

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



*The Remorse of the Emperor Nero after the Murder of his Mother* - John William Waterhouse (1878)

## INSTRUCTOR

Simone Gubler

## CONTACT

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## LECTURE TIMES

12:20PM - 1:10PM

## LECTURE LOCATION

GM210

## OFFICE HOURS

Wednesday and Friday 10AM-11AM

## OFFICE LOCATION

Caldwell 214A

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is the good life? If I want to live well, should I pursue happiness, wealth, fast cars, love, lust, religious devotion, learning... and/or should I get a dog?

How should I act? When faced with morally significant choices, what should I do? Is moral practice about obeying rules, generating good outcomes, or cultivating character?

In this class, we will tackle these questions—questions about how we should live, and what we should do—systematically. We will begin by familiarizing ourselves with the major theoretical traditions in ethics: utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics (as well as with one anti-theoretical tradition: particularism). Then, we will move to engage with recent philosophical debates that both highlight differences among the competing ethical theories and provoke worries about their ability to account for the complexity of moral experience.

By the end of this course, students will have:

- Developed familiarity with the subject-matter and landscape of moral theory
- Engaged with contemporary debates in moral theory
- Practiced applying moral theories (and anti-theories) to problems of individual conduct
- Laid the groundwork for reflective careers as moral saints or monsters

## POLICIES

### Office Hours

All students are encouraged to visit me during my office hours. I want each of you to come at least once, early on in the semester, so that I can get to know you. In the first class, I will pass around a sign-up sheet, so that you can make an appointment to meet with me in Week Two. After that, you are welcome to drop by at any time during office hours, or by appointment as necessary. Office hours represent a good opportunity to discuss any questions you might have in relation to the course, as well as to troubleshoot any challenges that threaten your academic success.

### Readings

All assigned readings are compulsory. The readings may be found on Sakai. Readings consist of edited extracts from longer works, so be sure to use the versions on Sakai in preparation for class.

### Disabilities

Accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. If you think that you are likely to need accommodations, please contact Accessibility, Resources and Service (details here: <https://ars.unc.edu/accommodations>), and present your Accommodation Letter to me as soon as possible.

### Academic Honesty

Many norms will be in question in this course. One community standard that will not be up for debate, however, is academic honesty. All students must familiarize themselves with the Honor Code, and observe it scrupulously in all coursework. Suspected violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct.

### Electronic Devices

No phones are to be used during class time. Use of other electronic devices is discouraged. Electronic devices are distracting - not merely for you, but for the people around you. A bonus: studies suggest that you'll enjoy better recall if you take notes by hand (see for example: <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/>).

### Charity

Some of the ideas that we'll deal with in this class are likely to seem very odd to you. You might even want to reject them outright. That's perfectly normal. When we encounter new or unfamiliar ideas and arguments, especially when they seem to threaten our standard ways of thinking about things, there's a strong impulse to reject them. But the art of being a good philosopher is, in part, the art of pushing through (and then rationally investigating) that initial reaction of repulsion to a strange idea. So, to that end, let's operate according to a guiding principle: 'the principle of charity':

*"The principle of charity governs the interpretation of the beliefs and utterances of others. It urges charitable interpretation, meaning interpretation that maximizes the truth or rationality of what others think and say"*

*- R. Feldman, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

I'd like us to follow this principle in all of our work in this class — in our interactions with each other, with invited guests, as well as with the ideas in the set readings.

So, when someone makes an argument or claim:

- Start from the assumption that the person is rational and is trying to communicate something interesting and meaningful to you.
- Be generous: try to give the best possible interpretation to their statement.
- Be patient: avoid attributing wrongness or confusion until you've carefully considered whether a relevant insight may be derived from their statement.

## ASSESSMENT

### Short Discussion Paper - The Grand Inquisitor (2-3 pages)

**15%** Prompt will be posted on Sakai on Monday, January 13th. Due in class on January the 27th.

### In-Class Reading Quizzes

**10%** These five quizzes contain questions that anyone who has done their reading should be able to address. When will I give them? Only time (and diligent class attendance) will tell!

### Group Exercise: Introduce a major figure

**10%** You will be assigned to groups in class on January the 13th. Each group will be given a thinker to formally introduce to the class. When we arrive at the first reading for your assigned figure, your group will make a powerpoint presentation to the class, engagingly identifying arguments and ideas that distinguish your thinker's contribution to moral theory.

### Midterm Take-home Exam

**30%** The take-home exam will be distributed in class on the 28th of February and will cover all material up to that date. Answers are due in class on the 2nd of March.

### Final Paper (8 pages)

**35%** Topics for the final paper will be distributed on the 16th of March. This assignment has two components.

1. You are to produce a 2 page blueprint for the paper, including a topic sentence, paragraph by paragraph argument plan and an annotated bibliography. The blueprint is worth 1/4 of the final paper grade. It is due on the 30th of March. You will receive feedback on the 8th of April.
2. The final 8 page paper is due on Sakai, on Thursday, April 30th.

### Attendance

Attendance is compulsory. Each student is permitted a maximum of two unexplained absences. Each further unexplained absence will result in a 2% reduction in the overall course grade.

## ASSESSMENT

### Extra Credit

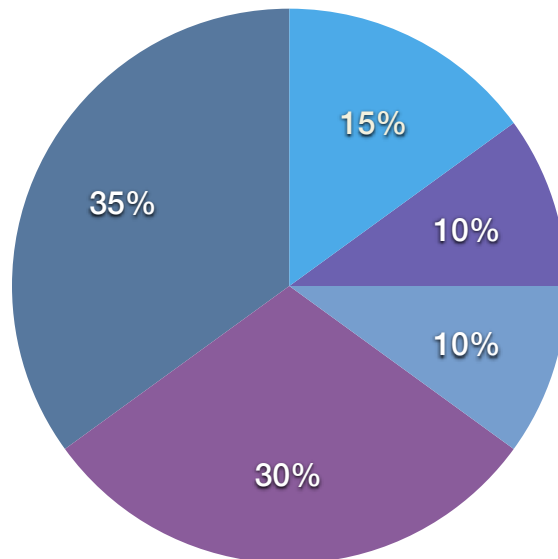
2%

Your education does not end at the classroom doors. As an incentive to participate in, and benefit from, the research activity of the university at large, 2% extra credit is on offer to students who attend events that are relevant to this class (1% per event, maximum of two events). There is a list of eligible events on Sakai (you may also apply to the instructor to add an event to the list). You will need to email the instructor a 1-2 paragraph critical summary of the event in order to claim credit for it.

## FINAL GRADE BREAKDOWN

|    |        |    |       |
|----|--------|----|-------|
| A  | 94-100 | A- | 90-93 |
| B+ | 87-89  | B  | 84-86 |
| B- | 80-83  | C+ | 77-79 |
| C  | 74-76  | C- | 70-73 |
| D+ | 67-69  | D  | 64-66 |
| D- | 60-63  | F  | 0-59  |

- Short Essay - 15
- Reading Quizzes - 10
- Group Exercise - 10
- Mid-Term Exam - 30
- Final Paper - 35



**SCHEDULE  
OF CLASSES**

|                                        |                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WEEK ONE<br>Wednesday,<br>January 8    |                                            | <i>Syllabus</i>                                                                                                                                                                     |
| WEEK ONE<br>Friday,<br>January 10      |                                            | <i>The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor</i><br>Fyodor Dostoyevsky                                                                                                                     |
| WEEK TWO<br>Monday,<br>January 13      |                                            | <i>Socrates' Question</i><br>Bernard Williams                                                                                                                                       |
| WEEK TWO<br>Wednesday,<br>January 15   |                                            | <i>Euthyphro</i><br>Plato                                                                                                                                                           |
| WEEK TWO<br>Friday,<br>January 17      |                                            | <i>Trying out One's New Sword</i><br>Mary Midgely                                                                                                                                   |
| WEEK THREE<br>Monday,<br>January 20    | <b>Martin Luther King Day</b>              | <b>No Class</b>                                                                                                                                                                     |
| WEEK THREE<br>Wednesday,<br>January 22 | <b>The Good Life</b>                       | <i>The Hedonic Calculus</i><br>Jeremy Bentham<br><i>Hedonism</i><br>J.S. Mill                                                                                                       |
| WEEK THREE<br>Friday,<br>January 24    |                                            | <i>The Experience Machine</i><br>Robert Nozick                                                                                                                                      |
| WEEK FOUR<br>Monday,<br>January 27     |                                            | <i>Faring Well and Getting What you Want</i><br>Chris Heathwood                                                                                                                     |
| WEEK FOUR<br>Wednesday,<br>January 29  | <b>Short discussion paper due in class</b> | <i>The Elements of Wellbeing</i><br>Brad Hooker                                                                                                                                     |
| WEEK FOUR<br>Friday,<br>January 31     | <b>Utilitarianism</b>                      | <i>Utilitarianism</i><br>J.S. Mill                                                                                                                                                  |
| WEEK FIVE<br>Monday,<br>February 3     |                                            | <i>Playing God</i> (podcast)<br><a href="https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/playing-god">https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/playing-god</a> |

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|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WEEK FIVE<br>Wednesday,<br>February 5   |                                    | Class Visit: Todd May - Ethics and The Good Place                                |
| WEEK FIVE Friday,<br>February 7         |                                    | <i>The Singer Solution to World Poverty</i><br>Peter Singer                      |
| WEEK SIX<br>Monday,<br>February 10      |                                    | <i>Rule-Utilitarianism</i><br>Brad Hooker                                        |
| WEEK SIX<br>Wednesday,<br>February 12   |                                    | <i>Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics</i><br>Julia Driver                      |
| WEEK SIX<br>Friday,<br>February 14      | <b>Problems for Utilitarianism</b> | <i>A Critique of Utilitarianism</i><br>Bernard Williams                          |
| WEEK SEVEN<br>Monday,<br>February 17    |                                    | <i>Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality</i><br>Peter Railton |
| WEEK SEVEN<br>Wednesday,<br>February 19 |                                    | <i>Utility Cascades</i><br>Max Khan Hayward                                      |
| WEEK SEVEN<br>Friday,<br>February 21    | <b>Kant</b>                        | <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i><br>Immanuel Kant                  |
| WEEK EIGHT<br>Monday,<br>February 24    |                                    | <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i><br>Immanuel Kant                  |
| WEEK EIGHT<br>Wednesday,<br>February 26 |                                    | <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i><br>Immanuel Kant                  |
| WEEK EIGHT<br>Friday,<br>February 28    | Mid-term exam distributed          | No reading; in class exercise                                                    |
| WEEK NINE<br>Monday,<br>March 2         | <b>Mid-term exam due in class</b>  | <i>Kant's Formula of Humanity</i><br>Christine Korsgaard                         |
| WEEK NINE<br>Wednesday,<br>March 4      | <b>Agency and Responsibility</b>   | <i>The Trolley Problem</i><br>Judith Jarvis Thomson                              |

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| WEEK NINE<br>Friday,<br>March 6        |                               | <i>Freedom and Resentment</i><br>P.F. Strawson                                |
| WEEK TEN<br>Monday,<br>March 9         | <b>Spring Break</b>           | <b>No Class</b>                                                               |
| WEEK TEN<br>Wednesday,<br>March 11     |                               | <b>No Class</b>                                                               |
| WEEK TEN<br>Friday,<br>March 13        |                               | <b>No Class</b>                                                               |
| WEEK ELEVEN<br>Monday,<br>March 16     |                               | <i>Responsibility and the<br/>Limits of Evil</i><br>Gary Watson               |
| WEEK ELEVEN<br>Wednesday,<br>March 18  | <b>Passion and Desire</b>     | <i>Treatise &amp; Second Enquiry<br/>(excerpts)</i><br>David Hume             |
| WEEK ELEVEN<br>Friday,<br>March 20     |                               | <i>Treatise &amp; Second Enquiry<br/>(excerpts)</i><br>David Hume             |
| WEEK TWELVE<br>Monday,<br>March 23     | <b>Virtue</b>                 | <i>Internal and External Reasons</i><br>Bernard Williams                      |
| WEEK TWELVE<br>Wednesday,<br>March 25  |                               | <i>Modern Moral Philosophy</i><br>Elizabeth Anscombe                          |
| WEEK TWELVE<br>Friday,<br>March 27     |                               | <i>Politics</i> , Book I;<br><i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I<br>Aristotle, |
| WEEK THIRTEEN<br>Monday,<br>March 30   | <b>Blueprint due in class</b> | <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II. 1-6<br>Aristotle                         |
| WEEK THIRTEEN<br>Wednesday,<br>April 1 |                               | <i>Non-Relative Virtues: An<br/>Aristotelian Approach</i><br>Martha Nussbaum  |
| WEEK THIRTEEN<br>Friday,<br>April 3    |                               | <i>Duty, Desire and the Good<br/>Person</i><br>Nomy Arpaly                    |

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| WEEK FOURTEEN<br>Monday,<br>April 6    | <b>Particularism</b>             | <i>Ethics Without Principles</i><br>Jonathan Dancy                                                                 |
| WEEK FOURTEEN<br>Wednesday,<br>April 8 |                                  | <i>Ethics Without Principles</i><br>Jonathan Dancy                                                                 |
| WEEK FOURTEEN<br>Friday,<br>April 10   | <b>Holiday</b>                   | <b>No Class</b>                                                                                                    |
| WEEK FIFTEEN<br>Monday,<br>April 13    | <b>Unsettling Ethical Theory</b> | <i>Vision and Choice in Morality</i><br>Iris Murdoch                                                               |
| WEEK FIFTEEN<br>Wednesday,<br>April 15 |                                  | <i>Murdoch the Explorer</i><br>Cora Diamond                                                                        |
| WEEK FIFTEEN<br>Friday,<br>April 17    | <b>Moral Dilemmas</b>            | <i>Moral Dilemmas</i><br>Walter Sinnott-Armstrong &<br><i>Moral Dilemmas and Consistency</i><br>Ruth Barcan Marcus |
| WEEK SIXTEEN<br>Monday,<br>April 20    |                                  | <i>Moral Dilemmas and Guilt</i><br>Patricia Greenspan                                                              |
| WEEK SIXTEEN<br>Wednesday,<br>April 22 | <b>Moral Luck</b>                | <i>Moral Luck</i><br>Thomas Nagel                                                                                  |
| WEEK SIXTEEN<br>Friday,<br>April 24    |                                  | <i>The Moral of Moral Luck</i><br>Susan Wolf                                                                       |
| EXAM WEEK<br>Monday, April 27          |                                  | <b>No Class</b>                                                                                                    |
| EXAM WEEK<br>Thursday, April 30        | <b>Final Paper Due on Sakai</b>  |                                                                                                                    |