Introduction to Ethics

Phil 2  •  Spring 2016

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TEXT
None: All readings will be available online through WebCT.
A clicker is required: The Turning Technologies model QT. (The Turning NXT response card will also be compatible.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Catalog Description: Examination of the concepts of morality, obligation, human rights and the good life. Competing theories about the foundations of morality will be investigated.

This course satisfies Area C2 (Humanities), which prescribes that students be able to:

A. Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions and methods of the study of the humanities.
B. Investigate, describe, and analyze the roles and effects of human culture and understanding in the development of human societies.
C. Compare and analyze various conceptions of humankind.
D. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the historical development of cultures and civilizations, including their animating ideas and values.

The focus of this course is on two very important questions: What sort of life should I lead, and how should I treat other people?

The central concern in this course will not be the ethics of social policy (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty), though problems in applied ethics will emerge. Rather, the focus will be on ethical theories- systems for deciding what is right and wrong- and with personal ethics- thinking about the nature of the good life, and how we ought to live, and treat others, on a day-to-day basis.

Although our emphasis will be on theories of morality that originate in western civilization, we will also give consideration to Chinese ethics, as that is found
in the Confucian tradition. We will consider contributions to ethics that have been made by modern feminist thought.

Though we will be learning something about the nature of morality and the traditional moral theories, both religious and secular, our approach will be critical, and we should be prepared to carefully examine our assumptions about moral values. Given this critical approach, students can expect to refine their ability to analyze and assess arguments.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this course you should be able to:

- Describe and distinguish key ethical concepts, including concepts such as good, right, duty, universality, relativism, obligation, virtue
- Read and comprehend philosophical texts, classical and contemporary, in the area of ethics.
- Discuss core ethical problems, such as: Whether either culture or religion provide a source of values, what it means to be virtuous, the nature of justice, how can we know what is right or wrong, and the nature of happiness.
- Write clear and concise explanations and arguments about basic ethical problems.
- Distinguish the basic ethical theories and approaches, including: deontology, utilitarianism, virtue ethics, social contract theory, and non-traditional or non-western positions-- in particular, feminist theory and Confucian ethics
- Apply basic ethical concepts and approaches to solving practical problems in ethics, including: sex and reproduction, the death penalty, treatment of non-human animals, marriage and divorce

**COURSE GRADE**

A basic requirement for passing this course is that the student make an evident attempt to complete all of the assignments listed below. Assuming this requirement is met, the following cutoff scheme represents the maximum course total required for each letter grade. Target scores for the individual assignments are also provided.

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<th>Total</th>
<th>Clicker Quizzes</th>
<th>Mid-term</th>
<th>Final</th>
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The instructor will be following the Philosophy Department's grading standards. There will be a handout in the handouts folder at SacCT providing a general rubric for your in-class essays.

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Exams: All exams will include 20-30 multiple choice questions. You will answer the multiple choice questions using your clicker. The midterm will also include short essay questions- responses should be one page in length (no more). Two of these will be chosen at random from a list provided in advance, and will be mandatory- you won't have any choices about which question to answer.

The final will be similar to the midterm but will include a long essay question, with a recommended length of 3-4 pages. The topic for this essay appears below. This essay will be written during the final exam period. Except for this last essay question, the final will not be cumulative. All writing will involve the critical appraisal of philosophical argumentation, and will be evaluated for proper handling of philosophical concepts presented in the course as well as for mastery of the course material. For an explanation of what is involved in philosophical writing, see the Philosophy Department’s writing guidelines. (These guidelines are written for papers, but the general principles they outline apply to in-class writing as well.)

Final Exam Topic for Long Essay: Write a letter to a loved one giving them advice on how to live the good life. Your letter should make it clear whether the good life is a happy life, and if so, what you think happiness is, and how we are to achieve it. Your letter must show command of the course material.

In-Class Quizzes: Students should expect a quiz to be given each day in class, beginning with the second class meeting. Quiz questions will normally be interspersed with the lecture and responses will be given via clicker. Some questions may cover a reading assignment and some may be review of a previous lecture; others may deal with online instruction material. Some questions may be aimed at polling the class regarding their philosophical views; for these, all answers will be scored as correct.

Clicker Bonus: It is your responsibility to insure that you have a working clicker- your own- with you in class. There will be no makeups for quizzes missed either as a result of absence or a missing or malfunctioning clicker. In order to accommodate such problems, I will add a bonus equal to 15% of the total possible clicker points. This bonus will not allow your clicker score to exceed the maximum possible number of correct in-class responses-- that is, it will not give you extra credit.

I will convert clicker points to course points using a conversion factor, which will be 400 / the total possible clicker points. Your course points will then be calculated by multiplying your clicker total by this conversion factor. For ex-
ample: Suppose there are 500 possible clicker points. The conversion factor would be 400/500, or 0.8. That means each clicker point is worth 0.8 course points. Suppose Sally has 450 points (including her bonus). Sally will receive 360 course points as her clicker score (450 x 0.8).

It is a requirement of this course that you register your clicker at our SacCT page by the end of the first week of classes. If you have not registered your clicker by the end of the second week, you will lose credit for any quizzes you have taken during the first two weeks, and you will not receive credit for any quizzes after that until your clicker is registered.

It is your responsibility to regularly check your clicker scores online to ensure that your clicker has been properly registered and you are getting the appropriate credit for your clicker quizzes. Please notify me right away of any problem you encounter in registering your clicker. Failure to do so may result in your not getting credit for any affected clicker quizzes.

Disability Accommodation: If you have a disability and require accommodations, you need to provide disability documentation to Services to Students with Disabilities, Lassen Hall 1008, (916) 278-6955. Please discuss your accommodation needs with me after class or during my office hours early in the semester.

Extra Credit/Participation: Class participation is encouraged and can earn you extra credit. You may participate by asking or answering questions in class, or by coming to office hours. Students who participate regularly (e.g. during more than half of the class periods) will receive 15-20 points and those who contribute occasionally may expect 5-15. Normally there will be a 20 point maximum for this extra credit, but this limit may be extended in recognition of outstanding effort or exceptional mastery of the course material. You may also be offered extra credit of up to 15 points for participating in instructor evaluations. No other form of extra credit will be available.

Missed Exams: If you are going to miss an exam, please contact me soon as possible. Unless there are verifiable extenuating circumstances (usually medical), you must make up your exam within one week of the exam date. There will be a penalty equal to 20% of the points possible on the exam unless you are able to document serious and compelling reasons for missing it. There are no exceptions to the requirement for documentation - not even for funerals.

Withdrawal from the course: Please be mindful of drop deadlines. After the end of the second week of classes, you will be asked to justify any request to withdraw, and if your explanation is not satisfactory your petition to drop will be denied. (The criteria are on the back of this form.) In the large majority of cases, if a student does not withdraw during the first two weeks, she is committed to finishing the class.

Communication: Please check your Saclink email at least once each week. Please also check weekly for announcements on our SacCT page; it’s wise
to check on Sundays to see if there are any announcements relevant to our work during the coming week.

**Laptop Use:** Laptops, tablets, and smart phones may not be used during lecture. Exceptions will be made only under special circumstances, e.g. to accommodate disability. If you are found to be using one of these devices during class you will be asked to put it away; repeat offenses will be penalized at a rate of 10 points per incident.

**Proper Comportment:** University students are expected to know that it is not appropriate to chat with, or share notes with, their classmates during lecture. Repeat offenders will be penalized at a rate of 10 points per incident.

**Academic Dishonesty:** This usually involves using unauthorized notes during an exam or plagiarism, which is presenting the work of someone else—whether copied or paraphrased—as one’s own. When material is copied without use of quotation marks, plagiarism is presumed. Please understand that it is not enough simply to reword material you find online to avoid the charge of plagiarism. You are responsible for what you turn in; check to be sure all appropriate citations are included in your work. If unauthorized notes are found to be accessible to you during an exam, you will be presumed to be using them. Those who permit others to cheat are considered accomplices and are guilty of cheating.

You must not use, or even handle, anyone else’s clicker after the start of lecture. This will be considered cheating.

Please review the [University's policies regarding academic dishonesty](#). The library also maintains a very useful page on plagiarism.

Anyone caught cheating will lose credit for the assignment on which they cheated, with no possibility of make-up. The minimum penalty will be 150 points, which is likely to drop the offender 1-2 letter grades in the course. If your clicker is used while you are not in attendance, the penalty will be 150 points against you as well as the person who uses your clicker on your behalf. Egregious cases (e.g. multiple infractions, failure to cooperate with an investigation into academic dishonesty) may result in a student's failing the course. Please be aware that I am required to report all cases of cheating to the University's Office of Student Conduct, which may take further action.

**Outside Sources:** Sometimes students feel the need for additional reference material. Please be aware that Wikipedia is unreliable and therefore not suitable for academic purposes. If you need a source for background information, I recommend the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). Articles in the IEP, unlike those in Wikipedia, are reviewed for accuracy by people who are experts in their fields.