

Welcome! ☺ Read the entire syllabus: all that's worth knowing is here and all that's here is worth knowing.
You may not claim ignorance of anything in this syllabus, so read it well and ask if you have questions!

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course surveys some philosophical theories of **what it means to be a good person and live a good life**. Your goal is to acquire a clearer understanding of the individual issues we will discuss and of yourself as a moral and political thinker: knowledge of individual facts is fleeting, but the skills you gain by analyzing them will stick. This course is an indispensable basis for all other courses in moral and political philosophy, but will also make a significant critical contribution to any field of study.

HOW TO DO PHILOSOPHY

The goal of philosophy is the search for wisdom and truth, not harmony. “Agree to disagree” may be a commendable attitude in everyday life, but it is poor scholarship. Here's a recipe for good philosophizing:

1. **Judge all ideas** and arguments that you encounter, including your own, as thoroughly and impartially as you possibly can. Ideas have no feelings that you can hurt, so don't hold back.
2. **Respect all people:** ideas may not deserve respect, but people do. Be kind, inclusive, and give fair hearing to all sides. This is especially true of the philosophers whose arguments we will read: they are professionals and you have a lot to learn from them.

“This argument is flawed because of these reasons...” = GOOD!

“This guy's a terrible person” or “You must be stupid” = BAD!

This balance between an open mind and a critical mind is very difficult to achieve, so try your hardest!

REQUIRED TEXTS

J. Rachels. *Elements of Moral Philosophy, 7th Ed.* McGraw-Hill, 2012. ISBN: 9780078038242.

S. Cahn. *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology, 2nd Ed.* Oxford UP, 2010. ISBN: 9780199757510.

PAPER

2-3 pages, double-spaced; other guidelines will follow. The introduction must include your thesis (what you argue), summarize your main claims, and show how each claim supports your thesis. The rest of the paper discusses each claim in turn, presenting your reasoning and evidence for it. **This format is mandatory.** You may NOT do any research beyond the textbooks readings: I want to read your ideas. Before you write, **you should send me an outline or see me (by appointment).** The sooner the better.

Papers are due at the beginning of class. Late papers will incur a 5% grade deduction for each day they are late. The due date after class time already counts as day one. Late submissions due to extenuating circumstances must be arranged in advance and documented. **Upload your paper to Scholar only: no hard copies.**

Excellent grammar and clear style are expected. Visit the writing center or talk to me if you need help.

QUIZZES

Five, take-home. See schedule. Each quiz is worth up to 10 points and concerns the readings for that week.

WORKSHOP

A 500-word exercise where you summarize two sides of a debate and then present your own argument for which side is better and why. The focus is partially on *what* you say but especially on *how* you say it.

EXAMS

You will take a *midterm* and a *final*. The final is comprehensive of all course material. You may bring one letter-sized "cheat sheet" with whatever you want on it, so long as it is printed on one side and leaves the other blank. No electronic devices. You may not make up a missed exam without prior arrangements.

GRADING

The maximum possible points is **300**, thus distributed:

Paper = 75 Final = 75 Midterm = 75 Quizzes = 50 Workshop = 25 Participation = ≤10 extra

A 279 A- 270 B+ 261 B 249 B- 240 C+ 231 C 219 C- 210 D+ 201 D 189 D- 180

This course is not an "easy A." Past averages have attested around B-. However, I do not curve grades.

GRADE CONTESTATION

If you think you have received an unfair grade on an assignment, please e-mail me a written appeal within 3 days of receiving the graded assignment. In your appeal, explain the specific parts of your assignment that you think I have graded unfairly. Include what you think the proper assessment should be and why. I will then review your appeal and return the re-graded assignment to you within 3 days. If I find that I had been correct the first time, your grade will stay the same. If I find that I had been too strict, I will raise it. And if I find that I had been too lenient, I will lower it. Thus, if you think you have a strong case, then by all means appeal. If not, don't just "give it a shot": you'll waste your time and mine and it might even hurt your grade.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Since several readings are only available electronically, you may use a laptop, Kindle, Nook, Galaxy, iPad, or other electronic reader that is *not* also a cell phone. All uses unrelated to class are forbidden: at any given time I may ask you to show everyone your screen.

ALL OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES MUST REMAIN OFF. NOT ON VIBRATE: OFF. NO EXCEPTIONS.

First infraction = no points for the day. Second infraction = you're dismissed from the course.

ACCOMMODATION

Please see or e-mail me if you need accommodation due to learning disabilities or any other health-related reasons: we will work with you right away. Make sure to bring it up with me no later than **Friday 1/27** and produce all the required documentation.

VIRGINIA TECH HONOR CODE

www.honorsystem.vt.edu I take our honor code very seriously and so should you. Know the ins and outs of your dos and don'ts: plagiarism due to distraction or sloppiness is still plagiarism and may be punished as if it were intentional cheating. ***Suspected violations will be reported to the Undergraduate Honor Court.***

READING SCHEDULE AND DUE DATES

Changes to this schedule are possible. They will be announced in class and via e-mail.

(C) = reading is in Cahn's book

(R) = reading is in Rachels's book

(S) = reading is on Scholar

Introduction

Syllabus review. Introductory lecture.	W 1/18
Rachels: "What is morality?" (R 1-13)	F 1/20
Rachels: "The challenge of cultural relativism" (R 14-31)	M 1/23

MORALITY: theory

Utilitarianism	Rachels: "The utilitarian approach" (R 97-108) Mill: <i>Utilitarianism</i> (C 93-97)	W 1/25
	Pojman: "Strengths and weaknesses of utilitarianism" (C 105-113) Nozick: "The experience machine" (S 42-45)	F 1/27
Deontology	Rachels: "Are there absolute moral rules?" (R 124-135)	M 1/30
	Kant: "The Categorical Imperative" (C 79-88) O'Neill: "A simplified account of Kant's ethics" (C 89-92)	W 2/1
Virtue and care ethics	Rachels: "The ethics of virtue" (R 158-172) Mayo: "Virtue ethics" (C 120-122) QUIZ #1 DUE	F 2/3
	Rachels: "Feminism and the ethics of care" (R 146-157) Held: "The ethics of care" (C 123-128)	M 2/6

MORALITY: practice

Religion and death	Rachels: "Does morality depend on religion?" (R 48-61) Cahn: "God and morality" (C 30-33) <i>recommended</i> Plato: <i>Euthyphro</i> (S 75-93)	W 2/8
	Nagel: "Death" (C 356-365) Q2 DUE	F 2/10
Abortion	Thomson: "A defense of abortion" (C 145-163)	M 2/13
	Marquis: "Why abortion is immoral" (C 182-189)	W 2/15
	Warren: "On the moral and legal status of abortion" (C 164-181) WORKSHOP DUE	F 2/17
	Hursthouse: "Virtue theory and abortion" (C 190-202)	M 2/20
Punishment	Bedau & Kelly: "Punishment" (S 1-12) <i>especially sections 2, 3, 4</i>	W 2/22
	Benatar: "Corporal punishment" (S 13-25)	F 2/24
	Rachels: "Kant and respect for persons" (R 130-140) (<i>death penalty</i>)	M 2/27

Midterm

Workshop analysis and midterm exam review. <i>workshop returned</i>	W 2/29
MIDTERM EXAM. Bring your "cheat sheet." No books, no notes, and no electronic devices.	F 3/2

SPRING BREAK, MARCH 3-11: NO CLASSES THIS WEEK

JUSTICE: theory

Theories of justice	Rachels: "Ethical egoism" (R 62-79) <i>midterm returned</i>	M 3/12
	Rachels: "The social contract theory" (R 80-96)	W 3/14
	Hospers: "What libertarianism is" (S 349-356) Q3 DUE	F 3/16
	Nielsen: "A moral case for socialism" (S 356-364)	M 3/19
	No reading. Attendance is mandatory.	W 3/21
	Rawls: "A theory of justice" (C 137-142) Q4 DUE	F 3/23

Philosophical writing workshop	<i>Pryor: "Guidelines on writing a philosophy paper" (S)</i>	M 3/26
	<i>Grade sample philosophy papers 1-2 and bring them to class (S)</i>	W 3/28
	<i>Grade sample philosophy papers 3-4 and bring them to class (S)</i>	F 3/30

JUSTICE: practice

Terrorism	Walzer: "Terrorism" (C 239-248)	M 4/2
	McPherson: "Is terrorism distinctively wrong?" (C 249-254)	W 4/4
	<i>Bible, Genesis 17:1-27. Qur'an 37: 100-109. Video in class. Q5 DUE</i>	F 4/6
Free speech and protest	Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Letter from a Birmingham jail" (C 379-399)	M 4/9
	Thoreau: "Civil Disobedience" (S 635-659)	W 4/11
	Class discussion: the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements. PAPER DUE	F 4/13
Various issues	Nussbaum: <i>Liberty of Conscience</i> (S)	M 4/16
	D'Amato: "Do children have religious rights?" (S 26-31)	W 4/18
	English: "Led by the child who simply knew" (S 32-41)	F 4/20
	Steorts: "Two views of marriage" (S 42-47) Girgis: "Real marriage" (S 48-56)	M 4/23
	Cassidy: "'Don't Get Raped' vs. 'Don't Rape': an inquiry" (S 57-60)	W 4/25
	2012 election roundup	F 4/27
Conclusion	Taylor: "The meaning of life" (C 366-376) Eagleman: "The Brain on Trial" (S) <i>paper returned</i>	M 4/30

Review and final

The Truth + Final exam review	W 5/2
COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM: 7:45 A.M. Bring "cheat sheet." No books, notes, or devices.	W 5/9