

# PHIL 362: The Nature of Morality

**Instructor:**

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Caldwell 210B

Office Hours: M 11:30 AM-12:30 PM, R 2:30-3:30 PM (or by appointment)

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## Course Description

This course is a survey seminar in metaethics. Metaethics is the area of moral philosophy that has to do with the nature of morality. Metaethics deals with questions such as: Is morality objective? Is there really such a thing as right and wrong? Does our moral discourse express beliefs or just feelings? Do our moral judgments necessarily motivate us to act?

We will begin the course by discussing a variety of challenges to the view that morality is objective and real. We will then consider a variety of views that attempt to vindicate the objectivity and reality of morality. Finally, we will examine some issues surrounding moral motivation.

Class meetings will proceed through a mix of lecture and discussion, and participation will be a significant component of the course. Students will complete writing assignments directed toward both understanding the various issues discussed in the course and becoming proficient in clear, concise philosophical argumentation.

At least one prior course in philosophy will be required for enrollment.

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## Course Requirements

Three short papers (600-800 words each): 30%

Expanded final paper (1200-1600 words): 30%

In-class presentation: 20%

Participation: 20%

### 1. Three short papers

Students will write three short (600-800 word) papers over the course of the semester. Each of these papers will be worth 10% of the course grade, for a total of 30%.

## 2. Expanded final paper

At the end of the semester, in lieu of a final exam, students will revise and expand one of the three short papers they wrote during the semester into a longer paper (1200-1600 words) that engages more deeply with its subject matter. With permission from the instructor, students can instead write an entirely new paper of the same length on a different topic from the course. This expanded paper will be worth 30% of the course grade.

## 3. In-class presentation

Each student will give an in-class presentation on one of the assigned readings, introducing the reading and leading class discussion on it. This presentation will be worth 20% of the course grade. Students can choose to present in pairs or on their own.

## 4. Participation

Because philosophical discussion is essential to understanding course material, participation will be a significant component of the course (20% of the course grade). Students are expected to carefully read the material assigned for each class in advance and arrive prepared to participate in discussions of that material. Although attendance is required, even perfect attendance is not sufficient for a grade of A in participation. Students must not only attend class but regularly make valuable contributions to class discussions in order to earn an A in participation. Contributions to class discussions will be evaluated on the basis of frequency, constructiveness and respectfulness. Other forms of participation, such as attending office hours, will also be taken into consideration.

Students who feel that regular participation in group discussions will not be possible for them should contact the instructor with their concerns. Alternative methods of participation will be accommodated for such students to the best of the instructor's ability.

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## Course Policies

### 1. Late papers

Each student will be given one "free late day," to be used once in the course, whenever the student requests it. Otherwise, unless special permission is obtained from the instructor **at least 24 hours before the due date**, late papers will not be accepted without a penalty. Permission will only be given in the event of unforeseen circumstances that prevent the student from completing the paper on time. In the event of such circumstances, the student is responsible for providing suitable documentation to the instructor. When a paper is turned in late without prior permission from the instructor,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a letter grade will be deducted from that paper's grade for each calendar day that the paper is late.

## **2. Academic Honesty**

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 in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.” All students are expected to adhere to the UNC Honor Code, and plagiarism will be punished as severely as the university allows.

In general, using anyone else’s words in papers is discouraged in this course. If quoting from assigned readings is necessary in a paper, all quotations must appear in quotation marks, and an internal citation (such as a footnote or endnote) indicating their source must be provided in a standard format. It is also a form of plagiarism to closely paraphrase text from an external source, changing a few of the words but imitating the sentence/paragraph structure of the external source. Text that appears outside of quotation marks in a paper must be the student’s own words, and those words must be presented within the student’s own organizational and sentential structure.

In addition, plagiarism can be committed non-deliberately; if one is reckless in one’s use of other people’s words or ideas, then one has committed plagiarism even if one did not intend to do so. In borderline cases, students should err on the side of consulting the instructor, instead of hoping that they are not committing plagiarism. Students should also contact the instructor with any other questions or concerns about plagiarism-related issues.

## **3. Non-Discrimination**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is committed to equality of educational opportunity. The University does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of race, color, gender, age, national origin, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

In addition, the instructor is committed to making the classroom a safe space for all students. Personal attacks or discriminatory treatment of others will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

## **4. Accommodations**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. If you have need of these services, please visit <http://accessibility.unc.edu>, call 919-962-8300 or email [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu). Please contact ARS as early in the term as possible.

## Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to revision. Readings may be added, removed and/or adjusted at the instructor's discretion. Any such changes will be announced both in class and via e-mail. Otherwise, students should come to class each day having read the reading assigned for that day.

There is no assigned textbook. All course readings will be posted on Sakai.

Agenda	Reading	Assignments
Week 1: Introduction	van Roojen, "What Metaethics Is" Sayre-McCord, "Metaethics" (selections)	
<b>Unit I: Anti-realist Challenges to Morality</b>		
Week 2: Error Theory	Mackie, <i>Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong</i> (selections) Cuneo, <i>The Normative Web</i> (selections)	
Week 3: Evolutionary Debunking	Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value" Vavova, "Debunking Evolutionary Debunking"	Paper 1 assigned
Week 4: Expressivism	Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" Schroeder, "What is the Frege-Geach Problem?"	
Week 5: Quasi-realism	Blackburn, "Anti-realist Expressivism and Quasi-realism" Dreier, "Metaethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism"	Paper 1 due
<b>Unit II: Varieties of Moral Realism</b>		
Week 6: Reductive Naturalism	Railton, "Moral Realism" Moore, <i>Principia Ethica</i> (selections) McPherson, "Semantic Challenges to Normative Realism" (selections)	
Week 7: Non-reductive Naturalism	Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist" Horgan and Timmons, "New Wave Moral Realism meets Moral Twin Earth"	
Week 8: Constructivism	Korsgaard, <i>The Sources of Normativity</i> (selections) Enoch, "Agency, Shmagency"	Paper 2 assigned
Week 9: Quietism	Scanlon, <i>What We Owe To Each Other</i> (selections) McPherson "Against Quietist Normative Realism"	
Week 10: Robust Realism	Enoch, "An Outline of an Argument for Robust Metanormative Realism"	Paper 2 due

	Worsnip, “Explanatory Indispensability and Deliberative Indispensability”	
<b>Unit III: Moral Motivation</b>		
Week 11: Internalism and Externalism about Reasons	Williams, “Internal and External Reasons” McDowell, “Might There Be External Reasons?”	
Week 12: Internalism and Externalism about Motivation	Smith, <i>The Moral Problem</i> (selections) Shafer-Landau, <i>Moral Realism</i> (selections)	Paper 3 assigned
Week 13: Morally Worthy Motivations	Markovits, “Acting for the Right Reasons” Sliwa, “Praise Without Perfection: A Dilemma for Right-Making Reasons”	
Week 14: The Limits of Morality	Williams, “Persons, Character, and Morality” Wolf, “Moral Saints”	Paper 3 due
Week 15: Course Wrap-up	No new reading	Final paper assigned