

# Current Value Questions

## Christopher Newport University, Spring 2018

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MEETING Dr. Chris Tweedt Philosophy 304, sec. 1  
INFO 202 McMurrin Hall MWF, 12–12:50 pm  
chris.tweedt@cnu.edu 112 McMurrin Hall  
704.941.9079

TEXTBOOK There is no textbook for this course. Readings are hyperlinked on this syllabus.

OVERVIEW This class is divided into **five sections**.

1. First, I will introduce you to philosophy, how ethics is a discipline of philosophy, and how philosophers throughout history have thought through ethics and its importance for living a good life.
2. Second, we'll discuss whether we can make ethical decisions at all, and, if we can, how we make them. We'll address the view that ethical statements are just opinions that can be neither true nor false, that ethical statements depend on standards we or our culture can create, that we are not in control of our actions and so not responsible, and that all of our supposedly good actions are the result of luck. We'll then discuss how to approach tough ethical decisions, even when we know the outcome will turn out poorly.
3. Third, we'll discuss what makes an action right. Good consequences? Rule-following? Becoming a better person? Or a combination?
4. Fourth, we'll talk about how to put what we've learned into practice. We'll analyze how these ethical principles apply in specific cases: abortion, freedom, privacy, treatment of animals, and treatment of future persons.
5. Last, we'll examine whether God is the source of moral obligations.

SCHEDULE Jan 8-12 **Intro to ethics**

Jan 15-19 **A brief history of western philosophy on ethics**  
Selections from Plato's *Phaedo*

**Special problems and issues in ethics (Metaethics)**

Jan 22-26 **Are there objective moral truths?**  
Selection from A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*  
James Rachel's "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Jan 29-Feb 2 **Free will and moral responsibility**  
"Underdetermination Thesis" in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*  
Galen Strawson's "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility"  
Harry Frankfurt's "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"

Feb 5-9 **Moral luck and moral dilemmas**  
Thomas Nagel's "Moral Luck"

Feb 12-16 **Moral reasoning, Test #1**

**What makes an action right? (normative ethics)**

Feb 19-23 **Utilitarianism**  
Selections from John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*: chapter 2 (the whole thing), then the first 4 paragraphs of chapter 4.

Feb 26-Mar 2 **Deontology, Double Effect, Contractarianism**

Selection from Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: Section I (pages 7-18 in the book's pagination)

Mar 5-9 **Spring Break**

Mar 12-16 **Virtue Ethics, Stoicism, Particularism**

Selections from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: Book I, chapters 1-5, 7-10; Book II (the whole thing)

Selections from Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles*: Book III, ch. 2, 3, 25-37

Epictetus' *Enchiridion*, ch. 1-21

How to be a Stoic, "Seneca on Anger Pt. 1"

**Current ethical questions (applied ethics)**

Mar 19-23 **Test #2, Abortion**

Giubilini and Minerva's "After-birth Abortion: Why Should the Baby Live?"

Judith Jarvis Thomson's "In Defense of Abortion"

Mar 26-30 **Deceit, Freedom, and Privacy**

Chris Tollefsen's TEDx talk on lying

James Rachels' "Why Privacy is Important"

Apr 2-6 **Rights of animals and future persons**

Alastair Norcross' "Puppies, Pigs, and People"

Aaron Griffith's "The Rights of Future Persons and the Ontology of Time"

**What is the source of moral obligations/rights? (Metaethics again)**

Apr 9-13 **Arguments for and against god's existence**

Book I, chapters 1 and 2 from C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*

William Rowe's "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism"

Apr 16-20 **Divine Command Theory, Test #3**

Rough draft of paper due by Apr 18, 5 pm

Christian Miller's "Divine Will Theory: Intentions or Desires?"

Apr 23 **Final** Final draft due by 4:30 pm

EVALUATION 100 points **5 unannounced quizzes**

5 questions each quiz, 4 points for each question  
Short answer questions covering that day's readings and last class  
Given at the beginning of class, picked up 10 minutes later  
You can make up a quiz only if you have a really good excuse.  
You only have 2 calendar days to make up missed quizzes.  
There are no retakes.

300 points **3 tests**

10 questions each test, 10 points for each question  
Short answer questions covering that part of the semester  
Test dates are on the schedule.

100 points **1 paper**

50 points for the draft, 50 points for the final paper  
This is a thesis defense paper with a clear and concise argument.  
1000 words at most for each draft  
I'll show you how to write this paper in class.  
The first draft is graded for its clarity, reasoning, and promise.  
The final draft is graded for how well you respond to comments.  
I'll comment on your draft within 72 hours of when you email it to me.  
You get an automatic 0/100 if you plagiarize or turn in your draft late.  
Due dates are on the schedule.

+/- **Participation**

If you participate in class discussion and you're really close to getting a higher grade, I'll give you the higher grade at the end of the term.

GRADING SCALE	500 > A > 460	449 > B+ > 440	399 > C+ > 390	349 > D+ > 340
	459 > A- > 450	439 > B > 410	389 > C > 360	339 > D > 310
	299 > F > 0	409 > B- > 400	359 > C- > 350	309 > D- > 300

OFFICE HOURS	Monday	Wednesday	Friday	
	11-12 am	11-12 am	11-12 am	
	1-2 pm	1-2 pm	1-2 pm	

**HONOR CODE** By being enrolled in this class, each student is expected to read, understand, and abide by the CNU's honor code. CNU reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct at any time is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. This conduct includes plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes.

**Class Policy:** You'll receive an automatic F in the course if you share test or quiz questions with other students. The purpose of these tests is to, well, test your knowledge. If you allow other students to prepare, it undermines the testing process. If you discover someone sharing questions and report it to me, you will get free ice cream. Also, I'll report all seeming-plagiarism to CHECS and give you a 0 for the assignment. I won't argue with you whether you did it intentionally. We all know how that will go. You'll argue that you didn't mean to do it, just like people who do it intentionally argue. So I'm not even going to ask. Please be intentional about not doing it.

**DISABILITY, ACCOMMODATION** In order for a student to receive an accommodation for a disability, that disability must be on record in the Office of Student Affairs, 3rd Floor, David Student Union (DSU). If you believe that you have a disability, please contact Dr. Kevin Hughes, Vice President of Student Affairs (594-7160) to discuss your needs. Dr. Hughes will provide you with the necessary documentation to give to your professors. Students with documented disabilities are required to notify the instructor no later than the first day on which they require an accommodation (the first day of class is recommended), in private, if accommodation is needed. The instructor will provide students with disabilities with all reasonable accommodations, but students are not exempted from fulfilling the normal requirements of the course. Work completed before the student notifies the instructor of his/her disability may be counted toward the final grade at the sole discretion of the instructor.

**ACADEMIC SUPPORT** The Center for Academic Success (located in Christopher Newport Hall, first floor, room 123) offers free tutoring assistance for Christopher Newport students in several academic areas. Staff in the center offer individual assistance and/or workshops on various study strategies to help you perform your best in your courses. The center also houses the Alice F. Randall Writing Center. Writing consultants can help you at any stage of the writing process, from invention, to development of ideas, to polishing a final draft. The Center is not a proofreading service, but consultants can help you to recognize and find grammar and punctuation errors in your work as well as provide assistance with global tasks. You may visit the Center for Academic Success to request a tutor, meet with a writing consultant, pick up a schedule of workshops, or make an appointment to talk one-on-one with a University Fellow for Student Success. If I become concerned about your course performance, attendance, engagement, or well-being, I will speak with you first. I also may submit a referral through our Captains Care Program. The referral will be received by the Center for Academic Success as well as other departments when appropriate (Counseling Services, Office of Student Engagement). If you are an athlete, the Athletic Academic Support Coordinator will be notified. Someone will contact you to help determine what will help you succeed. Please remember that this is a means for me to support you and help foster your success at Christopher Newport.