pp. 245-252
April 16 & 18	Abortion II: Pro-Choice Views	Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion'; pp. 47-60; Harman, 'Creation Ethics', pp. 310-324
April 23 & 25	Wrongful Procreation? Two Problems	Roberts, 'An Asymmetry in the Ethics of Procreation', pp. 765-775; Sher, pp. 181-186 of 'Transgenerational Compensation'.
April 30 & May 2	Wrongful Procreation? Causing Disability	Barnes, 'Valuing Disability, Causing Disability', pp. 88-113