

GLOBAL ETHICS | PHILOSOPHY 2304
Fall 2018
Mondays and Wednesday
2:30-3:45pm | Section 87205 | Holden 114

Instructor: Gil Hersch, Ph.D
Email: hersch@vt.edu
Office: 224 Major Williams Hall
Office Hours: MW 1:30-2:15pm and by appointment

In this class we will focus on the ethics of global poverty—whether global poverty can be alleviated, what does morality require of us, and whether we have obligations to the global poor. It is not merely a matter of misfortune or bad cosmic luck that some people are so badly off while others are not. Global poverty, and the suffering that it causes, is one of the most pressing moral issues of our time, especially because now we have the capacity to alleviate such mass suffering. This class will focus on the *ethics* of global poverty, but to answer ethical questions on this issue requires an understanding of the nature of the problem, its causes, and its possible remedies. This understanding must be interdisciplinary—drawing on insights from a variety of disciplines.

What will I learn in this class?

By the end of this class you will be able to:

- Recognize and explain central ideas and concepts in the discussion of global poverty.
- Compare and evaluate rival views on the ethics of global poverty.
- See yourself as a moral agent that reflects on their relation to global poverty.

By the end of this class you will improve your skills in:

- Reading and analyzing complex philosophical texts.
- Constructing coherent philosophical arguments.
- Writing papers dealing with philosophical topics.
- Conversing and reflecting on questions in ethics.

What do I need to have?

The Ethics of Global Poverty: An introduction by Scott Wisor

While you can purchase a hardcopy of this book, it is available for free as a PDF from the Virginia Tech Library (lib.vt.edu). It can be found at this link:

<https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/books/9781317574705>

I recommend using the free option.

The rest of the course readings are available on the course Canvas website.

What do I need to do to get a grade?

1. **Attendance:** You can have up to 3 (10% of classes) absences without any penalty, no explanation needed. Each absence beyond that deducts a third of a letter grade from your final grade. Exceptions to this policy will only be made in the case of a *serious* extenuating circumstance (e.g. emergency medical or family problem) supported by appropriate evidence.
2. **Participation (10%):** Philosophy is often best learned through discussion and dialogue. A significant portion of our time in class will be devoted to discussion of the issues, both in small groups and as a class. You are expected to read about the topics before class and come prepared to ask questions and discuss the ideas. Please come to class with the course texts and your notes, having read all the material assigned for the day. You should be fully prepared to discuss the material and actively participate in class discussion. I encourage you to take notes while you read, noting points of interest, what you may agree or disagree with, and any questions that may arise as you go through the material. Your experience in this class will be significantly better if you do these things.
3. **Weekly papers (8*7.5=60%):** each week, beginning with the 3rd week of class, you will be asked to submit a 300-600 word paper by Thursday at 2pm. There will be 10 such papers, of which I will take into account only the best 8. Each of these will receive a grade (check plus, check, check minus, unacceptable). You may submit only 8 if you like.

In class we will discuss the sort of thing I am looking for in your term paper. But in grading your essay I will be looking for three things, weighted roughly equally:

- Comprehension: understanding of the concepts and ideas discussed in the essay.
- Clarity: presentation of the ideas and concepts in a clear and concise manner.
- Engagement: serious, sincere and independent thinking about the items under discussion.

Each paper should be submitted with a word count and your name on the **back** of the last page. If more than one sheet, only stapled papers will be accepted.

4. **Class presentation (15%):** Students will be organized in ten groups of 3-4 students and make a class presentation during the classes after Thanksgiving. All details of the presentations and expectation will be discussed closer to the end of the semester.
5. **Final exam (15%):** Short answers exam (3-4 sentences per answer). Ahead of time I will give you a list of 16 concepts from the class. 8 concepts will be chosen for the exam of which you will need to discuss 4.

What are the course policies?

- **Academic integrity:** 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/>

If you have any concerns about academic integrity and how the honor code applies to you, whether questions about the importance of academic integrity or about what is or is not permitted on specific assignments, please talk with me **in advance**.

- *Attendance and classroom behavior:* You are expected to attend every class **on time** and to have read the assigned material ahead of time. Attendance will be taken some time in the first five minutes of class. It will not be possible to sign in late. Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated.
- *Preparation and course material:* This is important, so I've repeated it. You are expected to come to class with the course texts and your notes, having read all the material assigned for the day. You should be fully prepared to discuss the material and actively participate in class discussion. I encourage you to take notes while you read, noting points of interest, what you may agree or disagree with, and any questions that may arise as you go through the material. Your experience in this class will be significantly better if you do these things. I appreciate the fact that you might be quite confused or bored by some of the readings. I ask only that you push through and try your best. I encourage you to stop by during my office hours or set up an appointment to discuss the course material or assignments with me, especially if you are having difficulty understanding something, or would like more personalized help on some area of the course.
- *Classroom engagement:* We will be discussing some controversial issues, some of which you may have strong personal opinions about. Please be respectful and civil in all your classroom interactions, regardless of how strongly you may (dis)agree with the views you may be arguing for or against. You must distinguish between positions and arguments on the one hand and the people who advance them on the other. While the former are open to reasoned criticism, the latter are not legitimate targets. See VT's [Principles of Community](#)
- *Laptops and electronics:* Use of computers, tablets, smartphones, and other electronic devices is **not allowed** in class. Exception will only be made on a case by case basis either because of presenting a convincing argument for such a need or with written permission from, for example, the Office for Students with Disabilities.
- *Late papers:* No papers will be accepted late. If you are late for any reason, simply avoid submitting that paper. Exceptions to this policy will only be made **in advance** in the case of a serious extenuating circumstance (e.g. emergency medical or family problem) supported by appropriate evidence.
- *Students with disabilities:* I am committed to making this class as accessible as possible. If aspects of this course — such as time-limited exams or inaccessible web content — result in barriers to your inclusion or your ability to meet course requirements, please notify me as soon as possible. We will adapt methods, materials or testing in order to offer fair terms of participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Services for Students with Disabilities office to discuss and arrange reasonable accommodations.

Schedule

1	8/20	Introduction and reasoning	Introduction	
2	8/22		Analytic reasoning	
3	8/27		Ethics overview	Russ Shafer-Landau, <i>The Fundamentals of Ethics</i> , 1-17
4	8/29		Ethics overview	Excerpts from <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>
	9/3		LABOR DAY	
5	9/5	Understand poverty	2 What is poverty?	Angus Deaton, "Measuring Poverty"
6	9/10		3 The causes of poverty	Abhijit Banerjee & Esther Duflo, <i>Poor Economics</i> , ch. 1-2
7	9/12		4 The study of poverty	PEER REVIEW
8	9/17	Duties to eradicate	5 Duties of humanity	Peter Unger, <i>Living High and Letting Die</i> , ch. 2, sec 1-9
9	9/19			Unger, <i>Living High and Letting Die</i> , ch. 2, sec 10-18
10	9/24		6 Duties of justice	Peter Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , ch. 4
11	9/26			Peter Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , ch. 5
12	10/1		7 Associative duties	Lea Ypi, Robert Goodin & Christian Barry, "Associative Duties, Global Justice, and the Colonies", pp. 104-118
13	10/3			Continue Ypi et. al., pp. 118-135.
14	10/8		8 Denying duties	-
15	10/10			Thomas Hurka, "The Justification of National Partiality
16	10/15	Foreign aid & its critics	9 Aid, critics, innovators	William Easterly, <i>The White Man's Burden</i> , ch. 1
17	10/17		10 Aid allocation	Toby Ord, "The moral imperative toward cost-effectiveness in global health"
18	10/22	Global institutional reform	11 Immigration	S. Wilcox "The Open Borders Debate on Immigration"
19	10/24		12 Humanitarian intervention	James Pattison, "Is There a Duty to Intervene?"
20	10/29		13 International trade	Fernando Tesón, "Why Free Trade is Required by Justice", sec. I-III, pp. 126-138
	10/31	NO CLASS	Watch "The End of Poverty?"	
21	11/5	Practical issues	14 Advocacy	Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others", pp. 5-12, 24-29
22	11/7		15 Consumption	Holly Lawford-Smith, "Unethical consumption and obligations to signal"
23	11/12		<i>Global warming</i>	Darrel Moellendorf, "Climate Change Justice"
24	11/14		<i>Global health policy</i>	Julian Reiss & Philip Kitcher, "Biomedical Research, Neglected Diseases, and Well-Ordered Science"
	11/19	THANKS		
	11/21	GIVING		
25	11/26	CLASS		
26	11/28	PRESENTATI		
27	12/3	ONS		
28	12/5	REVIEW		
	12/10	FINAL	10:05AM-12:05PM	