

Morality and Justice (PHIL 1304)

Professor: Karen Kovaka

Fall 2020

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Office Hours: Tues 3:30-5:30pm

Office: Major Williams 220

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Class Hours: M/W asynch; F synch

Classroom: N/A, online

Course Description

This class will introduce you to a selection of personal and political ethical questions. For example: What makes an action right or wrong? Should we be allowed to sell parts of our bodies? Do corporations have an unjust amount of power? As you study these questions, you will learn how to analyze philosophical arguments, and even practice subjecting your own views to philosophical scrutiny. You will leave this class with a set of tools for engaging with the questions of morality and justice that we all encounter throughout our lives.

Course Structure

This is an online course. The content for Mondays and Wednesdays will be asynchronous (not live), meaning you will work through it on your own. On Fridays, however, you will meet on Zoom for live discussions in small groups (sections) of 25 students and one Graduate Teaching Assistant. To find out what time your Friday section meets, check your course schedule in HokieSpa. Together, the asynchronous and synchronous course content forms 5 layers. Engaging with these 5 layers makes up your coursework each week.

- Layer 1: Reading the texts.
- Layer 2: Watching my pre-recorded mini-lectures on the texts and reviewing my detailed notes on the texts.
- Layer 3: Completing a quiz on the texts and lectures.
- Layer 4: Actively participating in your Zoom discussion section each Friday.
- Layer 5: Keeping an intellectual journal about what you are learning.

You will complete Layers 1-3 before your Friday meetings. You have until Friday afternoon each week to complete Layer 5.

Graduate Teaching Assistants

The teaching team for this class is made up of me, the professor, and 3 graduate teaching assistants, or GTAs. GTAs will lead your Friday discussion sections and grade your homework assignments and exams. They will also hold virtual office hours, and they are available to answer questions and discuss course content with you.

GTA contact information and office hours:

- Casey Anne Brimmer: cabrimmer19@vt.edu. Office hours: Tuesdays 2-4p
- Kordell Dixon: kordell@vt.edu. Office hours: Mondays 3-5p
- Andrea Johnson: andreamjohnson@vt.edu. Office hours: Wednesdays 9-11a

Evaluation

1. Goal-setting and self-evaluation: 5%
2. Weekly quizzes: 15%
3. Weekly journal entry: 15%
4. Discussion section attendance & participation: 15%
5. Midterm exam: 25%
6. Final exam: 25%

Goal-setting and Self-evaluation

This is going to be a weird semester. But it can still be a good one! In order for you to get the most out of this class, I want you to set goals for yourself at the start. These goals can be anything you want, from getting an A to improving your study habits to getting out of bed in time for your Friday discussion section. Whatever the goals, I want you to identify them at the start of the semester so you can be more in control of your own success, whatever the rest of the year brings. Once you set these goals, I'll ask you to evaluate how you think you're doing during and at the end of the semester.

Quizzes

You will complete weekly multiple choice quizzes through Canvas. These quizzes are due each Thursday evening by 5pm, and they will be available the Sunday before they are due. They will cover both the assigned reading for the week and my pre-recorded mini-lectures on those readings. Quizzes are open book, and they are only meant to check your comprehension of the material, not to trick you. Late quizzes will receive no credit. At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest quiz score when calculating your final grade. There will be 13 quizzes total, and the first one is due on Thurs. 9/3 (the second week of class).

Journal

Every Friday by 5pm, you will complete and submit a journal entry via our Canvas site. By the end of the semester, you'll have a record of which ideas you found interesting, challenging, tedious, or incomprehensible, as well as a sense of how your own views about morality and justice have developed over time. I will provide open-ended prompts to guide you, and I'm looking for about one page per week. You are, of course, welcome to add as much additional content as you like. Your GTAs will grade the journal entries based on completion.

Discussion Sections

You are required to attend and participate in weekly discussion sections via Zoom. Come to these sessions prepared to ask questions, listen to what others have to say, and engage in conversation with the group. Your GTA will assign your grade for this portion of the course.

Casey Anne Brimmer's Discussion Sections:

- CRN 89002: Friday 9:05-9:55a, meeting link and log-in on Canvas
- CRN 89009: Friday 10:10-11a, meeting link and log-in on Canvas
- CRN 89008: Friday 12:20-1:10p, meeting link and log-in on Canvas

Kordell Dixon's Discussion Sections:

- CRN 89006: Friday 9:05-9:55a, meeting link and log-in on Canvas
- CRN 92279: Friday 10:10-11a, meeting link and log-in on Canvas
- CRN 89001: Friday 2:30-3:20p, meeting link and log-in on Canvas

Andrea Johnson's Discussion Sections:

- CRN 92281: Friday 9:05-9:55a, meeting link and log-in on Canvas
- CRN 89007: Friday 12:20-1:10p, meeting link and log-in on Canvas
- CRN 92280: Friday 2:30-3:20p, meeting link and log-in on Canvas

Exams

Both the mid-term and final will be take-home exams. I will make them available to you 1 week before they are due. The mid-term will be a short-answer style exam. It will be assigned on 10/8 and due on 10/15. The final exam format is still to be determined. It will be assigned on 12/4 and due on 12/11.

Fine Print

- **Attendance:** I expect you to come to every single live discussion section (Fridays) except when illness or other personal circumstances prevent you. Your camera should be on for the entire class session, and you should be prepared to contribute to the discussion by sharing your own thoughts, answering my questions, and responding to your classmates' observations. Your GTA will keep track of attendance each week and forgive 2 absences with no questions asked. After 2 absences, your GTA will deduct points from your final grade for each additional absence. If your circumstances require you to miss more than 2 classes, you and I need to speak in person about alternative ways for you to participate in the course.
- **Accessibility:** We all learn differently, and I am committed to making this course accessible to everyone. Please come talk to me if some aspect of the course isn't working for you: we can collaborate on alternatives that suit your needs, interests, and learning style. If you have a disability (or think you might), it's also a good idea to contact [Services for Students with Disabilities](#).
- **Technology:** Our phones, tablets, and laptops are crucial tools for online learning, yet they can also distract us during a live class. I want to free you from these distractions as much as possible. For that reason, I am providing notes on all the texts I ask you to read, which means you do not have to take notes when you listen to pre-recorded mini-lectures or during live discussion sections. In return, I ask that during your 50 minutes of live time each week, you do not check your email, message people, or use the Internet for anything that isn't course-related.
- **Academic integrity:** I take academic integrity very seriously. It's important that all the assignments you complete are your own work and that you know how to credit and cite sources appropriately. If you have any questions about my expectations for a particular assignment, be sure to talk to me!

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/>.

- **Changes to the syllabus:** I may adjust the course readings and schedule as the semester goes along. It is your responsibility to pay attention to Canvas and your email so that you are aware of any changes.

Texts

There are no required books for this course. All of the texts I assign are available on our Canvas site.

Reading Schedule

1 Getting Philosophical

Date	Content
Week 1 8/24 & 8/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: What Moral Philosophy Is • Reading: Mortimer Alder (1940), "How to read philosophy"
Week 2 8/31 & 9/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Philosophical Arguments • Reading: Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Robert Fogelin (2015), <i>Understanding Arguments</i>, ch 1, 3

2 Major Ethical Theories

Date	Content
Week 3 9/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Consequentialism • Reading: John Stuart Mill (1861), <i>Utilitarianism</i>, ch 2
Week 4 9/14 & 9/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Consequentialism • Reading: Peter Singer (1972), "Famine, affluence and morality" • Reading: Mozi on impartial caring, pp. 63-72 in <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i>, edited by Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden
Week 5 9/21 & 9/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Deontology • Reading: Immanuel Kant (1785), <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>, ch 2 • Reading: Onora O'Neill (1985), "A simplified account of Kant's ethics"
Week 6 9/28 & 9/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Deontology • Reading: Rae Langton (1992), "Duty and desolation"
Week 7 10/5 & 10/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Virtue Ethics • Reading: Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>, selections
Week 8 10/12 & 10/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Virtue Ethics • Konzi (Confucius), <i>Analects</i>, pp. 3-50 in <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i>, edited by Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden
Week 9 10/19 & 10/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Relativism • Reading: James Rachels (2003), "The challenge of cultural relativism"

3 Crime and Punishment

Date	Content
Week 10 10/26 & 10/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Retributivism • Reading: Herbert Morris (1968), "Persons and punishment" • Reading: Russ Shafer-Landau (1996), "The failure of retributivism"
Week 11 11/2 & 11/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Deterrence • Reading: Jeremy Bentham (1789), <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i>, ch 13 • Reading: Igor Primoratz (1989), <i>Justifying Legal Punishment</i>, ch 3
Week 12 11/9 & 11/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Reform • Reading: Jean Hampton (1984), "The moral education theory of punishment" • Reading: Russ Shafer-Landau (1991), "Can punishment morally educate?"
Week 13 11/16 & 11/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Prison Abolition • Reading: Angela Davis (2003), <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i>, selections
Week 14 11/30 & 12/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Police Abolition • Reading: Alex Vitale (2017), <i>The End of Policing</i>, selections

4 Choose Your Own...

Date	Content
Week 15 12/7 & 12/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: TBD • Reading: TBD