

PHIL362 Contemporary Ethical Theory

UNC Chapel Hill | Spring 2020

Note: This syllabus is updated on March 19, 2020 to reflect the changes made in response to the University's suspension of in-person classes during the COVID-19 outbreak. Most of these changes were made as a result of the class discussion on online transitioning on March 19, 2020.

Instructor: Minji Jang (jangmj@live.unc.edu)

Class Meetings: T/TH 9:30am-10:45am in Wilson Hall 217

Office Hours: T/TH 11:00am-12:00pm or by appointment in Caldwell Hall 206A

1. Course Description

In this seminar, we will investigate convoluted questions surrounding moral responsibility and blame. How should we distinguish moral responsibility from causal responsibility? Are we (ever) justified in ascribing moral responsibility? What constitutes moral blame, and under what conditions (if any) is it justified? What does it take to genuinely forgive someone? What are the distinct values or functions of emotions and reactive attitudes in our lives? We will examine the different answers provided by contemporary moral philosophers to these questions.

2. Target Audience and Course Expectations

This is an *advanced* undergraduate seminar designed for students who have taken at least one prior philosophy course (though not necessarily a course in ethics or moral psychology).

You will examine some of the key ideas and topics in contemporary debates on moral responsibility, form your own positive views on these issues, and practice effectively defending your views in writing and speech. One of the expectations in this course is that you will produce a piece of work that you can submit to an undergraduate journal or a conference in philosophy or that you might use as a writing sample for a philosophy networking workshop. With that in mind, you will write a final research paper that is longer than a typical length.

3. Course Requirements and Assessments

The requirements for this course are as follows.

Due Date	Assignment	Percentage
Daily	Attendance and Participation	10%
Daily	Reading Quiz	10%
TBD	Two Reading Responses	20% (10% each)
2/21 (Fri)	Midterm Paper	20%
5/1 (Fri)	Final Research Paper	40%

Attendance and Participation (10%)

You'll meet this requirement *in part* by attending class regularly. But you'll also need to regularly participate in discussion and in-class group activities to get full points. There will be *alternative* ways of earning participation points; we will discuss a specific guideline for these assignments in class.

Cold-calling

In class, I will occasionally “cold-call” you and ask if you would like to contribute your thoughts. You can always feel free to “skip” a particular question, or “opt-out” of being cold-called at any point during the semester for a particular class, a unit, or the entire semester.

Mid-semester estimates and self-evaluation

In the mid-semester, you and I will each release an *estimate* of your participation grade—this does not count toward your overall grade and only serves to give you a sense of how you've been doing so far. If there is a gap between my estimate and yours, or if what you see is not the grade you expected or wanted, come talk to me and we'll discuss the ways to boost your participation grade.

Note: Since March 19, there will be two ways of attending & participating in class.

In response to the University's suspension of in-person meetings, we will continue to have *live* Zoom meetings for lectures and discussions during our regular class periods (9:30-10:45am EST).

If you, for any reason, cannot attend a live class meeting, you should watch the recording of the live streaming and answer the question(s) posed during the meeting on Sakai's discussion forum. You won't be able to write on the forum until you submit your first entry, so only those of you who watched that day's recording can know what question(s) to answer. Your forum post will then count as your attendance and participation. (You can of course participate in the forum even when you attended the live-streamed class, though it won't be required.)

Reading Quiz (10%)

There will be total of 13 unannounced, reading quizzes administered at the beginning of a class. *You will not know in advance the dates on which these quizzes will be given.* These will be brief, multiple-choice questions that should be easy to answer if you have done the reading.

This assignment aims to give you further incentives to do the readings on time and come to class. I will drop your lowest 3 quiz grades, so the remaining 10 will count toward your grade (each worth 1%). *You can only make up for the missed quizzes if you have a verified, excused absence.*

Note: Since March 19, remaining *reading quizzes* have been replaced by *daily reading reactions*. You only need to have **total 10** passed reading quizzes and reactions, combined, to get full points, so feel free to write as many reactions to the readings as you'd like.

How to Write: Prior to each class meeting where there's a new reading, you'll write a brief reaction (roughly 250 words) to that day's reading. Your reaction should (i) briefly summarize one of the main ideas, claims, or arguments in the reading, and (ii) present a question or a comment about this idea, claim, or argument.

For instance, you can:

- Pose a *clarificatory question* and explain why such clarification might be helpful for understanding/evaluating the author's project;
- Provide an *objection* or a *counterexample* to the author's claim and explain how it might challenge the author;
- Provide an argument or an example that will *strengthen* the author's claim and explain how it might help out the author;
- Or, add a question or a comment that is not meant to achieve these particular goals but you think is still *directly responding* to the author's project. (In such a case, you'll need to tell me why you think it's relevant.)

You can write a reaction to the reading on which you're already assigned to write a reading response, but it will have to be on a *different* point, claim, or an argument.

How to Submit: You'll include your reaction in the body of a message, not as an attachment, and send it to me via Sakai Messages, with the subject line including your Last Name and the Title of the Reading (e.g. Jang, Kelly response), by 9:00pm the night before the day of class on which we'll discuss the reading. For instance, if you'd like to write a reaction on Kelly scheduled to be discussed on Thursday (3/26), you'll need to message me your Kelly reaction by **9pm** Wednesday (3/25). Do not email me your reading reaction, for it might get lost in the sea of emails that I receive daily!

Two Reading Responses (20%; 10% each)

You will write two short reading responses (1.5 to 2.5 double-spaced pages) on the assigned readings over the course of the semester. Your reading response should explain an aspect of the reading that you found interesting (e.g., a particular argument, example, or question) and critically respond to it. A specific guideline for this assignment, along with the schedule, will be posted on Sakai. *Your reading responses are due at 5pm on the day before class on which we'll discuss the assigned reading.*

Midterm Paper (20%)

You will write a midterm paper (1500-2000 words \approx 5-6 double-spaced pages) on one of the given prompts. It will be due Friday, 2/21. While this is not a required step for this assignment, I *strongly* encourage you to have at least one individual meeting with me to discuss your paper ideas, preferably in the earlier stages of writing.

Final Research Paper (40%)

You will write a final paper (2500-3000 words \approx 8-10 double-spaced pages) on a topic of your choice. You will complete the following four steps to write this paper:

- (1) Initial meeting to discuss ideas. *Due Thursday 3/26*. You will first have an individual meeting with me to discuss your ideas for a potential topic for your paper. You should come to the meeting having carefully thought about what you want to write about.
- (2) Abstract submission. *Due Friday 3/27, 5pm*. You will write an abstract of your paper (200-250 words), explaining the issue(s) you plan to discuss and what you plan to argue.

(3) Initial draft submission. *Due Friday 4/10, 5pm*. You will write and submit a complete, initial draft of the paper. I will send you detailed comments on your draft.

(4) Final draft submission. *Due Friday 5/1, 5pm*. You will revise the draft based on my comments and submit the final draft.

Provided that you complete the first three steps of the process by the due dates above, your grade for your final paper will be determined solely by the final step (i.e., the final submission).

Note: Since March 19, your paper grades have been adjusted as follows. If your grade on the midterm paper is *higher* than your grade on the final paper, your midterm paper and final paper will each be worth 30% of your grade. If your grade on the midterm paper is *not higher* than your grade on the final paper, your midterm paper will be worth 20% of your grade, and your final paper 40%.

4. Other Class Policies

Anonymous grading

I will grade your reading responses and papers *anonymously*. To ensure this, please do not include your name anywhere in the paper. Instead, please include your PID number *both* in the title of the file *and* in the upper right-hand corner of the header. You will also use a standard format for all of your papers (1-inch margin, 12 pt, Times New Roman, double-spaced), for a distinctive style might threaten anonymity.

Extensions and late policy

For papers, I will usually grant you an extension if you make a reasonable request *in advance* of the deadline. A late assignment without an extension granted in advance will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for each calendar day that it is late (or part of a day).

Electronics

Electronic devices—laptops and tablets, but *no phones*—are allowed in class for accessing the electronic copies of the readings and note-taking. However, I reserve the right to rescind this permission if they become a distraction. Whether you bring a laptop to class or not, you should bring paper and a pen in order to complete in-class exercises and activities.

Plagiarism and the Honor Code

You are expected to abide by UNC's Honor Code, and refrain from any kind of academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism. At UNC, plagiarism is defined as "deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise." This includes *unintentionally* stealing another person's work or failing to give credit to someone else's idea *by accident*.

Just as you are bound by the Honor Code not to plagiarize, I am bound by it to report suspected cases of academic dishonesty of any kind to the Honor Court. If you are ever in any doubt as to whether something constitutes plagiarism, check with me first!

5. Commitment to Safe Learning & Resources

Together as a class, we are committed to creating a safe learning environment for everyone involved, irrespective of their ability, age, economic status, ethnicity, first language, gender expression and identity, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexuality. Personal offenses or discriminatory remarks toward others on any of these bases will not be tolerated in class under any circumstances.

During the semester, we will have *anonymous climate surveys* to ensure that everyone feels welcomed and respected during class discussions and lectures. If you have any concerns about the learning environment at any time during the semester, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Accessibility Resources & Service

If you need special accommodations for class assignments, please register with the Accessibility Resources & Service Office (<https://ars.unc.edu/>). Once I receive an official request from the ARS Office, I'd be happy to make the arrangements.

Writing Center

To ensure the anonymous grading, I will not read the paper drafts. But you can always set up an appointment with one of the coaches at the UNC Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/>) to improve your paper at any stages of writing—from brainstorming, to polishing a full draft.

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS (<https://caps.unc.edu/>) 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, both for short-term and long-term needs.

6. Reading Schedule (Subject to change)

Week 1:

- 1/9 Thurs: Introduction

Unit 1. Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Week 2:

- 1/14 Tues: Harry Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” (1969)
- 1/16 Thurs: Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” (1971)

Week 3:

- 1/21 Tues: Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck” in *Mortal Questions* (1979)
- 1/23 Thurs: Susan Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility” (1988)

Week 4:

- 1/28 Tues: Peter Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment” (1962)
- 1/30 Thurs: Marina Oshana, “Ascriptions of Responsibility” (1997)

Unit 2. Faces of Moral Responsibility

Week 5:

- 2/4 Tues: Gary Watson, “Two Faces of Responsibility” (1996)
- 2/6 Thurs: David Shoemaker, “Attributability, Answerability, and Accountability: Toward a Wider Theory of Moral Responsibility” (2011)

Week 6:

- 2/11 Tues: Cheshire Calhoun, “Responsibility and Reproach” (1989)

Unit 3. Ignorance and Excuses

- 2/13 Thurs: Gideon Rosen, “Skepticism about Moral Responsibility” (2004)

Week 7:

- 2/18 Tues: Michele Moody-Adams, “Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance” (1994)
- 2/20 Thurs: Robert Adams, “Involuntary Sins” (1985)
- **2/21 Fri: Midterm paper due!**

Unit 4. Blame and Reactive Attitudes

Week 8:

- 2/25 Tues: T.M. Scanlon, excerpt from *Moral Dimensions* (2008)
- 2/27 Thurs: Susan Wolf, “Blame, Italian Style” (2010)

Week 9:

- 3/3 Tues: Macalester Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique” (2012)
- 3/5 Thurs: Macalester Bell, “A Woman's Scorn: Toward a Feminist Defense of Contempt as a Moral Emotion” (2005)

Week 10:

- 3/6 Fri through 3/15 Sun: *Spring break – no class!*

Week 11:

- 3/17 Tues and 3/19 Thurs: *Extended spring break due to COVID-19 – no class!*

Unit 5. Civic and Criminal Responsibility

Week 12:

- 3/24 Tues: Tommy Shelby, “Crime” from *Dark Gbetos* (2016)
- 3/26 Thurs: Erin Kelly, “Desert and Fairness in Criminal Justice” (2012)
- **3/26 Thurs: Initial meeting for final paper due!**
- **3/27 Fri: Abstract for final paper due!**

Unit 6. Forgiveness

Week 13:

- 3/31 Tues: Cheshire Calhoun, “Changing One’s Heart” (1992)
- 4/2 Thurs: Pamela Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness” (2001)

Unit 7. Blame and Moral Protest

Week 14:

- 4/7 Tues: Bernard Boxill, “Self-Respect and Protest” (1976)
- 4/9 Thurs: Matthew Talbert, “Moral Competence, Moral Blame, and Protest” (2012)
- **4/10 Fri: Initial draft of final paper due!**

Unit 8. Responsibility for Beliefs and Implicit Bias

Week 15:

- 4/14 Tues: Pamela Hieronymi, “Responsibility for Believing” (2008)
- 4/16 Thurs: Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder, “Doxastic Wronging” (2019)

Week 16:

- 4/21 Tues: Robin Zheng, “Attributability, Accountability, and Implicit Bias” (2019)
- 4/23 Thurs: Wrap-up session!

Week 17:

- **5/1 Fri, 11:59pm: Final draft of final paper due!**