

# PHIL 138: Responsibility

T/Th 11am-12:20pm; RWAC 0426

Prof. Manuel Vargas

Winter 2025

## Overview

This is a course on moral (as opposed to legal, causal, and other varieties of) responsibility. We've got two theoretical aims. The first is to familiarize you with some of the major positions among philosophical theories of moral responsibility in both their classical and contemporary forms. The second is to take up the question of whether and how artificial systems (think: AI) might or might not be morally responsible. The course has a variety of practical aims. One of these is to encourage you to think independently about difficult philosophical issues. To that end, critical reflection on the readings is a priority. Second, we hope to refine your philosophical skills, which includes reasoning about abstract issues, formulating arguments and objections, considering imaginative new possibilities, and being able to map and develop novel conceptual possibilities.

Rather than proceeding on a lockstep schedule, we will take as long as we need to work through assigned readings. I anticipate that we will work through roughly 1-3 readings a week, depending on how things go. Also, depending on class interests, we may adjust the projected reading list.

## Contact info

[mrvargas@ucsd.edu](mailto:mrvargas@ucsd.edu)

Office: RWAC- Bldg 1, Arts & Humanities, Floor 4, room 0468

Office hours: T @ 3:30-4pm; Th @ 1-1:50 + by appointment. *Note: If you cannot make scheduled office hours, just send me an email listing three times when you have availability, and I'll do my best to make something work.*

We have the ideal TA for this course: Sam Delorme [sdelorme@ucsd.edu](mailto:sdelorme@ucsd.edu).

There are no sections, but he has office hours if you want to discuss any of the course material or assignments. His office hours are TBA.

## Evaluation

20% In-class writing assignments (we will drop 2 of these)

20% Midterm 1

20% Midterm 2

25% Final exam (comprehensive)

15% Participation

Attendance is expected but not mandatory on any days other than exam days. If you are ill, please stay home. In-class writing assignments are small, in-class writing assignments that will regularly occur over the quarter.

They may be about the reading, but will more frequently be about the ideas discussed in the course.

They are graded on a high pass (100)/pass (85)/low pass (70)/no credit (0) model. Unless otherwise specified, they will be written and submitted in an exam book, that you will purchase in advance.

**(Buy a set of blue/green books in advance!)** Don't worry if you miss one or two of these. We will drop your lowest two scores, on the understanding that everyone will have good reasons for missing a class meeting for illness, an emergency, or some other unanticipated reason. If you have a good reason for missing more than two in-class writing assignments, please be in contact with the TA.

Exams are all in-class, by longhand, using exam books (blue or green is fine).

## Readings

Readings are available through Canvas. Readings provide the background context for the lectures, but class meetings will often be focused on the ideas discussed in the readings, and only secondarily on the readings themselves.

## Tech, slides, etc.

- This class is intentionally low tech. Phones should be in pockets or bags, and use of technology is generally discouraged.
- When slides are used for lectures, they will be posted later in the week on canvas (not before, as this precludes Socratic-style education).
- Given that this class covers race/class/gender content as well as controversial topics about morality, recording the contents would undermine the quality of discussion, making it ill-suited for podcasting. Therefore, recording is not permitted without explicit prior authorization by the instructor.
- Use of AI, ChatGPT, and equivalent for evaluated work is not permitted and grounds for automatically failing the course.

## Provisional Schedule

Read the articles *prior* to the date of the class meeting.

<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Introduction, theoretical options</b>
1/7	Intro, theoretical options, logistical matters
1/9	Hieronymi, P (2022) Agency and Responsibility
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Consequentialism and reactions</b>
1/14	Schlick, M (1939) When is Man Responsible?
1/16	Strawson, PF (1962) Freedom and Resentment
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>tbd</b>
1/21	
1/23	
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>tbd</b>
1/28	
1/30	<b>MIDTERM 1 [in class]</b>
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>tbd</b>
2/4	
2/6	
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>tbd</b>
2/11	
2/13	
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>tbd</b>
2/18	<b>M AWAY</b> ; guest lecture or asynch (tbd)
2/20	

**Week 8 Start AI readings if we haven't already**

2/25

2/27 **MIDTERM 2 [in class]**

**Week 9 tbd**

3/4

3/6

**Week 10 tbd**

3/11

3/13 Last day to submit any other (i.e., non-final-exam) work for the course.

**Finals week**

3/20 (Th) **11:30am-2:29pm FINAL EXAM (PHIL 138)**

**Reading list** (provisional, subject to updating; we are unlikely to read all of this)

Introduction

1. Hieronymi, P (2022) Agency and Responsibility

Basic theoretical options

1. Schlick, M (1939) When is Man Responsible?
2. Strawson, PF (1962) Freedom and Resentment
3. Frankfurt, H (1969) Alternative Possibilities
4. Frankfurt, H (1971) Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person
5. Wolf, S (1987) Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility
6. Strawson, G (1994) The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility

Contemporary self-expression/identificationist views

1. Sripada, C (2015) Self-Expression
2. Sripada, C (2016) Free Will and the Construction of Options
3. Gorman, A (2022) Demystifying the Deep Self View

Contemporary RR views

1. McKenna, M (2013) Reason-Responsiveness, Agents, and Mechanisms
2. Nelkin and Vargas (2024) Responsibility and Reasons-Responsiveness

Instrumentalisms

1. Vargas "Instrumentalist Approaches to Moral Responsibility"
2. McGeer (2025) "The 'Intelligent' Capacitarian Approach to Responsible Agency"
3. Jefferson & Siffer (2024) "Responsible Agency and Moral Audience"
4. Moody and Nojournian (2024) What is Blame Good For
5. Murray, S (2024) Negligence and Self Trust

Artificial intelligence and responsibility

1. Matthias, A (2004) The Responsibility Gap

2. Tigard, D (2020) There is no techno-responsibility gap
3. Tigard, D (2021) Artificial Moral Responsibility
4. Tigard, D (2021) Responsible AI and Moral Responsibility
5. Gogoshin, DL (2021) Robot Responsibility and Moral Community
6. Vallor and Ganesh (2023) AI and the Imperative of Responsibility
7. Gogoshin, DL (2024) A way forward for responsibility in the age of AI
8. Vallor and Vierkant (2024) Finding the Gap: AI, Reactive Attitudes, and Vulnerability
9. Veluwenkamp & Hindriks (2024) AA Responsibility Control Gaps

## **General Information**

### *Student drop-in hours/office hours*

Office hours are listed under contact information. Alternatively, you can email me to set up an appointment to meet for individual or small group office hours.

### *Email Policy*

The instructors and instructional assistants for this course are happy to reply to emails sent from UCSD email addresses. We do not reply to emails from non-UCSD addresses. Please note that there are two subjects the instructor will not discuss by email, even if they are sent from a UCSD account. These are:

- a) Requests for information about the exam or final assignment that arrive in the 24-hour period immediately preceding the exam.
- b) Requests to adjust your final class grade. If you have an issue with your grade please make an appointment to discuss it during my office hour next quarter.

### *Missed exams*

There is no opportunity to make up exams. A missed midterm exam will entail that the score on the next exam is applied to both the missed exam and the exam that was taken. However, failure to take the final exam, and/or failure to have taken at least one midterm, will constitute a failure to pass the course.

### *Evaluation*

Assignments and their weights are expected to be as stipulated on the first day of class, but the instructor retains the right to make changes to the syllabus. If so, notification of those changes will be provided in advance.

### *Regrading*

There is no option to regrade final exams, final assignments, or to complete assignments for bonus points. However, for students unhappy with their grade for non-final TA-graded assignments can apply to have it re-graded. There is a process to this. First, students must arrange a face-to-face meeting (zoom is fine) with their grader to discuss the basis for the original grade. Please note that email is not an acceptable substitute, and no regrading will occur without an initial face-to-face meeting. If the student and grader come to an agreement on the merit of the initial grade, or on an adjusted grade resulting from their meeting, no further student action is required. If the student still prefers a re-grade, he or she should provide the professor with the originally submitted work for re-evaluation.

For a re-grade to occur the professor will need to receive the submission within two weeks of the original assignment, or before the end of week 10, whichever is sooner. Whatever grade the second grader gives the essay will be the final grade, even if it is lower than the original grader's grade. The professor reserves the right to review and decide any re-grade cases.

### *Disabilities*

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please contact me privately) and to the OSD Liaison in the department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged. Contact the OSD for further information: 858.534.4382 (phone), osd@ucsd.edu (email), [disabilities.ucsd.edu](http://disabilities.ucsd.edu) (web).

### *Academic Integrity*

Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. Plagiarism in this course is ordinarily grounds for failing this course. For more information about UCSD's policy on academic integrity go to: <http://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/appendices/2>

### *Slides, handouts, etc.*

Any handouts, slides, or the like that are used in class and that have substantive content will be made available via Canvas in some or another form.

### *Technology*

For remote courses, the expectation is that you will minimize educational distractions while in synchronous elements of the course (including social media, alerts, and the like).

For in-person, non-virtual meetings, electronics (including but not limited to cell phones and laptops) are not ordinarily permitted in lecture or during exams. If you believe you have compelling grounds for an exception, talk to the professor in advance. The second violation of this policy will trigger a 0% for the participation grade. Your TA will let you know what the policy is in discussion sections.

For remote classes, attendance in synchronous meetings constitutes permission to record your voice and image for the purposes of making a recording of the synchronous class meetings available to students of the course. Recordings made for the asynchronous elements of remote learning courses will be made available in Canvas.

For non-remote, in-person courses, recording lectures introduces several complicated issues about consent and student participation in class. For that reason, students may not record (audio or video) in this class except in accordance with documented ADA accommodations. Any recordings made in connection with a disability accommodation are for the student's personal academic use only and may not be distributed in any manner to any other individual.

### *Waitlist*

Students will be admitted to this class according to their place on the waitlist.

### *Exams*

By enrolling in this class, you agree to take the final exam, if there is one, by its scheduled day and time, unless registered with OSD. Failure to take the exam at that time constitutes failure to pass the course. For take-home assignments, you agree to submit them by the posted deadlines. Plan your end of term travel and other commitments accordingly.

### **Where can I get help?**

In addition to the readings, class, office hours, and maybe even sections, we've also got handouts.

[How to Survive Your First Philosophy Class](#)

[How to Write Philosophy Papers](#)

If you have questions about any academic matters at all, please contact your TA or professor.

UCSD has some useful support resources for non-academic needs. Check out [Basic Needs](#) and [Mutual Aid](#) for help with some of the basics every student needs. And check out [Student Health and Well-Being](#) for resources to keep you going. Also, if you are skipping and/or stretching meals, or having challenges accessing food, you may be able to get funds for free food money. [Details here](#).

[Satisfactory Academic Progress \(SAP\)](#) refers to the academic standards students must maintain to remain eligible for federal, state, and institutional financial aid. If you are receiving financial aid, please ensure you review the [SAP requirements and the appeals process](#).