Right & Wrong in the Contemporary World

PHIL 215
Fall 2019

Syllabus

Instructor

Chad Vance

Office Hours: MF 11am-12:30pm
(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?
- Is it even possible to consider moral questions without bias?
- Does our government have legitimate authority over us?
- Do all adult citizens have a right to vote?
- Should recreational drugs be legal?
- Should procreation be regulated?
- Should we open our borders to immigrants?
- Is it morally permissible to kill fetuses? Or the terminally ill?
- 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?
- What code of ethics should driverless cars be given?
- And many more...

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 (35%). You will take a mid-term exam (15%) and a final exam (20%).

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).

3. Class Debate (10%). You will participate in one of four small team, in-class debates.

4. Discussion Days (5%). You and a small team will become informed about one of six contemporary issues. You will then write a short report about it, and help me to guide an informal in-class discussion.

5. 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).

6. 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 or disengaged, or falling asleep, texting, using the internet, etc.

Course Policies

Frequently Asked Questions
Answers to frequently asked questions can be found here: http://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/faq.pdf

Two notes: (1) You are responsible for reading the FAQ by the end of the first week of class. (2) Please consult this syllabus and the FAQ first, whenever you have a question about the course.

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/studenthandbook/honor_system/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

Disability & Accessibility Services
If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability or any issue affecting accessibility, please submit to me a letter from Accessibility Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. More information can be found in the Campus Center (room 109), 757-221-2510, or at:
wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentaccessibilityservices/

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/forfacstaff/holidays/religiousguidelines/index.php

Discrimination and Harassment
The College of William & Mary policies on Discrimination and Sexual Harassment 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, religious belief, 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 Equity on the first floor of James Blair Hall. More information about discrimination and harassment can be found at:
wm.edu/offices/compliance/policies/student_discim_policies/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, papers, and DEBATES in bold/CAPS.

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<tr>
<th>UNIT ONE</th>
<th>LEGALITY &amp; MORALITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td>Argumentation &amp; Rationality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 8/28</td>
<td>Intro/Syllabus/Arguments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 8/30</td>
<td>Irrationality</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td>Disagreement &amp; Morality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 9/2</td>
<td>Echo Chambers</td>
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<td>Wed 9/4</td>
<td>Ethical Relativism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 9/6</td>
<td>CLASS CANCELLED</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
<td>Government Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 9/9</td>
<td>Discussion: No-Platforming (and Punching Nazis)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 9/11</td>
<td>Philosophical Anarchy</td>
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<td><strong>Week 4</strong></td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 9/16</td>
<td>Discussion: Gun Regulation (and Kashuv-Harvard controversy)</td>
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<td>Wed 9/18</td>
<td>Voting Rights</td>
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<td>Fri 9/20</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<td><strong>Week 5</strong></td>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 9/23</td>
<td>Discussion: Tolerance &amp; Civility (and Rights for Felons &amp; ISIS Brides)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 9/25</td>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 9/27</td>
<td>DEBATE: MONUMENTS</td>
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<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
<td>Parent Licensing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 9/30</td>
<td>Parenting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 10/2</td>
<td>No new topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 10/4</td>
<td>DEBATE: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM</td>
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<td><strong>Week 7</strong></td>
<td>Immigration</td>
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<td>Mon 10/7</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
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<td>Wed 10/9</td>
<td>Review: Mid-Term Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 10/11</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><strong>Week 8</strong></td>
<td><strong>Abortion, part 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 10/16</td>
<td>Abortion (against)</td>
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| Fri 10/18 | Abortion (for)  
**DUE: Paper 1** |
| **Week 9** | **Abortion, part 2** |
| Mon 10/21 | Abortion: Fetuses & Persons  
| Wed 10/23 | No new topics  
No new readings |
| Fri 10/25 | Discussion: Cultural Appropriation  
(and school uniforms)  
No readings |
| **Week 10** | **Animals, part 1** |
| Mon 10/28 | Eating Meat (for)  
• Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals” |
| Wed 10/30 | No new topics  
No new readings |
| Fri 11/1 | Discussion: Listening to R Kelly  
(and Chad singing NWA)  
No readings |
| **Week 11** | **Animals, part 2** |
| Mon 11/4 | Eating Meat (against)  
• Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People” |
| Wed 11/6 | No new topics  
No new readings |
| Fri 11/8 | DEBATE: SWEATSHOP LABOR  
No readings |
| **Week 12** | **Famine** |
| Mon 11/11 | Famine Relief (for)  
• Singer, “Famine, Affluence & Morality” |
| Wed 11/13 | Famine Relief (against)  
• Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics”  
• Patton, “Game Preserve Ethics” |
| Fri 11/15 | DEBATE: REPARATIONS  
No readings |
| **Week 13** | **Climate Change** |
| Mon 11/18 | Procreation  
• Young, “Overconsumption & Procreation: Are They Morally Equivalent?” |
| Wed 11/20 | Individual Responsibility  
| Fri 11/22 | No new topics  
No new readings |
| **Week 14** | **Distributive Justice** |
| Mon 11/25 | Discussion: Universal Basic Income  
(and distributive taxation)  
**DUE: Paper 2**  
No readings |
| **Week 15** | **Driverless Cars** |
| Mon 12/2 | The Trolley Problem & the Ethics of Driverless Cars  
• Jenkins, “Autonomous Vehicles, Ethics, and Law: Toward an Overlapping Consensus” |
| Wed 12/4 | No new topics  
No new readings |
| Fri 12/6 | Review: Final Exam  
No readings |
| Tue 12/17 | Final Exam: 9am – 12pm  
Section 01 (9am class) |
| Wed 12/18 | Final Exam: 2pm – 5pm  
Section 02 (10am class) |