

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 both 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 political and moral philosophy, but will also make a significant critical contribution to any field of study.

Remember that the goal of philosophy is the search for wisdom and truth, not harmony. It requires that you attack or defend the ideas of other people, so you must take a critical stance toward our readings and discussion alike. "Agreeing to disagree" may be commendable in life but is rather poor scholarship. At the same time, you must respect the arguments of others, especially those of our authors: they know more than you do and you have a lot to learn. 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, 6th Edition*. McGraw-Hill. ISBN: 9780073386713.
S. Cahn. *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology, 2nd Edition*. Oxford UP. 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.

Upload the paper to Scholar or hand in a hard copy. 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 counts as day one. Late submissions due to extenuating circumstances must be arranged in advance and documented.

"Good content + bad writing = bad grade." Excellent grammar and clear style are expected. Visit the writing center or talk to me if you need help.

WRITING WORKSHOPS (WW)

These are short writing exercises that will help you recognize good and bad philosophical writing and write better yourself, which will be useful for your paper. The focus is not on what you say, but in how you say it.

We will do three workshops: (1) summarize a reading in three short paragraphs; (2) pick a side in a debate and defend it; (3) grade an old paper from this course. For the first two workshops you will practice with an ungraded exercise and receive feedback, and then you will do a graded exercise one or two weeks later. The third workshop is only ungraded. I will also post optional extra exercises on Scholar for your use.

EXAMS

You will take a **midterm** and a **final**, both in class. Each exam includes fill-in-the-blank, short-answer, and essay questions. Both exams are open-book and must be written on blue books. The final is comprehensive. No electronic devices are allowed. You may not make up a missed exam without prior arrangements.

QUIZZES

Eleven, unannounced, in class. Each quiz is worth up to 3 points and concerns the reading due that day. At the end of the course I will drop your lowest score. If you took fewer than ten, no scores will be dropped.

GRADING

The maximum possible points is 300, thus distributed:

Paper = **100** Final = **80** Midterm = **60** Workshops = **30** Quizzes = **30**

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

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance is taken daily. Absences **1-5**: allowed even if unexcused. **6-15**: each -3 points, unless excused. **16**: you're dropped from the course.

Significant and assiduous participation is worth up to 15 extra-credit points.

To excuse absences, bring: (1) a physician's note with contact information; or (2) a letter by the supervisor of a VT-endorsed extra-curricular activity. Missed class work can be made up if the absence is excused.

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.

Appealing the grade means to "re-open the case": you are not punished just for having appealed, but you're also not warranted any benefits. 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, spare yourself the time and the risk.

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.

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 9/2**.

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. All violations will be reported to the Undergraduate Honor Court.

READING SCHEDULE AND DUE DATES

(R) = reading is from Rachels' book. **(C)** = from Cahn. **(S)** = on Scholar.

Introduction

Syllabus review. Introductory lecture.	M 8/22
Rachels: "What is morality?" (R 1-13)	W 8/24
Rachels: "The challenge of cultural relativism" (R 14-31) WW #1a in class	F 8/26

Moral philosophy: theory

Utilitarianism	Rachels: "The utilitarian approach" (R 97-108)	M 8/29
	Mill: <i>Utilitarianism</i> (C 93-104)	W 8/31
	Nozick: "The Experience Machine" (S)	F 9/2
Deontology	Rachels: "Are there absolute moral rules?" (R 124-135)	M 9/5
	O'Neill: "A simplified account of Kant's ethics" (C 89-92)	W 9/7
	Kant: "The Categorical Imperative" (C 79-88) WW #1b (graded)	F 9/9
Virtue ethics	Rachels: "The ethics of virtue" (R 158-172)	M 9/12
	Aristotle: "The nature of virtue" (C 114-119)	W 9/14
	Mayo: "Virtue ethics" (C 120-122)	F 9/16

Moral philosophy: practice

Death and euthanasia	Nagel: "Death" (C 356-365)	M 9/19
	Rachels: "Active and passive euthanasia" (C 203-209)	W 9/21
	Sullivan: "Active and passive euthanasia: a reply to Rachels" (C 210-217)	F 9/23
Abortion	Thomson: "A defense of abortion" (C 145-163)	M 9/26
	Marquis: "Why abortion is immoral" (C 182-189)	W 9/28
	Warren: "The moral/legal status of abortion" (C 164-181) WW #2 (graded)	F 9/30
Marriage equality	Steorts: "Two views of marriage" (S)	M 10/3
	Girgis: "Real marriage" (S)	W 10/5
	FALL BREAK: NO CLASS.	F 10/7

Political philosophy: theory

Social contract	Rachels: "The idea of a social contract" (R 80-96)	M 10/10
	Rawls: <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (C 137-142)	W 10/12
	MIDTERM EXAM. Bring your readings and notes.	F 10/14

Socialism and libertarianism	Rachels: "Ethical egoism" (R 62-79)	M 10/17
	Hospers: "What libertarianism is" (S)	W 10/19
	Nielsen: "A moral case for socialism" (S)	F 10/21
Ethics and religion	Rachels: "Does morality depend on religion?" (R 48-61) <i>Graded midterm returned.</i>	M 10/24
	Cahn: "God and morality" (C 30-33)	W 10/26
	Plato: <i>Euthyphro</i> (S)	
	No reading. WW #3 IN-CLASS	F 10/28

Political philosophy: practice

Famine relief	Singer: "Famine, affluence, and morality" (C 218-231) <i>Paper topics assigned.</i>	M 10/31
	Hardin: "Lifeboat ethics: the case against helping the poor" (S)	W 11/2
	O'Neill: "Rights, obligations, and world hunger" (S)	F 11/4
Nationality & immigration	MacIntyre: "Is patriotism a virtue?" (S)	M 11/7
	Walzer: "The distribution of membership" (S)	W 11/9
	Carens: "Aliens and citizens: the case for open borders" (S)	F 11/11
Terrorism	Walzer: "Terrorism" (C 239-247)	M 11/14
	McPherson: "Is terrorism distinctively wrong?" (C 248-253)	W 11/16
	<i>The Bible</i> , Genesis 17:1-27 and 21:1-21. <i>The Qur'an</i> 37: 100-109. PAPER DUE	F 11/18

THANKSGIVING BREAK, NOVEMBER 19-27: NO CLASSES THIS WEEK

Feminist and care ethics	Rachels: "Feminism and the ethics of care" (R 146-157)	M 11/28
	Held: "The ethics of care" (C 123-128)	W 11/30
	Merrill: "That only a mother" (S)	F 12/2
Conclusion	Rorty: "Who are we?" (S) Nietzsche: <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (S) <i>Graded paper returned.</i>	M 12/5

Review and final

The Truth! + Final exam review.	W 12/7
COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM: 4:25 P.M. Bring blue books and your readings/notes.	W 12/14