

Practical Ethics:
Moral Reasoning and How We Live
PHIL 163.002/ UNC, Chapel Hill

Fall 2023

Course Information

Credit Hours	3
Pre-Requisites	None
Target Audience	Open to all undergraduates
Meeting Pattern	M/W/F, 1:25-2:15pm
Instructional Format	In Person
Classroom	SC 209
Final Exam	Saturday, December 9, 12:00pm

Instructor Information

Name	Gerard Rothfus
Office Location	11 Caldwell Hall
Office Hours	T/Th, 10-11:30am (in-person), or by appointment
Email	gthrothfu@unc.edu

Course Description

This course surveys (some of) the rich field of contemporary practical ethics, with an emphasis on examining controversies surrounding the making and taking of life. Students will wrestle with classic philosophical questions like when and why is killing wrong?, is there a moral difference between doing harm and merely allowing it?, is the morally right action always the one that leads to the best consequences?, etc., and then consider how different answers to these questions bear upon topics as significant and contested as the ethics of capital punishment, abortion, animal rights, and genetic engineering.

Course Texts and Materials

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings and exercises will be made available online via Sakai.

Learning Objectives in Brief

This course will equip students to think critically and thoughtfully about the nature and demands of human morality as they pertain to questions involving the making and taking of human life. Students will finish the course with a broad appreciation of the motivation and structure of the central moral perspectives prominent in contemporary practical ethics. They will also gain a good sense of the relevance of these perspectives to prominent controversies in modern life (e.g. abortion, animal rights, etc.) as well as the dialectical state of academic debate on these topics. Finally, students who complete the course will have advanced in the skill of writing clear, lucid, and charitable argumentative papers.

Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

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 distinct to philosophy, but which are foundational to all forms of knowledge. These basic philosophical skills involve 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 them

In addition, PHIL165 satisfies our **value theory** requirement in the philosophy major and minor, and as such 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

Finally, this course satisfies the Philosophy requirement for the **PPE** minor.

IDEAs in Action Gen Ed

This course is part of the IDEAs in Action General Education curriculum, satisfying either the **Ways of Knowing** or the **Ethical and Civic Values** focus capacity.

Learning Outcomes (Ways of Knowing)

These are the learning outcomes that are expected of students after completing a course.

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 (Ways of Knowing)

These are the types of questions you should be able to answer after completing a course.

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?

Learning Outcomes (Ethical and Civic Values)

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 (Ethical and Civic Values)

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?

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.

Course Assignments and Assessments

The course will be organized around three weekly lecture/discussion periods, where various topics in practical ethics will be explored and discussed in person. You are **strongly** urged to do the suggested readings before each lecture in order to be better prepared to engage, ask questions, make suggestions in discussion, etc.

I will also hold office hours on Wednesdays from 2:30 to 4pm and on Fridays from 10:30am to 12pm. Feel free to come to office hours and ask any questions you may have about the course! If you are unable to make this time any week and would like to discuss the course, you are very much encouraged to set up an appointment for another time. In these office hours, I am happy to go over past readings or discuss questions about upcoming assignments, new material, writing strategies, etc. Whether in or out of office hours, please feel free to reach out to me any time!

Expected Time Dedicated to the Class

On average, students should expect to spend about 12 hours per week on seminar discussions and course assignments.

Course Assignments and Grading

Your grade will be determined according to the table below. (Note: All assignment due dates are recorded in the Course Outline.)

Midterm Paper (4-5 pages)	15%
Final Paper (6-8 pages)	25%
Peer Review Exercise (Collaboartion/Presentation Exercise)	10%
Final Exam	25%
Argument Outlines	15%
Participation	10%

Midterm Paper

Your short midterm paper will require you to write a philosophical response to one of the authors we read during the first part of the course. You will select one of the readings and write a **4 to 5 page** response to the reading that summarizes and explains a view held or an argument made by the author and

then either (a) criticizes the author's view or argument (by, respectively, presenting an argument challenging the author's view or raising and defending an objection to their argument) or (b) defends the author's view or argument (by, respectively, presenting a new argument for the view or supplying new support for the argument's premises).

I will make use of this general rubric in grading both the midterm and final papers: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/grades.html>

Final Paper

Your final paper will require you to write a philosophical essay arguing for or against a morally and practically significant position (though not one discussed in class!). There will be three stages to producing this paper: (i) writing an outline, (ii) writing a draft, and (iii) writing the final product. Each of these stages will contribute to your final paper grade in the following proportions: 10% for the outline, 20% for the rough draft, and 70% for the final version. The final paper must be **6 to 8 pages** long and will be assessed according to the general rubric linked above. We will discuss good philosophical writing practices and tips for handling the final paper as the course goes on. I will supply a list of possible topics to write on, though you may feel free to suggest your own as well!

Peer Review Exercise

After completing the rough draft stage of the final paper, we will engage in a peer review exercise. Students will be randomly partitioned into groups of 3 or 4 and will exchange paper drafts with their group members. Your task is to offer charitable and constructive feedback to each of your group members with the aim of helping them improve their final paper. After having had the opportunity to read your peers' papers, we will set aside one class period in which you will verbally present your feedback to your peers, accompanied by roughly **1 page** of thoughtful written comments on each reviewed paper. We will go over further details of this process as the assignment draws nearer.

Final Exam

Our final exam will be held on **Decemeber 9 at 12pm**. It will consist of short essay questions asking you to summarize and explain the arguments of the various authors discussed in the course. Grading be will be based upon how clearly, accurately, and charitably you can recall the relevant arguments. You will not be required to develop any original arguments or insights on the final exam. (That's for the papers!)

Argument Outlines

Starting when our properly ethical readings begin, before every class period, you will be required to submit a short outline of the central argument presented in the course reading for the day via Sakai. Your outline must be presented in numbered format, with the author's central conclusion and premises clearly indicated. Supporting arguments for the author's premises and subpremises should be included and indented beneath the premises they support. For example, if author S argues that Cleopatra killed Xerxes on the grounds that only Cleopatra and Helen could have done so and it couldn't have been Helen because she was seen in Crete at the time, you might outline the argument as:

1. Either Cleopatra or Helen killed Xerxes.
2. Helen did not kill Xerxes.
 - Helen was in Crete at the time of the killing.
 - Helen was seen by a witness in Crete.
 - The killer of Xerxes could not have been in Crete at the time.
3. Thus, Cleopatra killed Xerxes.

The goal is to lay bare the overall logical structure of the arguments we encounter throughout the course. Grading will be based on completion, though you want to strive for thoroughness, charity, and accuracy in summarizing the authors' arguments as well. You may miss three outlines without penalty. We will discuss this aspect of the course more in class, but feel free to reach out to me with any questions about argument outlines!

Participation

Participation credit can be earned by (i) attending lectures, (ii) thoughtfully participating in class discussions, and (iii) attending office hours. Students are expected to attend lectures, though two classes may be missed without penalty to a student's participation score. Students are encouraged to participate actively in course discussions by asking questions, raising objections, or presenting their own ideas. It is very natural to feel apprehensive or intimidated about speaking during class. (I often felt this way in my philosophy classes!) If you have any concerns about classroom participation, please feel free to come talk with me about it during office hours, both because this is an additional way to earn participation credit outside the classroom and because maybe we can find ways to make classroom discussion seem less formidable.

Every voice is welcome in our classroom and students should feel free to raise any questions or thoughts they may have regarding course material during our class discussions. However, every student is expected to respect the

bounds of kindness and respect for their peers during these discussions. (Avoid interrupting, rude language, insults, etc.) Conducting oneself with honesty and compassion is essential to good participation in the discussion and debate of controversial moral topics.

Grade Scale

A: 94-100	A-: 90-93	B+: 87-89	B: 83-86	B-: 80-82
C+: 77-79	C: 73-76	C-: 70-72	D+: 67-69	D: 60-66
F: <60				

If you have any questions about your grade at any point in the course, please don't hesitate to ask!

Late Policy

Late papers (including drafts and outlines) will be downgraded by ten points for every 24 hours past their due dates. (This excludes papers that are late due to university-approved or otherwise serious reasons brought to my attention in a timely manner.)

Syllabus Changes

The professor 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.

Attendance Policy

University 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
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).

Class Policy: Aside from the exceptions referenced above, attendance is expected of all students and will contribute toward your grade via your participation score. That said, I understand if you need to miss class occasionally for a reason that does not fall under the University approved list. In these cases, feel free to reach out to me and let me know that you won't be able to make it to class. Then we can work together to make sure the absence won't negatively affect your participation grade.

Honor Code

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 the Honor Code, please see me or consult studentconduct.unc.edu.

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.

Accessibility Resources and Services

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, including mental health disorders, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

Counseling and Psychological Services

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 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 their website <https://caps.unc.edu/> 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 and Related 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 at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Course Outline

Note: all assignments are due by the start of class on the days listed.

Week:	Topic:
Aug 21	Introduction I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus review, What is ethics?
Aug 23	Introduction II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophical method and writing, Logic • “Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments” by E.J. Coffman
Aug 25	Introduction III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlining arguments (cont.)
Aug 28	Class Cancelled
Aug 30	Class Cancelled
Sept 1	Moral Theory I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory of Value • “What Makes a Person’s Life Go Best?” by Derek Parfit
Sept 4	Labor Day: No Class
Sept 6	Moral Theory I (cont.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory of Value • “What Makes a Person’s Life Go Best?” by Derek Parfit
Sept 8	Moral Theory II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory of Right Conduct • “Moral Theory” by Julia Driver
Sept 11	Moral Theory VI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral methodology and reflective equilibrium • <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (selections) by John Rawls • “Introduction” from <i>Philosophical Papers</i> by David Lewis

Week:	Topic:
Sept 13	Class Cancelled
Sept 15	Doing vs Allowing I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a moral difference between killing and letting die? • “Active and Passive Euthanasia” by James Rachels • “Is Killing No Worse than Letting Die?” by William Nesbitt
Sept 18	Doing vs Allowing II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Trolley Problem” by Judith Thomson
Sept 20	Doing vs Allowing III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing” by Warren Quinn
Sept 22	Double Effect II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Deontology/Agents and Victims” by Thomas Nagel
Sept 25	Well-being Day: No Class
Sept 27	Double Effect I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Action, Intention and ‘Double Effect’” by Elizabeth Anscombe
Sept 29	Conference Travel: Class Cancelled
Oct 2	Double Effect IV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The doctrine of triple effect and why a rational agent need not intend the means to his end” by Frances Kamm
Oct 4	Do the Numbers Count? I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Should the Numbers Count?” by John Taurek
Oct 6	Do the Numbers Count? II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Innumerate Ethics” by Derek Parfit
Oct 9	Capital Punishment I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the death penalty morally justified? An affirmative case • “A Defense of the Death Penalty” by Louis Pojman

Week:	Topic:
Oct 11	<p>Capital Punishment II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the death penalty morally justified? A negative case • “Why We Should Put the Death Penalty to Rest” by Stephen Nathanson
Oct 13	<p>Midterm Paper Work Session</p>
Oct 16	<p>Abortion I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the right to bodily autonomy justify abortion? An affirmative case • “A Defense of Abortion” by Judith Jarvis Thomson
Oct 18	<p>Abortion II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the right to bodily autonomy justify abortion? A negative case • “Fetuses, Orphans, and a Famous Violinist: On the Ethics and Politics of Abortion” by Gina Schouten
Oct 20	<p>Fall Break: No Class</p>
Oct 23	<p>Abortion III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the human fetus have a right to life? A negative case • “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion” by Mary Anne Warren
Oct 25	<p>Abortion IV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the human fetus have a right to life? An affirmative case • “Why Abortion Is Immoral” by Don Marquis
Oct 27	<p>Abortion V</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the human fetus have a right to life? Another negative case • “Abortion and Infanticide” by Michael Tooley

Week:	Topic:
Oct 30	<p>Abortion VI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the human fetus have a right to life? Another affirmative case • “I Was Once a Fetus: That Is Why Abortion is Wrong” by Alexander Pruss • Final Paper Topic Selection Due!!
Nov 1	<p>Animal Ethics I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is speciesism immoral? An affirmative case • “Speciesism and Moral Status” by Peter Singer
Nov 3	<p>PPE Conference: No Class</p>
Nov 6	<p>Animal Ethics II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is speciesism immoral? A negative case • “What’s Wrong with Speciesism?” by Shelly Kagan
Nov 8	<p>Animal Ethics III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do non-human animals have rights? A positive case • “The Case for Animal Rights” by Tom Regan • Final Paper Outline Due!!
Nov 10	<p>Animal Ethics IV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do non-human animals have rights? A negative case • “Against the Moral Standing of Animals” by Peter Carruthers
Nov 13	<p>Animal Ethics V</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is animal experimentation in medicine justified? A negative case • “The Commonsense Case against Animal Experimentation” by Mylan Engel
Nov 15	<p>Animal Ethics VI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is animal experimentation in medicine justified? An affirmative case • “Defending Animal Research: An International Perspective” by Baruch Brody • Final Paper Rough Draft Due!!

Week:	Topic:
Nov 17	<p>Procreation I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should children be genetically selected/engineered? An affirmative case • “Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children” by Julian Savulescu
Nov 20	<p>Peer Review Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Review Reports Due!!
Nov 22	<p>Thanksgiving: No Class</p>
Nov 24	<p>Thanksgiving: No Class</p>
Nov 27	<p>Procreation II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should children be genetically selected/engineered? A negative case • “The Case Against Perfection” by Michael Sandel
Nov 29	<p>Procreation III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The non-identity problem or the ‘paradox of future individuals’ • “Five Plausible Premises and One Implausible Conclusion” by David Boonin
Dec 1	<p>Procreation IV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The non-identity problem or the ‘paradox of future individuals’ • “When intuition is not enough. Why the Principle of Procreative Beneficence must work much harder to justify its eugenic vision” by Rebecca Bennett

Week:	Topic:
Dec 4	Final Paper Meetings
Dec 6	Course Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Final Paper Due!!
Dec 9	Final Exam, 12pm