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## PHIL160 – Virtue, Value and Happiness: An Introduction to Moral Theory

UNC Chapel Hill | Spring 2021

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**Class Times:** (On Zoom, all times are EST) MWF: 9:05AM – 9:55AM

**Office Hours:** Wednesday: 10AM – 11AM | Friday: 3:45PM – 4:45PM

**Course Description:** This course is an introduction to the fundamental questions of the branch of philosophy called “ethics” or “moral theory.” Questions we will address including the following: What makes a life good or worth living? Why should one act morally (as opposed to selfishly, or wretchedly)? Are moral concepts like “right” and “wrong” mere social constructions, or perhaps tools of the powerful to control the weak? Or is morality instead objective and real? If morality is objective, how can we know what is truly right and wrong?

**Warning:** This course will be largely **reading-based**. (See the reading schedule for details.) While the exact number of pages per session varies, some readings are denser than others, and understanding philosophical texts often requires you to read them multiple times. Therefore, in general, you should expect to spend about **1 – 2 uninterrupted hours per class session** on the reading. (Note: Doing the readings is **absolutely essential**, since you will receive **exams** based on the readings. More information on exams below.)

### Course Goals:

1. You will gain a broad knowledge of ideas from central texts in ethics and moral philosophy. These ideas are highly influential – they have directly shaped, and continue to shape, the way we think about virtue, morality, and society. They are also deeply challenging, and you will be required to evaluate several competing ideologies and come to your own conclusions. By the end of the course you will hopefully be able to engage in thought about ethical issues from a more critical and informed standpoint.
2. You will learn to **read**: As has already been mentioned, this course is reading-based. Some of the texts we read will be highly abstract. Also, the texts for this course generally are taken from primary sources and are therefore written in styles that are sometimes foreign to contemporary readers. Having to read these passages slowly and carefully will teach you to extract the main ideas out of what are sometimes dense and unfamiliar texts.
3. You will learn to **write**: A good philosophy paper is clear, easy to follow, and straight to the point. In this class, you will learn to phrase your ideas as clearly as possible, structure your paper coherently, and avoid unnecessarily complicated and confusing language. This is an extremely versatile skill to have and will be helpful for you in the future.
4. Most importantly, you will learn to **think**: You will learn how to raise questions about views you are unfamiliar with or disagree with. You will also be confronted with challenging and interesting questions that require you to think critically about your *own*

views and argue rigorously for those views based on *reasons* and *evidence*. Finally, you will be taught how to communicate those views clearly and persuasively to others.

This class is not just for philosophy students: Being able to **read, write, speak** and **think** *logically* and *clearly* are skills that transfer to almost any part of life and any academic field. (That is why philosophy students are usually among the highest scorers on the LSAT, GRE, GMAT, and in medical school admissions.)

**Textbooks and Readings:** The following are the textbooks we will be using, and can be found inexpensively on Amazon:

- [Plato: The Republic](#) (tr. C.D.C. Reeve)
- [Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics](#) (tr. Terence Irwin)
- [Kant: Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals](#) (tr. James W. Ellington)
- [Mill: Utilitarianism](#)

In the interests of accessibility, I will make **all readings available online**. (Go to the class in Sakai then go to Resources>>Course Readings.) I personally find it very helpful to have physical copies, but even if you do not buy them I highly recommend that, if possible, you print out any readings I upload electronically, so that you can have a physical copy to read, highlight, take notes on, refer to in discussions, etc.

**Course Format:** This online course will be largely based around readings, pre-recorded lectures, and class discussions on Zoom. I will also try to have frequent office hours.

**Lectures** This course will be taught asynchronously, so that students impacted by Covid-19 disruptions will find the course accessible. My plan is to record and post on Sakai daily **lectures** that primarily discuss and elaborate on concepts from the readings for the next day. I will generally post lectures the day before class discussion. So, for example, I will try to post the lecture for Wednesday by Tuesday morning or afternoon. Although these lectures are not given during our official course meeting time, **it is required** that you watch them, and I will assume you have done so.

**Class Discussions** We will have optional **class discussions** in the mornings, from 9AM – 9:55AM. These will be through Zoom, and I will send out a link via e-mail. (If you do not receive a link or have trouble getting in, just email me.) My normal plan for these is that I will give a brief 10-15 minute refresher on the material from the lecture/readings, and then we will have some group discussion where students can grapple with and ask questions about the arguments and theories we are considering. (This is usually pretty fun.)

Again, these class discussions *are optional*, but I *strongly recommend* you come and participate: For one, I guarantee you will do better on your assignments. And secondly, there *is a participation grade* for this course, and although there are other ways to satisfy this requirement, participating in class discussion sessions is the easiest way to do so. (Also, do feel welcome to come even if you don't have any questions, and just want to listen!)

**Office Hours** Twice a week I will have some office hours. Unlike the discussion sessions, you can come at these times and ask about **basically anything**: Any questions you still have about the lecture or readings of course, but also any questions about assignments, course logistics, grades, help with homework/exams, or even more general questions about philosophy, ethics, academics, etc. Basically anything. You can ask me my favorite color, what I think about Kant's theory of the categorical imperative, my take on the shape of the earth, or even my opinion on the merits of stevia vs. Splenda. Whatever you want. (However, ask at your own peril. No guarantee my answers will be informative, reliable or prudent.)

**Note:** Everyone is welcome to come to office hours. In particular, you are very welcome to come to office hours even if you did not come to the class discussion, or even if you can only come for part of the time. You are also welcome to join if you don't have a question and just want to listen. (That applies to discussion sessions too.)

### **Grade Breakdown:**

- **Participation:** 15%
- **Exam 1:** 20%
- **Paper 1:** 15% (5 pages)
- **Exam 2:** 25%
- **Final Paper:** 25% (5 pages)

**Participation Breakdown:** Participation is an important part of your grade. It is also one of the easiest ways to get points, so I encourage you to actively participate.

The policy for participation is very simple, and if you keep track of yourself you can calculate it precisely. All you have to do is keep track of which dates you participated. **There are only four possible participation grades:** A+, C+, F+, and F-, computed as follows:

- A+ (100%): Student **participated well** at least 5 times.
- C+ (77%): Student participated well 3-4 times.
- F+ (50%): Student participated well 1-2 times.
- F- (0%): Student participated well 0 times.

There are two main ways you can participate: (1) First, by making a point or raising a question during class discussion sessions; (2) second, by chatting with me either during office hours or other Zoom appointments about material related to the course. (Other ways might be possible if you reach out to me, though you must reach out with enough time before the end of the course.)

Each day that you participate in discussion session, or office hours, or a Zoom meeting, you will have participated "one time." So as to spread your participation throughout the term, I will not count several questions, words, syllables, thoughts, or mumblings during a single session as separate instances of participation. You are totally encouraged to participate more than once per day, but you certainly don't have to, and doing so will not gain you any extra participation points.

In short, you can generally get points for participation only “once per session.” (And, conversely, you cannot knock out all your participation for the term by asking five questions in one session at the end.)

Note that I say **you must participate well**: You must raise questions or comments that indicate you have done the reading, seen the lectures, and are actively engaging with the problems we are talking about. (Note that I *do* track participation after discussion sessions, by check-marking on my roster those who have participated. If you participate, you *will* get credit.)

However, rest assured that I will not judge your participation by how “good” your arguments are, or on how *well* you understand the material. So long as you are sincerely trying to understand and discuss the material you will get full points, even if you ask a supposedly “dumb” question. (Really there is no such thing! If your question helps either you or someone else understand the material, then it is always good and worth asking.)

In general, if you just put in a good-faith effort here, this part of the course grade will be simple and straightforward.

**Exams:** You will have **two (2)** exams that will most likely involve some multiple choice and some short answer questions. Most likely they will be timed. I am still working on how these exams will be delivered, but I expect they will be done online through Sakai. Details of the exams and study guides will be given as we get closer to each exam.

**Papers:** Please read the following closely:

- Instructions for the papers will be uploaded to Sakai at certain dates. Due dates will be indicated on the reading schedule on Sakai.
- To make grading as fair as possible, grading will be blind. Thus, **no names are allowed on your papers. Please include only your UNC PID!**
- In general, **late papers** will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for every day (or part of a day) after they are due. However, you are allowed **one (1) “free” late day**, where you can turn a paper in up to 24 hours after the time it is due. Which paper you use it on is up to you. If and when you choose to use this, please just let me know via e-mail.
- **You must use citations:** You must cite sources in your papers, especially when you are quoting or attributing a view to an author. Citations serve the purposes of (a) protecting you from allegations of plagiarism (see below), and (b) proving to me that what you attribute to an author is what the author actually says. I don’t care what format you use, so long as I can easily find the place you are referencing. Citations do not count toward the word count. **Failure to cite will result in loss of points.**

**Academic Dishonesty, Plagiarism and Honor Code:** The UNC Instrument of Student Governance defines plagiarism as “deliberate or reckless representation of another’s words, thoughts, or ideas as one’s own without attribution [**e.g., citations**] in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.” Note that it is also unacceptable to re-use your **own work**, including submitting old papers. It is your responsibility to be familiar with university

policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty (see, e.g., page 5 [here](#)) and with the [Honor Code](#). It is my responsibility to report any instances of academic dishonesty. If you have any questions about anything on this topic, please come talk to me.

**Accessibility Resources & Service (ARS):** UNC-Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health struggles, chronic medical conditions, temporary disability, or pregnancy complications, all of which can impair student success. See the ARS website for contact and registration information: <https://ars.unc.edu/about-ars/contact-us>

**Counseling and Psychological Services:** CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short- or long-term needs: <https://caps.unc.edu/>

**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. Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Adrienne Allison – [Adrienne.allison@unc.edu](mailto:Adrienne.allison@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvscc@unc.edu](mailto:gvscc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at <https://safe.unc.edu>

### Reading & Assignment Schedule

Readings will be covered in discussion session on the dates listed.

This means they are explained in the **recorded lecture** posted on the previous day.

(Note that this schedule is tentative and subject to minor changes.)

- (1/20) Course Introduction
- (1/22) Introduction to Moral Philosophy
- (1/25) Republic Book 1: 327a-357a
- (1/27) Republic Book 2: 357a-368c
- (1/29) Republic Book 2: 368c-376c
- (2/1) Republic Book 2: 376c-386a
- (2/3) Republic Book 3: 386a-412b
- (2/5) Republic Book 3: 412b-419a; Book 4: 419a-427c
- (2/8) Republic Book 4: 427c-449a
- (2/10) Republic Book 8: 543a-569c
- (2/15) **HOLIDAY**
- (2/17) Republic Book 8: 543a-569c (continued)
- (2/19) Republic Book 9: 571a-592b
- (2/22) Republic Book 9: 571a-592b (continued)
- (2/24) **Exam 1**
- (2/26) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 1, sec. 1-5

- (3/1) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 1, sec. 6-7
- (3/3) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 1, sec. 8-12
- (3/5) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 1, sec. 13; Book 2, sec. 1-4
- (3/8) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 2, sec. 5-9
- (3/10) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 3, sec. 1-4
- (3/12) **HOLIDAY**
- (3/15) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 3, sec. 1-4 (continued)
- (3/17) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 3 sec. 5
- (3/19) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 3 sec. 5 (continued)
- (3/22) Nicomachean Ethics: Book 3 sec. 5 (continued)
- (3/24) Utilitarianism: Chapter 1
- (3/26) Utilitarianism: Chapter 2

### **Paper 1 Due**

- (3/29) Utilitarianism: Chapter 2 (continued)
- (3/31) Utilitarianism: Chapter 2 (continued)
- (4/2) Utilitarianism: Chapter 3
- (4/5) **HOLIDAY**
- (4/7) Utilitarianism: Chapter 4
- (4/9) Utilitarianism: Chapter 4 (continued)
- (4/12) Utilitarianism: Chapter 5

- (4/14) Utilitarianism: Chapter 5 (continued)
- (4/16) Utilitarianism: Chapter 5 (continued)
- (4/19) **Exam 2**
- (4/21) Introduction to Groundwork: pp. 7-13 (393-401)
- (4/23) Groundwork: pp. 13-17 (401-405)
- (4/26) Groundwork: pp. 19-23 (406-412)
- (4/28) Groundwork: pp. 23-29 (412-420)
- (4/30) Groundwork: pp. 29-32 (420-424)
- (5/3) Groundwork: pp. 32-38 (424-431)
- (5/5) Groundwork: pp. 32-38 (424-431)
- (5/11) **Final paper due**