

# PHIL 2304: GLOBAL ETHICS

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Fall 2015, M-W 4-5:15, MCB 329

office: Major Williams 210 – hours: MW after class

## OVERVIEW AND GOALS

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“How can I behave justly in a globalized, multicultural world where so many people disagree with me?”  
“How do my moral and political beliefs affect the lives and deaths of distant strangers?”

This course discusses these and other questions that matter (or *should* matter) in the everyday life of 21<sup>st</sup>-century global citizens like you and me. At the end of PHIL 2304 you will:

- Learn ethical and political theories from the Anglo-American, European, and East-Asian traditions and refine your grasp of the concepts of morality, rights, duties, freedom, power, and oppression.
- Be able to interpret ideas and events through the lens of moral philosophy, including social media, news, books, music, movies, TV shows, and documentaries.
- Understand how historical power relations—especially concerning race, sex, and economic class—still determine many moral and ethical features of contemporary public life.
- Develop analytical skills that will be useful later in your studies or in the workplace.
- Fulfill the Area 2 or Area 7 requirements in VT’s Curriculum for Liberal Education.

## CLASS FORMAT

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The material includes: (1) short daily readings, (2) weekly movies, and (3) two books.

- (1) Readings are typically 4-5 pages long, though some are longer. Each class period I will call on a few students to summarize the readings. It is okay if you do not understand everything: explain the gist and we will take it from there. **Failure to be prepared when called upon affects your participation grade.**
- (2) Movies can be watched in three ways: rent at Newman Library, stream online (see links on the schedule page), or attend the screenings. **I will screen the weekly movie each Friday at 5 p.m. in Durham 261.** These screenings are *not* public: in compliance with US Code §1-110, only students enrolled in this class may attend.
- (3) Books will be due at two separate times of the term. Each is about 200 pages. Both are easy reads.
  - *Things Fall Apart* – Chinua Achebe – ISBN: 9780385474542. Finish by October 19<sup>th</sup>.
  - *Cosmopolitanism* – Kwame A. Appiah – ISBN: 9780393329339. Finish by December 7<sup>th</sup>.

All readings, movies, and class discussions are included in all assignments: **everything is always “on the test.”**

## POLICIES

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Please follow these simple rules at all times while enrolled in this course:

- I do not take attendance. Philosophy is hard and your participation grade is big, so you *want* to be in class.
- Participation is graded subjectively. The more you talk, the better I know your ideas and remember you.
- Arriving more than 10 minutes late is rude. If I am over 10 minutes late, you may leave with no penalty.
- Late assignments incur a 10% penalty for each day, unless I have granted an extension well in advance.
- Extensions, grade disputes, and requests for incomplete grades will be judged on a case-by-case basis.
- E-mail is my preferred method of communication. I reply within 48 hours. If I do not, e-mail me again.
- **The First Rule of Good Discussion: “Keep an open mind, but not so open that your brain falls out.”**

## HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS COURSE

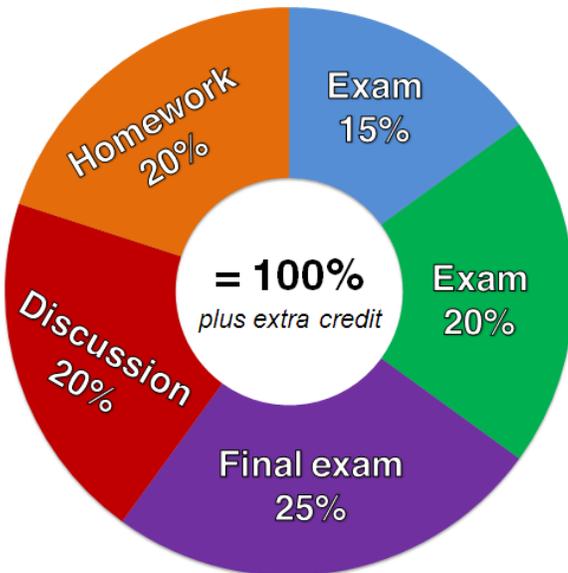
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**DIFFICULTY.** Philosophy is a tough subject and this is a hard class. **I demand a high level of engagement and comprehension**, so skimming, guessing, ballparking, and general BS are insufficient. This is why it is important to do the readings, and then use in-class lecture and discussion to *refine* your understanding and ask for clarification as needed. **You are not penalized for not understanding a reading, but you are for not completing it.**

**PARTICIPATION.** Discussion relates the readings to one another, to the movies, and to yourself. There are many ways to participate: ask questions, answer questions, defend opinions, criticize others, etc. At any time you may ask how you are doing participation-wise. **On 10/23 I will enter a partial participation grade** that will not count toward the final course grade: use it as an indicator of your participation thus far (e.g., “C” means “speak up a lot more!”).

**STAGE FRIGHT.** I know that some people hate public speaking. If that is you, you may participate online by posting to the Scholar Forums. However, online posts are not a complete substitute for in-class discussion, and you must still speak up in class to earn full participation credit. Talk to me if you want suggestions on how to overcome shyness and anxiety! I have been there, I understand, and I can help.

## ASSIGNMENTS



<b>EXTRA CREDIT</b>	syllabus quiz, on Scholar	<b>+3%</b>
<b>FIRST EXAM</b>	take-home, on Scholar	<b>15%</b>
<b>SECOND EXAM</b>	take-home, on Scholar	<b>20%</b>
<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	in class: you may use a cheat sheet	<b>25%</b>
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	regular attendance, active listening, and consistently good contributions	<b>20%</b>
<b>HOMEWORK</b>	pick <u>ONE</u> option: due Nov 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>20%</b>

- (1) bullet-point summaries of 15 readings: about ½ to 1 page each
- (2) critical review of one book: about 2,000 words or 8-12 pages
- (3) reviews of each movie: written (1 page) or filmed (2 minutes)
- (4) in-depth reviews of two optional movies from the list at the end of the syllabus: written (5 pages each) or filmed (10 mins)
- (5) suggest a personal or group project by November 1<sup>st</sup>, subject to my approval: blog, short film, art, community engagement, etc.

## GRADES

- A = exceptional**, above and beyond the requirements: this grade is reserved only for top students and is **very rare**
- B = standard**, meeting all requirements satisfactorily but not exceptionally: this grade is the **most common**
- C = substandard**, meeting some requirements but not others: this grade is for passable to mediocre work
- D = unsatisfactory**, meeting few requirements, and poorly: this grade is for those who do all-around badly
- F = failure** to meet most or all requirements: I have never failed anyone in this class so far.

Typically, my classes average a “B” at the end, with most students scoring 80-89%. However, I do not curve grades.

If you have issues with a grade, e-mail me. Say what you think the right grade should have been and why, including specific examples that you think I have under-evaluated. You will receive a response in up to three days’ time.

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

**ACCOMMODATION** By the end of the first week, please inform me of your health concerns or documented physical, mental, or learning disabilities, so that we may work together to help you succeed according to your abilities.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY** You are bound at all times by the Honor System Constitution ([honorsystem.vt.edu](http://honorsystem.vt.edu)). I take this very seriously and I assume you do too. Cheating is unfair to yourself and a scam on others, so please be honest with yourself, your classmates, and me. Suspected violations will be reported to the Honor Court and pursued.

**COMMUNITY** By working together, you and I agree to abide by the Virginia Tech Principles of Community. Please read the Principles here: <http://www.diversity.vt.edu/principles-of-community/principles.html>

## READING SCHEDULE AND DUE DATES

Click on [online](#)  readings. The rest are on Scholar. This schedule is also available as a calendar for VT Google Apps.

	READ THESE ARTICLES	WATCH THESE MOVIES	
Weeks 1-2 <b>MORALITY &amp; JUSTICE</b>	D'Amato: "Basics of morality and justice"	<i>The Hunger Games</i>	M 8/24
	Kessock: "What would Katniss do?"  + videos 1, 2, 3	   optional	W 8/26
	Rawls: <i>A Theory of Justice</i> + card game in class	<i>V for Vendetta (warning)</i>	M 8/31
	no reading	   + F 9/4, 5pm	W 9/2
<i>Syllabus Test</i>	Find under "Tests & Quizzes" on Scholar. Due by 5:00 p.m. Extra credit.		F 9/4
Weeks 3-4 <b>ECONOMIC FREEDOM</b>	NO CLASS. LABOR DAY.		M 9/7
	Griswold: "Trading tyranny for freedom"		W 9/9
	Herman: "Free trade" + videos 1, 2  (explicit)	<i>Inside Job</i>	M 9/14
	Quiggin: "The golden age"  Lee: "Finnish babies" 	   + F 9/11, 5pm	W 9/16
<i>First Exam</i>	Find under "Tests & Quizzes" on Scholar. Due by 5:00 p.m.		F 9/18
Weeks 5-6 <b>GLOBAL POVERTY</b>	Wearden: "85 people as wealthy as half the world" 		M 9/21
	Nike Sweatshops: Behind the Swoosh  (watch video)		W 9/23
	Slavery Footprint  (complete the survey)	<i>The End of Poverty?</i>  + F 9/18, 5pm	M 9/28
	Nsabimana: "#TheBullshitFiles"  Kapoor: "Celebrity humanitarianism"  + video 		W 9/30
Weeks 7-9 <b>RACISM &amp; IMPERIALISM</b>	NO CLASS. READ AHEAD.		M 10/5
	Young: "Talking about race"  The Racial Dot Map 		W 10/7
	Mills: <i>The Racial Contract</i> + videos 1, 2 		
	Newitz: "White people and movies like <i>Avatar</i> " 	<i>Avatar</i>	M 10/12
	Cole: "The white-savior industrial complex" 	   + F 10/9, 5pm	W 10/14
	Achebe: <i>Things Fall Apart</i> (finish book)	<i>Apocalypto (warning)</i>	M 10/19
Achebe: <i>Things Fall Apart</i> (finish book)	  + F 10/16, 5pm	W 10/21	
<i>Second exam</i>	Find under "Tests & Quizzes" on Scholar. Due by 5:00 p.m.		F 10/23
Weeks 10-11 <b>CLIMATE CHANGE</b>	Broome: "The ethics of climate change"		M 10/26
	Schmidt & Mann: "Convenient untruths" 	<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i>	W 10/28
	Shue: "Subsistence emissions and luxury emissions"	   + F 10/23, 5pm	M 11/2
	Zeitgeist: Addendum  (video: from 65:48 to 92:40)		W 11/4
Weeks 12-13 <b>WAR AND VIOLENCE</b>	Shah: "The arms trade is big business" 	<i>Lord of War</i>	M 11/9
	Rosenberg: "The fears of fearless white men" 	   + F 11/6, 5pm	W 11/11
	Levinson: "Mad, bad, sad" 	<i>The Thin Red Line (warning)</i>	M 11/16
	"Soldiers at war"  "Fight or flight" 	   + F 11/13, 5pm	W 11/18
<i>Homework</i>	Find under "Assignments" on Scholar. Due by 5:00 p.m.		F 11/20

**WEEK 14: THANKSGIVING BREAK — NOVEMBER 21-29**

Weeks 15-16 <b>LIBERTY &amp; COMMUNITY</b>	<b>Appiah:</b> <i>Cosmopolitanism</i> (finish book)	M 11/30
	<b>Appiah:</b> <i>Cosmopolitanism</i> (finish book)	W 12/2
	<b>Walzer:</b> “Moral minimalism”	M 12/7
	<b>Rorty:</b> “Who are we?” <b>Le Guin:</b> “The ones who walk away from Omelas”	W 12/9
<i>Final exam</i>	<b>Bring pen and cheat sheet. Meet in our usual classroom. 1:05-3:05 p.m.</b>	F 12/11

**RELATED LINKS**

**General**

- [Why study philosophy?](#)
- [How to e-mail a professor](#)
- [My website](#) (general resources for PHIL 2304 and others)

**Race, racism, and racial perception**

- Jamie Utt: “[Are whites disadvantaged by affirmative action?](#)”
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr.: “[Tarantino Unchained: white saviors](#)”
- [Photos challenge the way we see race](#)
- [Challenging the one-drop rule](#) (same topic)
- [World of Averages](#) (for a condensed version, see [here](#))
- [Gurl Goes to Africa](#) (why “voluntourism” is racist)

**Wealth, inequality, and development**

- Simon Kuper: “[Apartheid, just less black and white](#)”
- Nigel Warburton: “[Cosmopolitans](#)”
- Malala Yousafzai: “[I have the right](#)”

**Data, statistics, and media**

- [Gapminder World](#) (a great social sciences tool)
- [The world as 100 people](#) (basic statistics)
- [The world of 100](#) (a different data set)
- [Follow the Money](#) (who bribes your favorite politician?)
- [10x10](#) (news trends in pictures)
- [Worldometers](#) (real-time global statistics)

**Culture and cultural appropriation**

- [40 maps that will help you make sense of the world](#)
- [Public Shaming: tweets of privilege](#)
- [How powerful is your passport?](#)
- Nina Paley: “[This Land Is Mine](#)” (music video)
- Gayle Sulik: “[Pink ribbon blues: how breast cancer culture undermines women’s health](#)”
- George Monbiot: “[US mass child killings are tragedies. In Pakistan, mere bug splats](#)”
- Stella Young: “[I’m not your inspiration, thank you very much](#)”
- George Simons: “[World maps and intercultural debate](#)”
- Nick Danforth: “[How the north ended up on top of the map](#)”
- Sara Frykenberg: “[‘Abraham’s Daughter’ by Arcade Fire](#)”

**Films of philosophical interest**

- 1927 *Metropolis*
- 1940 *The Great Dictator*
- 1964 *Dr. Strangelove*
- 1968 *2001: A Space Odyssey*
- 1978 *The China Syndrome*
- 1979 *Apocalypse Now*
- 1982 *Gandhi*
- 1982 *Blade Runner*
- 1984 *Dune*
- 1984 *2010: The Year We Make Contact*
- 1988 *Grave of the Fireflies*
- 1997 *Contact*
- 1998 *The Truman Show*
- 1999 *Snow Falling on Cedars*
- 1999 *The Matrix* trilogy
- 2004 *Primer*
- 2004 *Hotel Rwanda*
- 2004 *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless...*
- 2005 *The New World*
- 2006 *The Fountain*
- 2006 *The Last King of Scotland*
- 2009 *District 9*
- 2011 *The Tree of Life*
- 2012 *Inception*
- 2014 *Boyhood*
- 2014 *Interstellar*