

## **PHIL 1304: Morality and Justice**

Lectures: M W 1:25-2:15pm

Spring 2024  
Goodwin 190

This course provides a survey of themes in moral and political philosophy. First, we examine three ethical frameworks: utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Then we turn to the idea of moral responsibility and its role in social life: What does it mean to be morally responsible for an action? What is the point of blame? Under what conditions should we forgive others? Finally, we will examine three central concepts in political philosophy: liberty, equality, and justice. Throughout the course, we will focus on fundamental philosophical skills including: defining technical terms, providing illustrative examples, and addressing counterexamples.

### Instructor

Philip Yaure

[philipyaure@vt.edu](mailto:philipyaure@vt.edu)

Office Hours: Major Williams 224, R 1:00-3:00pm

### Graduate Teaching Assistants

Yash Agarwal

[yash3@vt.edu](mailto:yash3@vt.edu)

Office Hours: Major Williams 208, T 2:00pm-3:00pm

Aisling O'Leary

[afoleary@vt.edu](mailto:afoleary@vt.edu)

Office Hours: Major Williams 210, W 11:00am-12:00pm

Michael Senters

[michaels22@vt.edu](mailto:michaels22@vt.edu)

Office Hours: Media Building 105, T 12:00pm-1:00pm

### Recitation Sections

18849: F 1:25-2:15pm, Davidson 125 – Aisling O'Leary

18851: F 9:05-9:55am, Major Williams 434 – Michael Senters

18852: F 11:15am-12:05pm, Major Williams 434 -Michael Senters

18853: F 10:10-11:00am, Pamplin 3010 – Yash Agarwal

18854: F 12:20-1:10pm, Davidson 201 – Aisling O'Leary

18856: F 1:25-2:15pm, Pamplin 3010 – Yash Agarwal

**Recitation (i.e. discussion) sections are a required part of the course.** You must be registered for and participate in a recitation section. *Participation in recitation is part of your grade!*

### Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be better able to:

1. Provide examples to illustrate philosophical concepts, claims, and arguments.
2. Explicate and criticize philosophical concepts and arguments in writing clearly and concisely.
3. Critically discuss philosophical concepts and arguments with their peers.
4. Articulate ways in which the ethical theories addressed in class bear on concrete issues in their own lives.

### Course Structure

Before each class: Review Canvas module, complete assigned reading, reading quiz

Class (M & W): Lecture, group activities, class-wide discussions

Discussion Section (F): Bring questions, actively participate

Every 2-4 weeks: Writing assignment due

### Communication with Instructor

**After Class Sessions:** The instructor and GTAs will be available for brief questions immediately after class.

**Office Hours:** The instructor is available for individual meetings R 1:00-3:00pm, or by appointment. A sign-up sheet for Thursday office hours will be posted to the introduction page to each class's module. You may also email the instructor to set-up an appointment at different time; please do so at least 24 hours before you are requesting to meet. GTAs will hold regular office hours (listed above) and will set their own appointment policies.

**Email:** For small logistical matters, you may contact the instructor via email. I will respond within 24 hours of your email (typically faster during the week). If you do not receive a response within 24 hours, please send a follow-up. GTAs will be available by email and will set their own email policies.

### Required Texts

There are no required books for this course. All readings will be made available via the course's Canvas page.

### Course Requirements

1. Reading Quizzes (13%)

2. Recitation Section (12%)

3. Written Assignments (75%)

Assignment 1: Define key terms (5%)

Assignment 2: Apply concept to example (10%)

Assignment 3: Explicate concept with example (15%)

Assignment 4: Explain 'hard case' example (20%)

Assignment 5: Introduce, define, and explicate concept, illustrate with example (25%)

**Reading Quizzes:** For each day of class, students will complete a brief quiz on the assigned reading, on the course Canvas site. The quiz will typically involve one multiple choice/poll question and one short answer question. Credit will be awarded for completion of quiz—typically there will not be one correct answer. The instructor and GTAs reserve the right to withhold credit if a submitted quiz does not demonstrate meaningful engagement with the assigned reading.

*Reading Strategy:* For much of this course, I have assigned full academic philosophy papers. These papers are challenging, and include material not that we will not directly touch on in the course. This is intentional. Your goal in reading these texts is not to gain total mastery of each and every thing the author says. Your goal is to gain some familiarity with the text's key

concepts, claims, and arguments. Use the “key questions” at the beginning of each week’s module as a guide during your reading. After you complete the reading, the reading quizzes will check whether you’re tracking (some of) the key concepts/claims/arguments from the reading. If you are at a loss for how to answer the reading quiz, that is a sign that you haven’t gotten what you need to from the reading and that you should take another pass at the assigned text.

**Recitation Section:** Students will attend and actively participate in Friday recitation sections. Students are required to attend the recitation they signed up for when registering for the course. Students will earn 1% for each recitation section they attend and participate in. (Attending and participating in 12 meetings of your section will qualify for full credit.) GTA have the discretion to withhold credit if a student attends but does not participate in section. Participation includes raising questions for the group, engaging constructively with other students’ comments, engaging in group activities, or active notetaking.

**Written Assignments:** Students will complete 5 assignments across the semester. Deadlines are listed below in the schedule. These assignments are scaffolded: they focus on philosophy writing skills that build on one another. The goal is for you to write, at semester’s end, a short essay that clearly defines, explicates, and illustrates a key concept from the course in your own words. Each assignment will ask you to critically engage with a main problem or argument covered in class readings and lectures. **Assignments are due at 5pm (eastern time) on the deadline day.**

*Late reading quizzes and weekly assignments will be accepted with no penalty if a valid excuse is communicated to GTA before deadline. The default extension for reading quizzes is 24 hours. The default extension for written assignments is 3 days (Friday at 5pm → Monday at 5pm). Longer extensions may be provided; contact instructor and cc GTA to request. If no valid excuse is provided, weekly assignments will be docked one point (e.g. from 13/15 to 12/15) per day; **reading quizzes will not be accepted late without a valid excuse.***

**Informal Expectation—Attendance and Participation:** Philosophy is done best in good company. Students will come to class prepared to discuss the assigned texts. While it is expected that students will come to class ready to raise questions/issues of interest to them, it is even more important to constructively engage with the questions/comments of your peers. We are each other’s best resources in this course. Attendance is expected at all lectures. If you are unable to attend lecture (e.g., due to a doctor’s appointment or family emergency), please contact a classmate to touch base about the material covered in lecture. If you are forced to miss more than one class in a row (e.g., due to illness), please contact the instructor to make arrangements.

#### Statement on Academic Integrity

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. All university policies and procedures apply in any Virginia Tech academic environment.

*Artificial Intelligence Policy:* **The use of AI-writing technology (e.g., ChatGPT) is not permitted in this course.** In the writing assignments for this course, our goal is for you to practice fundamental philosophical writing skills (e.g., explaining key terms in your own words, providing clear examples to illustrate a concept). These skills are essential to analytic thinking and writing, and will be presupposed in any higher-level philosophy course you take. Violations of this policy will be treated as violations of the Honor Code.

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

#### Statement on Well-Being and Accessibility

I am committed to making this course as accessible as possible. If you require a disability-related accommodation in order to fully participate in this course, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (<https://ssd.vt.edu/>) so that such accommodation may be arranged. I'm happy to assist where I can.

In addition, the following university resources are available to you:

#### Cook Counseling:

540-231-6557 to schedule an appointment and/or 24/7 crisis support

[ucc.vt.edu](http://ucc.vt.edu) for more information

#### Dean of Students Office:

540 231-3787 for general advice

540-231-6411 for after-hours crisis

[dos.vt.edu](http://dos.vt.edu) for more information

#### Hokie Wellness:

[hokiewellness.vt.edu](http://hokiewellness.vt.edu) for more information about health and wellness workshops and consultations

For a full listing of campus resources check out [well-being.vt.edu](http://well-being.vt.edu) .

## Course Schedule (subject to change)

### Week 1: Introduction

1/17: Review Syllabus

### Week 2: Utilitarianism I

1/22: Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch 1-2 (pp. 15-23/sections i-x)

1/24: Williams, *Utilitarianism and Integrity* (excerpt)

### Week 3: Utilitarianism II

1/29: Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

1/31: Srinivasan, "Stop the Robot Apocalypse" (excerpts)

## **Assignment 1 due Friday 2/2, 5pm**

### Week 4: Deontology I

2/5: Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 9-13, 30-33, 37-42

2/7: Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives"

### Week 5: Deontology II

2/12: Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 45-48 AND O'Neill, "Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems," pp. 510-516

2/14: Kant, "We Have No Duties to Animals"

## **Assignment 2 due Friday 2/15, 5pm**

### Week 6: Virtue Ethics I

2/19: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.4-5, I.7-9, I.13

2/21: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1-2, III.6-9

### Week 7: Virtue Ethics II

2/26: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.1-5, IX.9

2/28: Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ch 18 ("New Relations and Duties")

## **Assignment 3 due Friday 3/1, 5pm**

### Week 8: Spring Break, NO CLASS

3/4 – SPRING BREAK

3/6 – SPRING BREAK

### Week 9: Moral Responsibility and Blame

3/11: Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"

3/13: Fricker, "What is the Point of Blame?"

Week 10: Blame and Forgiveness

3/18: Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme" (excerpt of "Evil and the Limits of Moral Community" & "The roots of evil")

3/20: Cheshire Calhoun, "Changing One's Heart"

Week 11: Forgiveness

3/25: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, "Concepts and Principles," vol 1 ch 5

3/27: NO CLASS – Video lecture for assignment 4 review

**Assignment 4 due Friday, 3/29, 5pm**

Week 12: Justice I

4/1: Plato, *Republic* Book I

4/3: King, Letter from Birmingham Jail

Week 13: Liberty

4/8: Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (excerpt)

4/10: The Black Panther Party Ten-Point Program

Week 14: Equality

4/15: Williams, "The Idea of Equality"

4/17: Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit*, "Conclusion: Merit and the Common Good"

Week 15: Justice II

4/22: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§1-3, 11

4/24: Amazon HQ2 Proposal excerpt

Week 16: Wrap Up & Review

4/29: Closing Lecture

5/1: Closing Discussion

**Assignment 5 due Friday 5/3, 5pm**