

PHIL 2304: GLOBAL ETHICS

M-W 5:30-6:45, SAUND 409

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office: Major Williams 210 – Spring 2015 hours: by app.t

OVERVIEW AND GOALS

The goal of this class is to discuss problems that matter in the everyday life of 21st-century global citizens, including oppression, racism, sexism, justice, development, imperialism, hunger, wealth, and human rights.

At the end of PHIL 2304 you will:

- Learn which moral theories and political ideologies are most preeminent in Western philosophical thought.
- Refine your conceptual grasp of the ideas of rights, duties, deserts, freedom, power, and sovereignty.
- Be able to decipher everyday public life and the media through the lenses of moral philosophy, including the internet, the news, books, movies, TV shows, and documentaries.
- Understand how historical power relations—especially concerning race, sex, and class—still determine the power structures 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 requirement in VT's Curriculum for Liberal Education.

CLASS FORMAT

About half of our class periods are entirely dedicated to watching movies. The classroom is ideally set up for a cinematic environment and you are expected to comport yourselves accordingly. **Read the movie etiquette below!**

When we are not watching movies, we are talking about them. Typically, we will spend one week watching a movie and the following week discussing it and relating it to the readings.

The reading load averages 10-15 pages per period. Readings accumulate quickly and several periods may pass before we discuss them. You are responsible to keep up with the readings and be ready to discuss them at any time.

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

MOVIE ETIQUETTE

Please follow these basic civility rules when watching movies in class:

- As in theaters, no electronic devices are allowed during the movie! **Print the movie notes from Scholar.**
- Laptops and tablets are allowed on discussion days, but any use unrelated to class is forbidden.
- Food and drinks are allowed, but leave the room clean because there is another movie class after us.
- **Please leave the entire last row empty**, as we may have guests who will sit there (as will I).

HOW TO PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY

Each discussion day I call on a few students to briefly summarize the readings. You don't have to have understood everything in the text: rather, I would like you to share your understanding of it, including your doubts.

Class discussion will relate the movies, the readings, and your personal views and experiences. Ask questions, offer opinions, be ready to defend your position, and don't take it personally when people disagree with you.

I understand that some students are shy and dislike public speaking. If this is you, you may participate electronically by posting on the Scholar forums, which will contain discussion prompts related to movies and readings.

However, **debating ideas in person is an essential part of philosophical practice.** Electronic participation only goes so far: you need to speak up in class to make the best of your experience and earn a good grade.

BOOKS

In addition to the weekly readings, we will also read three books. Each is about \$10:

1. *Things Fall Apart* – Chinua Achebe – ISBN: 9780385474542
2. *The Wretched of the Earth* – Frantz Fanon – ISBN: 9780802141323
3. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* – Kwame A. Appiah – ISBN: 9780393329339

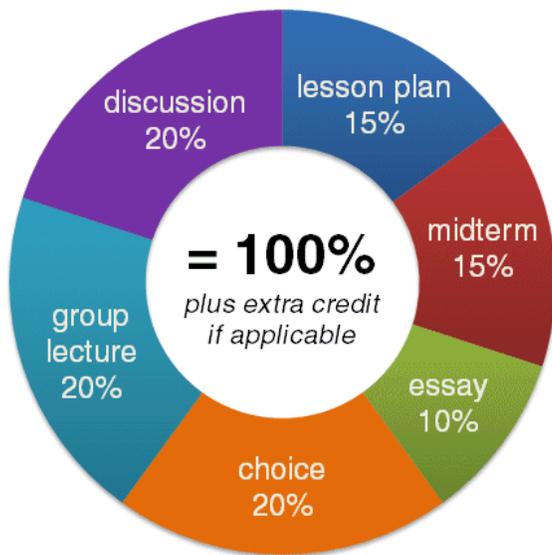
I will not lecture on these books—you will. On set dates in March and April (see next page), you will prepare a lesson plan in small groups, deliver a 15-minute lecture on a few book chapters, and lead class discussion for the day.

POLICIES

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

- Respect the movie etiquette on the previous page. Use common sense and do not bother yourself or others.
- Arriving more than 15 minutes late is considered rude. If I am more than 15 minutes late, you may leave.
- 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.
- 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.”**

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES



DISCUSSION – Regular attendance, active listening, and good contribution. Be here, be engaged, and participate. **20%**

GROUP LECTURE – 8 groups of 4-5 students. Lecture on one of the books. Maximum 15 minutes per lecture. **20%**

LESSON PLAN – Outline and rationale for group lectures. **15%**
Each member must turn in her or his plan individually.

MIDTERM – In class. You may use your books and notes. **15%**

ESSAY – Two-page written reflection on a given prompt. **10%**

CHOICE HOMEWORK – Pick *one* option and commit to it **20%**
by April 1st. The homework itself is due by May 10th.

- bullet-point summaries of 10 readings (about ½-page each)
- 250-word written or 2-minute filmed reviews of each movie
- 1000-word/10-minute reviews of two recommended movies
- suggest personal or group project (subject to prior approval)

Grades are not curved: if everyone gets an A, all the better.

Past grade averages for this course have been around B.

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). 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 partaking in this class you and I both 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

Readings are online  or uploaded to Scholar. This schedule is also available as a Google calendar for your VT Apps.

| | TO DO BEFORE CLASS | TO DO IN CLASS | |
|---|--|--------------------------------|--------|
| Weeks 1-3: <i>Freedom and fairness</i> | D'Amato: "Basics of moral philosophy" | <i>The Hunger Games</i> | M 1/26 |
| | Watch videos 1 , 2 , 3  | <i>The Hunger Games</i> | W 1/28 |
| | Kessock: " What Would Katniss Do? "  | discussion | M 2/2 |
| | Rawls: <i>A Theory of Justice</i> | discussion | W 2/4 |
| Weeks 4-7: <i>Development, responsibility, and poverty</i> | Wearden: " 85 people as wealthy as half the world "  Singer: "Famine, affluence, and morality" | <i>The End of Poverty? (1)</i> | M 2/9 |
| | Arthur: "World hunger and moral obligation" O'Neill: "Lifeboat Earth" (pp. 273-280; rest optional) | discussion | W 2/11 |
| | Miller: "Distributing responsibilities" | discussion | M 2/16 |
| | Nagel: "Poverty and food: why charity is not enough" | discussion | W 2/18 |
| | Pogge: "'Assisting' the global poor" esp. § 2,3,4,5 | <i>The End of Poverty? (2)</i> | M 2/23 |
| | Griswold, Herman, Marcos + vids 1 , 2 , 3  (explicit) | discussion | W 2/25 |
| | Kapoor: "Celebrity humanitarianism"  + video  Nsabimana: " #BullshitFiles: Christina Aguilera "  | discussion | M 3/2 |
| <i>Midterm</i> | You may use your notes. No electronic devices. Write in pen on the exam sheet. | | W 3/4 |

SPRING BREAK, MARCH 7-15 WATCH MOVIE AT HOME — AVATAR (2009)

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|--|--|-------------------------------------|--------|
| Weeks 9-11: <i>Imperialism, globalization, & oppression</i> | Newitz: " When will . . . movies like Avatar? "  | <i>Apocalypto</i> | M 3/16 |
| | Cole: " The white-savior industrial complex "  | <i>Apocalypto</i> | W 3/18 |
| | Said: <i>Orientalism</i> | discussion | M 3/23 |
| | Mills: <i>The Racial Contract</i> + videos 1 , 2  | discussion | W 3/25 |
| | Achebe: <i>Things Fall Apart</i> | groups 1 and 2 + lesson plan | M 3/30 |
| | Fanon: <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (through p. 248) | groups 3 and 4 + lesson plan | W 4/1 |
| <i>Commitment</i> | Submit your Choice Homework commitment on Scholar under "Assignments." | | W 4/1 |
| Weeks 12-13: <i>Climate change</i> | Broome: "The ethics of climate change" | <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> | M 4/6 |
| | Shue: "Subsistence emissions and luxury emissions" | discussion | W 4/8 |
| | Gardiner: "The real tragedy of the commons" | discussion | M 4/13 |
| Virginia Tech <i>Remembrance</i> | Collegiate Times, Letters to the Editor, 4/16/2007 | discussion | W 4/15 |
| | Essay due by 5:00 p.m. on Scholar under "Assignments." | | F 4/17 |
| Weeks 14-16: <i>Global society and its critics</i> | Held: "Principles of cosmopolitan order" | discussion | M 4/20 |
| | Sandel: "The procedural republic" | discussion | W 4/22 |
| | Walzer: <i>Thick and Thin</i> | discussion | M 4/27 |
| | Barber: " Jihad vs. McWorld "  | <i>Zeitgeist: Addendum</i> | W 4/29 |
| | Appiah: <i>Cosmopolitanism</i> | groups 5 and 6 + lesson plan | M 5/4 |
| | Appiah: <i>Cosmopolitanism</i> | groups 7 and 8 + lesson plan | W 5/6 |
| <i>Final</i> | Group conversation. Replaces a final exam. Attendance is mandatory. 7:00-9:00 p.m. READ THIS STORY BEFORE CLASS: "The ones who walk away from Omelas" | | F 5/8 |
| <i>Choice</i> | Choice Homework due by 5:00 p.m. on Scholar under "Assignments." | | S 5/10 |

RELATED LINKS

General

- [Why study philosophy?](#)
- [How to e-mail a professor](#)
- [A sample philosophy paper](#) (interactive presentation)

Culture and cultural imperialism

- 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](#)”
- [40 maps that will help you make sense of the world](#)
- [Public Shaming: tweets of privilege](#)
- [How powerful is your passport?](#)

Race, racism, and racial perception

- Jamie Utt: “[Are whites disadvantaged by affirmative action?](#)”
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr.: “[Tarantino Unchained: white saviors](#)”
- Harvey Young: “[The challenges of talking about race](#)”
- [The Racial Dot Map: one dot per person for the entire U.S.](#)
- [Photos challenge the way we see race](#)
- [Challenging the one-drop rule](#) (same topic)
- [World of Averages](#) (for a condensed version, see [here](#))
- [I went to Africa and all I got were these pictures](#) (blog)

Wealth and inequality

- Helena Lee: “[Why Finnish babies sleep in cardboard boxes](#)”
- Simon Kuper: “[Apartheid, just less black and white](#)”
- Nigel Warburton: “[Cosmopolitans](#)”
- Malala Yousafzai: “[I have the right](#)”
- Anup Shah: “[The arms trade is big business](#)”

Climate change

- Gavin Schmidt & Michael Mann: “[Convenient Untruths](#)”
- John Cook: “[Is Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* accurate?](#)”
- Frank Warner: “[The nine ‘errors’ Judge Brown found in *An Inconvenient Truth*](#)”
- Tim McDonnell: “[How many brutally hot days you will suffer when you’re old](#)”

Data, statistics, and media

- [Slavery Footprint](#) (take this survey!—how many slaves work for you?)
- [Gapminder World](#) (the best social sciences tool you’ll ever see)
- [The world as 100 people](#) (basic statistics)
- [The world of 100](#) (a different data set)
- [Follow the Money](#) (who contributed what to which political campaigns)
- [10x10](#) (news trends in pictures)
- [Worldometers](#) (real-time global statistics)

Recommended movies

| | |
|------|----------------------------------|
| 1927 | <i>Metropolis</i> |
| 1940 | <i>The Great Dictator</i> |
| 1964 | <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> |
| 1968 | <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> |
| 1978 | <i>The China Syndrome</i> |
| 1979 | <i>Apocalypse Now</i> |
| 1982 | <i>Gandhi</i> |
| 1984 | <i>Dune</i> |
| 1984 | <i>2010</i> |
| 1988 | <i>Grave of the Fireflies</i> |
| 1995 | <i>Pocahontas</i> |
| 1997 | <i>Contact</i> |
| 1998 | <i>The Thin Red Line</i> |
| 1999 | <i>Snow Falling on Cedars</i> |
| 2004 | <i>Hotel Rwanda</i> |
| 2005 | <i>Lord of War</i> |
| 2005 | <i>The New World</i> |
| 2005 | <i>V for Vendetta</i> |
| 2006 | <i>Flags of Our Fathers</i> |
| 2006 | <i>Letters from Iwo Jima</i> |
| 2006 | <i>The Fountain</i> |
| 2006 | <i>The Last King of Scotland</i> |
| 2009 | <i>District 9</i> |
| 2011 | <i>The Tree of Life</i> |
| 2014 | <i>Boyhood</i> |
| 2014 | <i>Interstellar</i> |