PHIL 215: Right & Wrong in the Contemporary World

Fall 2017
Section 01: MWF 9-9:50am
Section 02: MWF 10-10:50am
James Blair Hall 221 (9am) & 201 (10am)

Syllabus

Instructor

Chad Vance
Office Hours: MW 1pm-2:30pm
cvance@wm.edu
(and by appointment)
James Blair Hall, room 124

What Is This Class About?

Every day you are faced with moral decisions, many of them quite difficult. This course is designed to give you the tools with which you will be able to think about such issues more carefully and clearly. We will achieve this result by way of exploring a number of interesting contemporary issues. For instance:

- Is morality something that we just made up?
- Does our government have legitimate authority over us?
- Should everyone be allowed to vote?
- Is it morally wrong to defend the guilty?
- Should drugs be legal?
- Should procreation be regulated?
- Is it morally permissible to kill fetuses? Or the terminally ill?
- How should we address issues like oppression, racism, and sexism?
- Should we open our borders to immigrants?
- Is it morally wrong to eat animals?
- Do we have a moral obligation to help starving people?
- Do we have a duty to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions?
- Is it morally wrong to kill in video games?
- Is it morally permissible to clone a human being?
- What code of ethics should driverless cars be given?

Throughout our investigation of these questions, our primary goal will be to make you a better moral reasoner; i.e., our ultimate goal is to help you to (i) be able to think carefully and critically, (ii) be able to supply reasons for your ethical beliefs, and (iii) acquire the necessary tools to investigate moral issues on your own.

Assigned Readings

There is no textbook for this course. Assigned readings will be provided as pdf files, accessible under “Assigned Readings” on our course website, here:

http://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil215/phil215.html
Course Requirements

1. *Exams (40%).* You will take a mid-term exam (15%) and a final exam (25%).

2. *Papers (30%).* You will write two papers. The first (10%) will be a short diagnostic paper, 600-900 words (i.e., 2-3 pages), and the second (20%) will be a longer paper, 1200-1800 words in length (i.e., 4-6 pages). Topics and more info: TBA.

3. *Class Debate (10%).* You will participate in an in-class debate. More info: TBA.

4. *Quizzes (10%).* You will take a total of 11 short reading quizzes. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped; i.e., your 10 best scores will constitute your quiz grade (1% each).

5. *Participation (10%).* A portion of your grade will depend on your ability to come to class (on time and prepared), participate in class discussion, and refrain from being disruptive, falling asleep, sending text messages, or surfing the internet.

Course Policies

**Academic Integrity**

All students of the College of William & Mary are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity honor code policy of this institution. Violations of this policy include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, and stealing. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Council. More information about the honor code can be found at: [wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/honorcodeandstudentconduct/honorcode/index.php](http://wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/honorcodeandstudentconduct/honorcode/index.php)

NOTE: Students who are found to be in violation of the honor code will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (i.e., you will automatically receive an F for the course) as well as non-academic sanctions (which include academic probation, suspension, or expulsion).

**Student Conduct**

Students and faculty each have a responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to the code of conduct may be subject to discipline. More information at: [wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/student_code_of_conduct/index.php](http://wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/student_code_of_conduct/index.php)

**Disability Services**

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. More information at: Campus Center (room 109), 757-221-2510, or [wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/disabilityservices/](http://wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/disabilityservices/).

**Religious Observances**

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. Please let me know by the end of the drop/add period about any such conflicts, so that we can resolve them. More information at: [wm.edu/about/administration/provost/torfacstaff/holidays/religiousguidelines/index.php](http://wm.edu/about/administration/provost/torfacstaff/holidays/religiousguidelines/index.php).

**Discrimination and Harassment**

The College of William & Mary policies on Discrimination and Sexual Harassment and Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment and/or discrimination based upon race, sex, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, political belief, disability, veteran status, age, or any other category protected by the Commonwealth or by federal law should contact the Office of Compliance and Policy on the first floor of James Blair Hall. More information about discrimination and harassment can be found at: [http://www.wm.edu/offices/compliance/topics/discrimination_overview/index.php#policies](http://www.wm.edu/offices/compliance/topics/discrimination_overview/index.php) [http://www.wm.edu/offices/compliance/policies/sexual_harass/index.php](http://www.wm.edu/offices/compliance/policies/sexual_harass/index.php)
Course Schedule

Below is a schedule of the topics that we will cover, along with list of the reading(s) which you should complete before each class meeting. Please note the dates for **exams days, papers due dates, and debate days** in bold.

<table>
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<th>UNIT ONE</th>
<th>LEGALITY &amp; MORALITY: Morality, Rights, and Government Regulation</th>
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<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 8/30</td>
<td>Intro/Syllabus/Arguments</td>
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<td>Fri 9/1</td>
<td>Ethical Relativism &amp; Nihilism</td>
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<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Legitimacy of the State</strong></td>
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<td>Mon 9/4</td>
<td>Philosophical Anarchy</td>
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<td>• Hobbes, <em>Leviathan</em> (excerpt)</td>
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<td>Fri 9/8</td>
<td>Objections to Contract Theory</td>
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<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>What Kind of System?</strong></td>
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<td>Mon 9/11</td>
<td>Voting Rights</td>
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<td>Wed 9/13</td>
<td>Legal Advocacy</td>
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<td>Fri 9/15</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<td><strong>Week 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Government Regulation</strong></td>
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<td>Mon 9/18</td>
<td>Drug Legalization</td>
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<td>Wed 9/20</td>
<td>Parent Licensing</td>
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<td>Fri 9/22</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<td><strong>Week 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Abortion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 9/25</td>
<td>DEBATE: GUN REGULATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 9/27</td>
<td>Abortion (against)</td>
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<td>Fri 9/29</td>
<td>Abortion (for)</td>
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<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>Abortion &amp; Infanticide</strong></td>
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<td>Wed 10/4</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 10/6</td>
<td>DEBATE: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM</td>
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<td><strong>Week 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Euthanasia</strong></td>
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<td>Mon 10/9</td>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
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<td>Wed 10/11</td>
<td>Review: Mid-Term Exam</td>
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<td>Fri 10/13</td>
<td>MID-TERM EXAM</td>
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<td>UNIT TWO</td>
<td>Moral Obligation: Our Duty to Others and the World</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Structural Injustice</td>
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<td>Wed 10/18</td>
<td>Oppression</td>
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<td>Fri 10/20</td>
<td>Affirmative Action</td>
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<td><strong>DUE: PAPER #1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Young, “Five Faces of Oppression”</td>
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<td>• Himma, “Discrimination &amp; Disidentification”</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
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<td>Mon 10/23</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
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<td>Wed 10/25</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 10/27</td>
<td><strong>DEBATE: CULTURAL APPROPRIATION</strong></td>
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<td>No new readings</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Eating Animals</td>
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<td>Mon 10/30</td>
<td>Animal Rights (against)</td>
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<td>Wed 11/1</td>
<td>Animal Rights (for)</td>
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<td>Fri 11/3</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<td>• Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals”</td>
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<td>• Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People”</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Famine</td>
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<td>Mon 11/6</td>
<td>Famine Relief (for)</td>
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<td>Wed 11/8</td>
<td>Famine Relief (against)</td>
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<td>Fri 11/10</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<td>• Singer, “Famine, Affluence &amp; Morality”</td>
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<td>• Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics”</td>
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<td>• Patton, “Game Preserve Ethics”</td>
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<td>Mon 11/13</td>
<td><strong>DEBATE: MEMORIALIZING THE PAST</strong></td>
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<td>No new readings</td>
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<td>Wed 11/15</td>
<td>Procreation</td>
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<td>• Young, “Overconsumption &amp; Procreation: Are They Morally Equivalent?”</td>
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<td>Fri 11/17</td>
<td>Individual Responsibility</td>
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<td>• Sinnott-Armstrong, &quot;It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming &amp; Individual Moral Obligations&quot;</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Gaming &amp; Cloning</td>
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<td>Mon 11/27</td>
<td>Video Games</td>
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<td>Wed 11/29</td>
<td>Human Cloning</td>
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<td>Fri 12/1</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<td><strong>DUE: PAPER #2</strong></td>
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<td>No new readings</td>
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<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Driverless Cars</td>
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<td>Mon 12/4</td>
<td>The Trolley Problem &amp; the Ethics of Driverless Cars</td>
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<td>• Jenkins, “Autonomous Vehicles, Ethics, and Law: Toward an Overlapping Consensus”</td>
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<td>Wed 12/6</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<td>Fri 12/8</td>
<td>Review: Final Exam</td>
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