PHIL 6324: Advanced Topics in Ethics and Political Philosophy

Meetings

Mon 4 – 6:30

MWH 225

Professor

Jordan MacKenzie

Email

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Office Hours

Tuesday 10-11 and by appointment

# Course Overview

This graduate seminar will explore what responses we, as individuals, ought to have to oppression. We’ll start by reading some recent philosophical work on the nature of oppression. We’ll then explore how oppression shapes us as agents with socially-situated identities and particular psychological profiles. We’ll close by considering what obligations, if any, we have to resist oppression.

We will also be cultivating a set of skills that will help you make progress towards your MA in philosophy. Specifically, we will work on:

1. Formulating philosophically fruitful research questions
2. Conducting independent philosophical research
3. Writing long abstracts and papers suitable for conference submission
4. Providing actionable and respectful peer feedback feedback
5. Engaging with professional philosophers about their work

# Required Text

None.

All readings will be posted on Canvas.

# Background Knowledge Expectations

This course does not presuppose a background in philosophy. Key concepts will be discussed in class, and supplementary resources will be provided on an as-needed basis.

# Class Expectations and Policies

**1. Class Discussions:** Philosophy classes are only as good as the discussions that happen in them. As such, you will be expected to be active, respectful participants in class discussions. You are not required to have your cameras on for the duration of class, but it is strongly encouraged. Trust me—it will make the class go better for everyone.

**2. Accessibility**: I am committed to making this course accessible to everyone. If there is something that I can do to make this course more accessible for you, please come and speak to me. If you need disability-related accommodations, please contact VT’s Services for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.ssd.vt.edu/index.html>). Note, however, that you **do not need** to have an officially recognized or diagnosed disability to seek accommodations: you just have to come speak with me.

**3. Changes to the Syllabus**: This is a new course. As such, you should expect the syllabus to change—both as a response to student interest, and as a response to class pacing. I promise not to increase the workload associated with this class, and to give you a decent heads up about syllabi changes.

# Assignments—Graduate

1. **Attendance and Participation (15%):** Do the readings, show up for class regularly, and be an active, thoughtful, and respectful participant in class discussions.
2. **Comment Sheets (15%, 5% each)**: Graduate students are required to write three comment sheets on different readings throughout the term. Each comment sheet must be 2-3 double-spaced pages. You must explain the main argument (or an important sub-argument), ideally in premise-conclusion form. Then, you must raise an objection to that argument, explaining exactly how it undermines the argument. If you have space, you can consider how the author could respond.
3. **Long Abstract (15% total)**: you will be responsible for meeting with me to discuss potential term topics, and then writing a long abstract detailing one of those topics. You must also research conferences to which you could potentially submit this abstract/the paper that results from it.
4. **Draft Term Paper (10%)**: 3,000-5,000 words max. Based on feedback that you receive for your long abstract, you’ll then write a draft term paper. Even though this is a draft, you should take it seriously—I want full sentences, citations, and reasonable formatting.
5. **Peer Feedback Assignment (5% total).** Provide written feedback to a peer. This feedback should be substantive, and should address: structure, clarity, argument, engagement with secondary sources. You will be discussing this feedback with your peer in class.
6. **Final Term Paper (3,000-5,000 words): 40% total):** 3,000-5,000 words. Your final term paper should show appreciable growth from the draft paper. Final papers must be double spaced, nicely formatted, in Times New Roman (or equivalent) 12 point font, with proper citations.

# Grading Policies

1. **Anonymous Grading**:Please do not put your name on your papers—just write your student number.
2. **Late Assignments:** I will dock 5% of the assignment grade for every 24-hour period it is overdue. I am, however, **very generous about granting extensions** so long as you request them in advance of the deadline. In fact, I am willing to grant a *no questions asked* 24-hour extension on *any* assignment so long as you request it before the due date. I do not grant ‘retroactive extensions’, so make sure to ask for extensions before the assignment is due!
3. **Citations**: Citations are required for all assignments. I don’t care what style you use, but you must include page numbers. A bibliography is not necessary unless you have more than three sources. Any paper with missing or inadequate citations will be docked 5%.
4. **Grade bumps**: I round final grades up to the nearest percent—so an 89.5% will be a 90%, but an 89.4% will not. If you are unsatisfied with your final grade, please know that I do not grant ‘grade bumps’ (beyond a half percent), and do not offer bonus assignments. If you make good use of my resubmission policy, this should not be an issue.
5. **Academic Integrity**: see official Virginia Tech policy below.

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.

Academic integrity expectations are the same for online classes as they are for in person classes. We strongly encourage all instructors to discuss the use of technology, and specifically discuss areas we know are problematic temptations for students such as Chegg, CourseHero, and GroupMe to discourage students from using them. When the semester starts is an appropriate time in addition to providing a kind reminder before exams and assignments about expectations related to these sites. Please make your students aware that we are able to effectively investigate these incidents. If you have any questions about these sites or discussing them with your students, please do not hesitate to call our office. All university policies and procedures apply in any Virginia Tech academic environment, and all students are expected to follow them.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/

# Course Schedule

\*note: this schedule may be updated throughout the semester

**Part 1: Conceptual Questions**

**August 22: What Is Oppression? Part 1**

1. Marilyn Frye, “Oppression”
2. Ann Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* Chapter 1

**August 29: What is Oppression? Misogyny Case Study**

1. Kate Manne, *Down Girl*, Chapters 1, 2, conclusion

**September 5, Labor Day, No Class**

**Part 2: Identity, Moral Psychology, Agency**

**September 12: Adaptive Preferences**

1. Serena J. Khader, “Must Theorizing About Adaptive Preferences Deny Women’s Agency?”
2. Rosa Terlazzo, “Must Adaptive Preferences Be Prudentially Bad for Us?

**September 19: Gaslighting**

1. Cynthia A. Stark, “Gaslighting, Misogyny, and Psychological Oppression”
2. Paul-Mikhail Catapang Podosky, “Gaslighting: First- and Second-Order”

**September 26: Moral Damage and Epistemic Exploitation**

1. Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, Chapter 1
2. Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation”

**October 3: Anger**

1. Amia Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger”
2. Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage* (selection)

**October 10: Contempt**

1. Macalester Bell, *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology Of Contempt*, Chapters 1 and 4

**October 16—Last day to set up Long Abstract Meeting with me**

**October 17: Long Abstract Workshop**

1. MacKenzie, “Lighten Up: Humorlessness as a Moral Vice” (30 minutes)
2. Small group long abstract workshop (2 hours)

**October 19—Long Abstract Due**

**October 24: Sukaina Hirji (UPenn) Zoom Meeting**

1. Sukaina Hirji, “Oppressive Double-Binds”
2. Sukaina Hirji, TBD

**Part 3: Obligations to Resist Oppression**

**October 31—Do We Have a Duty to Resist Oppression?**

1. Carol Hay, “The Obligation to Resist Oppression”
2. Rosa Terlazzo, “(When) Do Victims Have an Obligation to Resist Oppression?”

**October 31— Solidarity**

1. Mike Zhao, “Solidarity, Fate-Sharing and Community”
2. Tommie Shelby, “Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression?”

**November 7—Effective Altruism**

1. Will MacAskill, “Replaceability, Career Choice, and Making a Difference”
2. Amia Srinivasan, “Stop the Robot Apocalypse”
3. Brian Berkey, “The Institutional Critique of Effective Altruism”

**November 12—Tamara Fakhoury (Minnesota) Zoom Meeting**

1. Tamara Fakhoury, “Quiet Resistance”
2. Tamara Fakhoury, “Non-Normative Behavior and the Virtue of Rebelliousness”

**November 21—Thanksgiving Break**

**November 23—Draft Paper Due**

**November 28—Peer Feedback Assignment Due**

**November 28—Class paper workshop and peer feedback**

Students will read each others’ papers in advance of class. You are expected to read all of your classmates’ papers, but will only have to provide feedback on two papers (due before the start of class. We will spend approximately 20-30 minutes workshopping each paper. This means that the class will run long; if you aren’t able to stay late, let me know and I’ll assign your paper to be workshopped early in the class. Dinner will be provided.

**Week 14: December 5—Hope Under Oppression**

1. Katie Stockdale, “Losing Hope: Injustice and Moral bitterness”
2. Kate Norlock, “Perpetual Struggle”

**December 10—Final Paper Due**