Introduction to Ethics

*Phil 2  •  Spring 2015*

Instructor: Dr. David Corner  
Office: MND 3014
Office Hours: T 12-12:30, 3-3:30; W 1:30-3
Office Phone: 278-6970  
Voicemail: 572-6474
Philosophy Department: 278-6424; 278-5364 (fax)
Email: dcorner@csus.edu
Web: http://www.csus.edu/indiv/c/cornerd

**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 C3: Introduction to the Humanities](#).

**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 these issues may 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 on a day-to-day basis. We will be thinking about how to deal rightly with the people around us- family, friends, coworkers, etc.

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 and Daoist traditions. 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:

- Understand the basic concepts of ethical theorizing, such as those of obligation and virtue;
Describe the major theories of normative ethics in the history of western culture, and identify the major figures responsible for their development, together with the principal arguments for and against them;

- Assess the plausibility of particular moral arguments;
- Apply ethical theories to moral dilemmas in personal life, and
- Undertake the responsibilities of citizenship in a liberal democracy, in which we are required to help make rational decisions on social policy.

**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. (Notice that the chart presumes higher scores before the end of the semester to decrease reliance on a high final exam score.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Clicker Quizzes</th>
<th>Mid-term</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instructor will be following the Philosophy Department's grade definitions.

**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 two short essay questions- responses should be about one page in length (no more). The final will be similar to the midterm but will include a longer essay question, with a recommended length of 3-4 pages. The topic for this essay appears below. 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.

Final Exam Essay Topic: 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. 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. Some questions may be aimed at polling the class regarding their philosophical views; for these, no answer will be scored as incorrect.
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 clicks- i.e. it will not work to 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 example: Suppose there are 500 possible clicker points. The conversion factor would be 400/500, or 0.8. Suppose Sally has 450 points (including her bonus). Sally will receive 360 points as her clicker score (450 x 0.8).

It is a requirement of this course that you register your clicker 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 check your clicker scores online to insure 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.

**Online Instruction:** Some of the instruction for this course will be given online. Normally, online instruction will be intended to supplement lecture material; it will give you important background to help you understand the lecture and readings, and provide valuable information for inclusion in the essay portion of your exams. However, exams may be based on any of the course materials made available to you, and in some cases online materials may be your primary source of exam-relevant instruction.

**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.

**Testing Center:** If you take your final exam in the testing center, please insure that it will be returned to the Philosophy Department before I have given my last final. If I do not receive your final in a timely manner you may be assigned a grade of WU. If the testing center will permit it, you may hand-carry your exam to the Philosophy Department in a sealed envelope. You may also be able to take your exam in the Philosophy Department. If we have the resources you need for your exam, you should consider doing this.

**Extra Credit/Participation:** Class participation is strongly encouraged and may earn you extra credit. You may participate by asking or answering questions in the classroom, or by coming to office hours. Normally there will be a 40 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 offered.

**Missed Exams:** If you are going to miss an exam, please contact me soon as possible. Make-ups for missed midterms may be given during the final exam period. There will be a penalty equal to 20% of the points possible on the exam unless you are able to doc-
serious and compelling reasons for missing the exam. 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, resulting in a grade of WU, which counts as an F on your transcript.

Incompletes will be granted only when circumstances beyond a student's control prevent them from completing the course. Normally there will not be more than a single assignment outstanding; otherwise, withdrawal is the appropriate remedy. Incompletes will not be granted after a student has failed the course for nonattendance. Absent emergency circumstances, arrangements for an incomplete must be made prior to the end of finals week. In all cases I will have to set up an incomplete contract which you must accept online at least 48 hours before grades are due.

Laptop Use: Laptops, tablets, and smart phones may not be used during lecture. Exceptions will be made only to accommodate disability.

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 paper. Those who permit others to cheat are considered accomplices and thus guilty of plagiarism themselves. If unauthorized notes are found to be accessible to you during an exam, you will be presumed to be using them.

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. 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: Students sometimes try to use material from outside sources on their course assignments, when they find that their notes are inadequate — perhaps because they were not attentive during lecture, did not understand the lecture and did not ask for help, did not do the required reading, or were simply absent. If you consult outside sources you should indicate the source of your material in your work. You are strongly advised to check these sources with me, as many (e.g. Wikipedia) are unreliable and therefore completely unsatisfactory for scholarly purposes. Students sometimes fail their assignments when they rely on such dubious sources.

I recommend, as a source for background information, the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Articles in the IEP, unlike those in Wikipedia, are reviewed for accuracy by people who know something about the subject matter.