



# VIRTUE, VALUE, AND HAPPINESS: AN INTRODUCTION TO MORAL THEORY

PHIL 160.001  
Spring 2025

**Professor:** Margaret Shea  
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207B Caldwell Hall

**Class Location:** 103 Caldwell Hall

**Meeting Pattern:** Tu./Th. 12:30pm-1:45pm

**Office Hours:** Tu. 2:15pm-4:15pm  
By appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

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This course provides a systematic overview of moral philosophy, introducing students to a curated selection of the discipline's guiding questions, animating disagreements, and seminal texts (both historical and contemporary). Questions we will explore include: what makes an act right or wrong? Is there a moral difference between killing a person and letting her die? When we say that an act is wrong, are we expressing our feelings or our beliefs? Do we have moral reason to help our friends? Students will get ample practice reading, reconstructing, and raising objections to philosophical arguments, and supporting their ideas with reasons.

**Credit Hours:** Three

**Target Audience:** All undergraduate students

## COURSE MATERIALS

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All readings for this course will be available on Canvas, under "Reserves."

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

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Students are expected:

- To complete the assigned readings before class meets.
- To attend all class meetings and participate in class discussions.
- To complete all graded and ungraded assignments (described below).



## GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

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The graded course components are participation (10%), pop quizzes (10%), 2 in-class argument analysis exercises (25% total), a final paper (30%), and a final exam (25%). More information about assignments will be provided nearer their due dates. Writing for the course exceeds 10 pages.

### Major Assessments

#### **2 In-Class Argument Analysis Exercises – 10% and 15% respectively, 25% total**

You will write two short (2 page) in-class essays, the first on [2/6](#) (10%) and the second on [3/6](#) (15%). I will distribute a passage and you will be asked to reconstruct and critically analyze the argument in the passage.

#### **Final Paper — 30%**

This assignment has two components. You will submit a paper plan (2-3 pages) on [4/3](#). I will return your plan with comments by [4/10](#). This component of the assignment is ungraded. Your final paper (5-8 pages) will be due on [4/15](#) at 11:59pm.

#### **Final Exam – 25%**

The final exam will cover material from the entire semester. It will be held on [Saturday, May 3 at 4pm](#).

### Minor Assessments

#### **Pop Quizzes – 10%**

There will be a handful of short pop quizzes throughout the semester. If you attend class and do the reading, you can expect to do well on them. Your performance on these quizzes will count for 10% of your final grade.

#### **Participation – 10%**

Your participation grade will reflect how thoughtfully you participate in the course, including class discussions, weekly Canvas posts and small-group in-class activities. Your participation grade is primarily a measure of the extent to which you make a good-faith effort to engage with course material and your peers, *not* of how often you “know the right answer.” Asking questions can be an excellent way of participating.

### *Canvas Posts*

Once a week, post a comment or question about the reading for the next day of class (Canvas writing over the course of the semester totals 2 pages). Each week you can choose whether to submit on Monday or Wednesday night. Please post your contribution by 11:59pm. You are encouraged to respond to other students’ questions and comments.

## GRADING

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All assignments will be graded using the standards described in the University Registrar’s “[Undergraduate Grade Definitions](#).” All assignments will be given a numerical grade. Your final grade will be calculated by taking the weighted average of all of your grades from the semester. Your final grade will be converted to a letter grade in accordance with the scale below:



Numeric Grade (%)	Letter Grade
93.5 and above	A
89.5 – 93.4	A-
86.5 – 89.4	B+
82.5 – 86.4	B
79.5 – 82.4	B-
76.5 – 79.4	C+
72.5 – 76.4	C
69.5 – 72.4	C-
66.5 – 69.4	D+
59.5 – 66.4	D
59.4 and below	F

Additional grading policies:

- **BLIND GRADING:** All major assignments – the argument analysis exercises, final paper, and final exam – will be blind-graded.
- **LATE POLICY:** All major assignments – the argument analysis exercises, final paper, and final exam – will be marked down a grade increment for each day that they are late (*e.g.* a paper that is B+ quality, but submitted a day late, receives a B).



## COURSE SCHEDULE

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### WEEK ONE

Th. 1/9	NO READING	Overview of the semester [Zoom]
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### WEEK TWO

#### NORMATIVE ETHICS

Tu. 1/14	James Rachels, "Ethical Egoism"	
Th. 1/16	John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (excerpts)	

### WEEK THREE

Tu. 1/21	Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine"	
Th. 1/23	"A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation"	Guide to Argument Reconstruction

### WEEK FOUR

Tu. 1/28	William Shaw, "The Consequentialist Perspective"	
Th. 1/30	NO NEW READING	

### WEEK FIVE

Tu. 2/4	Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"	
Th. 2/6	NO NEW READING	Argument Analysis Exercise #1

### WEEK SIX

Tu. 2/11	Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories"	
Th. 2/13	John Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?"	

### WEEK SEVEN

Tu. 2/18	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Section 1	
Th. 2/20	SNOW DAY	

### WEEK EIGHT

Tu. 2/25	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , selections from Section 2	
Th. 2/27	NO NEW READING (review Kant)	Guest Lecture: Prof. Sarah McGrath (Princeton University)



WEEK NINE		
Tu. 3/4	Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"	
Th. 3/6	NO NEW READING	Argument Analysis Exercise #2
WEEK TEN	APPLIED ETHICS	
Tu. 3/11	NO CLASS	Spring Break
Th. 3/13	NO CLASS	Spring Break
WEEK ELEVEN		
Tu. 3/18	Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"	
Th. 3/20	Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"	
WEEK TWELVE		
Tu. 3/25	NO NEW READING	Guide to Planning & Writing a Philosophy Paper
Th. 3/27	Thomas Nagel, "Death"	
WEEK THIRTEEN	METAETHICS	
Tu. 4/1	G.E. Moore, <i>Principia Ethica</i> (selections)	
Th. 4/3	A.J. Ayer, "The Emotive Theory of Ethics"	Plan for Final Paper Due
WEEK FOURTEEN		
Tu. 4/8	NO NEW READING	
Th. 4/10	J.L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"	
WEEK FIFTEEN		
Tu. 4/15	Sarah McGrath, "What's Weird About Moral Deference?"	Final Paper Due
Th. 4/17	NO CLASS	University Wellness Day
WEEK SIXTEEN		
Tu. 4/22	George Sher, "But I Could Be Wrong"	
Th. 4/24	NO NEW READING	Review for Final Exam

**FINAL EXAM**  
Saturday, May 3 at 4pm



## POLICIES & RESOURCES

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### CLASSROOM POLICIES + RESOURCES

#### *Classroom Climate*

It is paramount that our classroom environment be inclusive and respectful of all students, whatever their race, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation, political background, and physical and learning ability. If at any point you have a concern about the classroom climate, please reach out to me.

#### *Norms for Respectful Discussion*

Students should familiarize themselves with the philosopher David Chalmers' [guidelines for respectful, constructive, and inclusive philosophical discussion](#).

#### *Writing and Reading Philosophy Papers*

I recommend that students read and consult Jim Pryor's [guidelines for reading philosophy](#) and for [writing a philosophy paper](#).

### ACADEMIC POLICIES

#### *University Class Attendance Policy*

As stated in the University's [Class Attendance Policy](#), no right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities: [University Approved Absence Office \(UAAO\) website](#) provides information and [FAQs for students](#) and [FAQs for faculty](#) related to University Approved Absences
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office \(EOC\)](#)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office \(EOC\)](#).

#### *Equal Opportunity and Compliance – Accommodations*

Equal Opportunity and Compliance Accommodations Team ([Accommodations - UNC Equal Opportunity and Compliance](#)) receives requests for accommodations for disability, pregnancy and related conditions, and sincerely held religious beliefs and practices through the University's Policy on Accommodations. EOC Accommodations team determines eligibility and reasonable accommodations consistent with state and federal laws.

#### *Honor Code Statement*

All students are expected to follow the guidelines of the UNC honor code. In particular, students are expected to refrain from "lying, cheating, or stealing" in the academic context. If you are unsure about which actions violate that honor code, please consult the [Student Conduct website](#).

#### *Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy*

Use of generative AI tools of any kind is not permitted in this course. Any use of these tools will be considered an instance of academic dishonesty and will be referred to Student Conduct.



### *Syllabus Changes*

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

### *Acceptable Use Policy*

By attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. The Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) sets the expectation that you will use the University's technology resources responsibly, consistent with the University's mission. In the context of a class, it's quite likely you will participate in online activities that could include personal information about you or your peers, and the AUP addresses your obligations to protect the privacy of class participants. In addition, the AUP addresses matters of others' intellectual property, including copyright. These are only a couple of typical examples, so you should consult the full [Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#), which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property. Additionally, consult the [Safe Computing at UNC](#) website for information about data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.

## **STUDENT SERVICES & SUPPORT POLICIES**

### *Undergraduate Testing Center*

The College of Arts and Sciences provides a secure, proctored environment in which exams can be taken. The Center works with instructors to proctor exams for their undergraduate students who are not registered with ARS and who do not need testing accommodations as provided by ARS. In other words, the Center provides a proctored testing environment for students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (with pre-arrangement by your instructor). For more information, visit the [testing center website](#).

### *Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)*

UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The [Heels Care Network](#) website is a place to access the many mental health resources at Carolina. CAPS is the primary mental health provider for students, offering timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services. Go to the [CAPS website](#) or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health building for an initial evaluation to learn more. Students can also call CAPS 24/7 at 919-966-3658 for immediate assistance.

### *Title IX Resources*

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made [online to the EOC](#) or by contacting the University's Title IX Coordinator ([Elizabeth Hall](#)) or the [Report and Response Coordinators](#) in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office. Confidential resources include Counseling and Psychological Services and the [Gender Violence Services Coordinators](#). Additional resources are available at [Safe at UNC](#).

### *Policy on Non-Discrimination*

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers



access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered, and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied. If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (email the [Report and Response Coordinators](#) or see additional contact info at [Safe at UNC](#)) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#).

## COURSE GOALS AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOs)

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### *COURSE GOALS*

All our philosophy courses aim at the acquisition and nurturing of basic philosophic skills. One of the main goals of our philosophy curriculum is to instill and enable the development of skills that are first and foremost philosophical, but which are foundational to all forms of knowledge. These **basic philosophical skills** include being able to:

- Think critically;
- Deploy philosophical concepts and terminology correctly, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Represent clearly and accurately the views or argument of particular philosophers, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Identify the premises and conclusion(s) of a philosophical argument and assess both its validity and soundness;
- Apply a philosophical theory or argument to a new topic, and being able to draw and defend reasonable conclusions about that topic;
- Develop an argument for a particular solution to a philosophical problem in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Write clearly, precisely, and persuasively in defense of a philosophical thesis;
- Participate in respectful, critical, and reflexive dialogues about difficult philosophical positions;
- Read, interpret, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical texts and the philosophical positions presented in them.

In addition, PHIL160 satisfies our value theory requirement for the philosophy major and minor and thereby aims at developing the following learning outcomes:

- being familiar with some of the leading normative theories in philosophy, such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics;
- being able to identify and explain the various contexts in which philosophical questions of justification arise;
- being able to assess ethical values in terms of the philosophical and non-philosophical reasons offered;
- being able to recognize different ethical perspectives and the distinctive approaches these perspectives bring to questions of value;
- being able to evaluate ethical justifications for different ways of organizing civic and political communities;
- being able to analyze and evaluate the differences between personal ethical decisions and those bearing on the public and civic domains.





Note that PHIL 160 also satisfies the PHIL component of the PPE minor.

## *IDEAs in ACTION GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM*

### Gen Ed #1: FC-VALUES

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Explain the contexts in which questions of justification arise.
2. Assess ethical values in terms of reasons offered
3. Recognize different ethical perspectives and the distinctive approaches these perspectives bring to questions of value, evaluating ethical justifications for different ways of organizing civic and political communities.
4. Analyze the differences between personal ethical decisions and those bearing on the public and civic spheres.

Questions for Students:

1. How can people think fruitfully (individually and together) about how they should live their lives?
2. What is required to judge a standard or value as worthy of support?
3. How should we distinguish between prejudices and reasonable grounds for value judgments?
4. What considerations – stories, reasons, testimony, documents, data, etc. – can justify our values and commitments, whether personal or social?

### Gen Ed #2: FC-WAYS OF KNOWING

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Recognize and use one or more approach(es) to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world.
2. Evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and philosophical categories structure knowledge.
3. Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world.
4. Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases.
5. Apply critical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

Questions for Students:

1. What norms and expectations do I take for granted?
2. What categories and concepts frame my assumptions, experiences, and beliefs?
3. What practices of investigation or inquiry best challenge those assumptions and expectations?
4. How can I consider whether my beliefs might be wrong?

### Recurring Capacities

Every focus capacity course includes the following activities:

- **Writing**, totaling at least 10 pages in length or the intellectual equivalent
- **Presenting** material to the class, smaller groups, or the public through oral presentations, webpages, or other means
- **Collaborating** in pairs or groups to learn, design, solve, create, build, or research

These elements – referred to as “recurring capacities” – will help you repeatedly practice crucial skills for future study, life, and career success.