Philosophy 1304: Morality and Justice (Spring, 2017)

Contact Information (and Policy):

Professor:
Daniel Wodak  Email: dwodak@vt.edu  Office: 217 MWH
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 2:20–3:20 pm & by appointment

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs):
William Wilson  Email: will1138@vt.edu  Office: 213 MWH
Office Hours: Thursday 2–3 pm & by appointment

Lindsay Whittaker  Email: lmwhitta@vt.edu  Office: 210 MWH
Office Hours: Thursday 2–3 pm & by appointment

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? Should the state stop redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor? These are some of the familiar questions that we will consider in this course, along with prominent theories that seek to systematize and
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, TORG3100

**Section:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16648</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>1:25 PM – 2:15 PM</td>
<td>GOODW241</td>
<td>L. Whittaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16649</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>4:40 – 5:30 PM</td>
<td>PAM3001</td>
<td>L. Whittaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16650</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>5:45 – 6:35 PM</td>
<td>GOODW135</td>
<td>W. Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16652</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>10:10 – 11:00 AM</td>
<td>RAND209</td>
<td>W. Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16653</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>8 – 8:50 AM</td>
<td>GOODW241</td>
<td>L. Whittaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16654</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>11:15 AM – 12:05 PM</td>
<td>TORG1020</td>
<td>W. Wilson</td>
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</table>

**Required text:** All readings are available as PDFs on Canvas under Files.

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
<th>Date Graded/Returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>April 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing (on Canvas)</td>
<td>Canvas Quizzes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>April 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 5 (on Canvas)</td>
<td>Opt-in Essay I</td>
<td>0 or 5*</td>
<td>Section on February 15/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 22</td>
<td>In-class exam I</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Section on March 8/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 12 (on Canvas)</td>
<td>Essay I</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Section on March 29/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2 (on Canvas)</td>
<td>Opt-in Essay II</td>
<td>0 or 5*</td>
<td>Section on April 12/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 16 (on Canvas)</td>
<td>Essay II</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Section on May 3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9 3.25-5.25 pm</td>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>25</td>
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Participation

You are expected to attend both lecture and section. Accommodations will be made for students with out of town athletic events, for medical reasons, or on other reasonable grounds at the GTA’s discretion. In all cases, appropriate documentation will be required.

You are expected to come to section with the course text and your notes, ready to discuss the week’s material, and actively participate in discussion.

Canvas Quizzes

Every Sunday from January 22 to April 30 you will be expected to complete a short quiz on Campus. 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 1%. 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. There is a strict 500-word limit. 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 1,000-word essay defending a position on one of the philosophical issues that we consider in the first nine 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.

Final Exam

The final exam will be in the same format as the in-class exam, though it will be longer, and will cover material from the entire course.

NB: Assessments that are due on Canvas must be submitted (a) by 5 pm on the listed due date, (b) with your student number and word count on the front page, and (c) with your name and honor pledge written on a separate page at the very end of your assessment. Please do not write your name anywhere else on your assessment. This is for the purpose of allowing your GTAs to grade your assessments anonymously, and hence more fairly.

Four Simple Tips for How to Improve

1. Improve your research habits.

If you mostly rely on Wikipedia, blogs, or whatever else turns up on a quick google search, you’re doing it wrong. And you’ll do badly. These sources might contain some good philosophical analysis. But they’re just as likely to contain simple philosophical mistakes. Instead, you should rely on sources that are peer reviewed. Use google scholar instead of google. For especially useful starting points, 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: www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html; www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html.

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 some trial and error. It also becomes easier and easier the more you do it. If you practice analyzing and developing arguments throughout the course, that part of the assessments will be easy. If you don’t, it will be very difficult.

4. Philosophy is a social activity.

The best ways to study for this course are fairly simple. Do the readings carefully, actively taking notes on the central ideas, arguments, and objections. Then talk about these with a group of (old or new) friends from the course. They will help you understand material that you are struggling with. And you will reach a far deeper understanding yourself when you explain ideas, arguments, and objections to others.

Honor Code Procedures:

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. This course. The normal sanction I will recommend for a violation of the Honor Code is an F* sanction as your final course grade.

Other Administrative Issues:

Electronics Policy

Students are also expected to not use electronic equipment in class (including phones and laptops), except for i-clicker activities. Please bring printed copies of the applicable readings to lectures and sections. Exceptions will be made for students with disabilities and students who have volunteered with SSD to be note takers for the class.

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 the explicit 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 exam date or due date and another commitment, please email your GTA well in advance so that he or she can provide a fair alternative. We reserve the right to deny otherwise reasonable requests for accommodation if requested at the last minute without good reason.

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.

Readings

You are not required to purchase any books for this course. If you wish to purchase an introductory ethics textbook, I recommend James Rachels’ *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* and Julia Driver’s *Ethics: The Fundamentals*. We are reading a chapter from each of these books in week four.

All of the readings for the course are available for free on Canvas. Many of these readings have been abridged with the goal of keeping the readings to a maximum of 30 pages per week; given their brevity, you have no excuse for failing to do the required reading. You may wish to read the unabridged version of some of these readings. You can find all of the journal articles we are reading online, and unabridged versions of the relevant book chapters can be made available on request.

I highly recommend that you read *actively*—try to write a summary of the key ideas and arguments in each reading, and try to think of objections.
**Class Schedule:**

*All readings are available on Canvas.*

*Please bring printed copies of the relevant readings to class.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Introduction to moral philosophy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>January 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions:</td>
<td>When is an argument valid? Create your own examples of <em>modus ponens</em>, <em>modus tollens</em>, and one other ‘deductive form’ that Weston describes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Animals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>January 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>Alastair Norcross, ‘Puppies, Pigs, and People’, pp. 229-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions:</td>
<td>Do we have a duty to not support factory farming? Is there a morally significant difference between our behavior and Fred’s behavior?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>January 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>Alastair Norcross, ‘Puppies, Pigs, and People’, 236-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions:</td>
<td>Do humans have superior moral status to animals? What is the challenge from ‘marginal cases’? How does Norcross respond to it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Week 3  Charity

**M** January 30  
**Reading:** Peter Singer, ‘Famine, Affluence, and Morality’, pp. 229-343  
**Questions:** Do we have a duty to give to charity? What moral principle does Singer’s argument rely upon, and how does he defend that principle?

**W** February 1  
**Reading:** ‘Introduction to EA’ on effectivealtruism.org  
**Questions:** What are the most cost-effective charities? Do we have a duty to give to those charities? If you could donate $1000, who would you donate it to?

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**FEbruary 5: OPT-IN ESSAY I DUE**

# Week 4  Utilitarianism

**M** February 6  
**Reading:** Julia Driver, ‘Classical Utilitarianism’, pp. 40-60  
**Questions:** What are the two parts of the principle of utility? What is the hedonistic theory of value? What is Mill’s ‘proof’ and Moore’s objection to it?

**W** February 8  
**Reading:** James Rachels, ‘Are There Absolute Moral Rules?’, pp. 117-129
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions:</th>
<th>What is an absolute moral rule? Did Truman violate such a rule, as Elizabeth Anscombe held? What is Kant’s categorical imperative?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Week 5  Self-Defense

**M**  February 13  
**Reading:**  Frederick Douglass, ‘Is it Right and Wise to Kill a Kidnapper?’, pp. 277-280  
**Questions:**  On what basis does Douglass deny that there is an absolute right to live? On what basis does he deny that submission is wiser than resistance?  

**W**  February 15  
**Reading:**  Judith Jarvis Thomson, ‘Self-Defense’, pp. 283-303  
**Questions:**  Why, for Thomson, is it permissible to kill Innocent Aggressor in self-defense? What is the doctrine of double effect? Is the doctrine correct?  

### Week 6  Guns

**M**  February 20  
**Reading:**  Michael Huemer, ‘Is There a Right to Own a Gun?’, pp. 297-319 (pp. 310-316 are optional)  
**Questions:**  For Huemer, why do we have a weighty right to own guns? Why must a gun ban have much greater benefits than harms to be justified?  

**W**  February 22  
**IN-CLASS EXAM***
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Abortion</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>February 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>Don Marquis, ‘Why Abortion is Immoral’, pp. 183-197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions:</td>
<td>What is Marquis argument for the view that abortion is, with rare exceptions, seriously immoral? What objections does he consider?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>March 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>Judith Jarvis Thomson, ‘A Defense of Abortion’, pp. 47-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions:</td>
<td>For each example, what conclusion does Thomson draw regarding the permissibility of abortion? And what premises support it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

~~ SPRING BREAK ~~

*MARCH 12: ESSAY I DUE*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Free Speech</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>March 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>John Stuart Mill, ‘Of Liberty of Thought and Discussion’ (excerpts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions:</td>
<td>Does Mill’s argument require us to first determine whether speech is true or false? Why do we have a right to express false opinions?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Week 9  **Welfare and Equality**

**M** March 20  
**Reading:** Ronald Dworkin, ‘Justice, Insurance, and Luck’, pp. 320-31  
**Questions:** What is Dworkin’s theory of distributive justice? Why does he reject the two conservative and two “discontinuous” approaches to welfare reform?

**W** March 22  
**Reading:** Ronald Dworkin, ‘Justice, Insurance, and Luck’, pp. 331-349  
**Questions:** What is the hypothetical insurance approach to welfare reform? Does it satisfy the “envy” test? And how does it apply to inheritance taxes?

### Week 10  **Democratic Egalitarianism**

**M** March 27  
Questions: Why, for Anderson, does luck egalitarianism fail to express equal respect and concern for all citizens? What are her three main objections? What is Vonnegut’s objection in ‘Harrison’?

W March 29

Reading: Elizabeth Anderson, ‘What is the Point of Equality’, pp. 312-326

Questions: What is Anderson’s theory of democratic equality? How does it apply to income inequality? What is the ‘capabilities approach’?

*APRIL 2: OPT-IN ESSAY II DUE*

Week 11 Libertarianism

M April 3

Reading: Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State, and Utopia, pp. 149-64

Questions: What are the three principles of libertarianism? How does the Chamberlain example support libertarianism (and oppose the welfare state)?

W April 5


Questions: Is taxation on par with forced labor? What is Otsuka’s response to Nozick? How do we acquire
rights over previously unowned resources?

**Week 12**  
**Reparations**

**M** April 10  
**Reading:** Bernard Boxill, ‘A Lockean Argument for Black Reparations’, pp. 63-70, 77-78  
**Questions:** When does a victim have a right to reparations? What are the ‘counterfactual’ and ‘inheritance’ arguments for black reparations?

**W** April 12  
**Reading:** Naomi Zack, ‘Reparations and the Rectification of Race’, pp. 141-151  
**Questions:** According to Zack, what obligations do we have to deceased slaves? Were slaves ‘raceless’? What implications does this have for reparations?

*APRIL 16: ESSAY II DUE*

**Week 13**  
**Borders**

**M** April 17  
**Reading:** Mark Nelson, ‘A Problem for Conservativism’, pp. 620-630  
**Questions:** What are the commitments of patriotism? Why are these in tension with the commitments of libertarianism? What, for Nelson, is ‘nationism’?
April 19

Reading: Joseph Carens, ‘The Case for Open Borders’, pp. 251-258, 263-264

Questions: What are Carens’ three arguments for open borders? Which of the three is most persuasive? Does it matter if borders require the use of force?

Week 14 Responsibility

April 24

Reading: Do 3 Implicit Association Tests at implicit.harvard.edu; Jules Holroyd, ‘Responsibility for Implicit Bias’, pp. 274-282

Questions: What are implicit biases? Are you implicitly biased? Are we liable to blame for implicit biases? What is the argument from causal etiology?

April 26

Reading: Jules Holroyd, ‘Responsibility for Implicit Bias’, pp. 282-391, 297-300

Questions: What is the argument from the lack of control? Is it sound? Is it useful to maintain that individuals are liable to blame for their implicit biases?

Week 15 Blame

May 1

Reading: G.A. Cohen, ‘Casting the First Stone’, pp. 113-130
Questions: Why can’t anybody at all blame any acts of terrorism whatsoever? What are the two ways of discrediting a critic’s standing to blame?

W May 3 Course Overview

This syllabus is subject to change.
Changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.