

PHIL 212 Introduction to Ethics Fall 2012

version: August 26, 2012

Section 02 TR 4:00-5:15, 115 CNS

Instructor: Aaron Wolf
awolf@ithaca.edu

Office: 237 Park Hall

Office hours: Tuesdays 3:00-4:00

Course website: aawolf.mysite.syr.edu/introethics.html

Course overview

Our lives are shot through with ideas about how we should live and act. *Ethics* is the branch of philosophy that attempts to refine and assess these ideas. This course surveys major theories and problems in ethics. The course also aims to develop your moral reasoning skills. This requires *very* careful reading of the text, a willingness to scrutinize your beliefs and the beliefs of others, and a lot of mental effort. You cannot do well in this class by simply reading and memorizing what the authors say, or by passively listening to the views expressed in class discussion. You'll need to spend time outside of class *figuring out what you think* about the claims you read and hear about. You'll need to think hard about how best to defend what you think. You'll need to plan how to write clearly about these things, and you'll need to get comfortable with speaking out loud about them in front of the group. That's how philosophy is done.

Here are three basic guidelines. Throughout the course, you should be able to:

- say clearly what different ethical theories claim and how those claims are argued for.
- explain how philosophical methods are used in assessing these claims.
- express considered opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of each claim.

Materials

- **Textbook**
The Ethical Life, 2nd edition, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau. Oxford University Press, 2012.
<[Amazon link](#)>
- **Final project**
A site membership at www.xtranormal.com. The membership and basic resources you will need to complete the project are free, though there are paid add-ons you might choose to employ.

Assessment

- **Exams - 60% of course grade**
An in-class written exam will follow each unit of the course. True/false, matching, short answer, and essay questions may be given. Students are responsible for all assigned readings as well as material from class discussions. There is no Final Exam.
- **Discussion participation - 25% of course grade**
Active and quality participation in class discussions is essential for success in the course. Those who don't regularly voice their questions and observations will fall behind quickly, and since class time will consist almost entirely of group discussion, those who stay quiet will likely be bored. You should get in the habit of bringing your book to class, as having it in front of you tends to improve participation. Students will

self-assess their participation four times during the semester. *Failure to submit an assessment form on time will result in a penalty of at least 25%.* See the course website for more detailed information.

- **Final project - 15% of course grade**

As a final project, you will write and produce an original philosophical dialogue through Xtranormal, publish it to the internet, and present it to the class at the end of the semester. See the course website for detailed instructions.

Important: *You must present your video during the time you sign up for. No exceptions.*

Course-specific policies

- **Attendance & Participation**

Students are expected to attend every class, though attendance *per se* does not figure in your final grade. Attendance is graded indirectly by way of your participation grade. Every class will include material not found in the readings, for which you will be responsible on exams. If you must miss class, do not ask me to review this material with you unless you have made an appointment with me prior to 10 AM the day of the missed class. Appointments will be granted at my discretion.

- **Study cards**

For each day's reading, you may (but need not) submit a single 3x5 index card with study notes you have made from that day's assignment—and only from that assignment—at the beginning of class. These cards are not graded, but they will be returned to you during exams for extra assistance. No other materials may be used during exams, and *late cards will not be accepted. No exceptions.*

- **Nothing with internet or SMS**

No computers, phones, or anything else that can text, IM, or access the internet are allowed during class, except by permission from me. This is for your own good. *Violators of this policy will lose 2% off the final course grade for each violation, and I will probably not stop class to tell you that you've lost points.*

- **Make-up work**

Make-up exams will be permitted on a case-by-case basis at my discretion. If you need to miss an exam, *it's imperative that you discuss it with me beforehand.* Your chances of being granted a make-up are slim if you do not. Neither study cards nor the final project can be made up.

- **No extra credit**

No extra credit will be given in this course, so plan accordingly. If you have a documented illness or emergency, talk to me *before* it interferes with your work, not after.

- **Grade changes**

Students are entitled to an explanation of their grades. The rubrics I usually say enough to give you my impression of your work. If you have a basic matter-of-fact question about a score, feel free to ask me directly. If you wish to ask for a more detailed explanation or justification of your grade, you must (a) write a document explaining your question and (if you believe you were correct) giving evidence for your claim from the text or your notes, and (b) submit this document as a hard copy in person, along with the graded work in question. I will review it at my leisure and return it to you with notes and a new grade if warranted. If you do this, I will consider your request carefully and I will not lower your original grade. If you don't, I will not discuss your grade with you.

- **Email**

I'm not on campus much apart from office hours, so if you need to talk to me, email is probably your best bet. I do my best to respond quickly to emails during ordinary business hours. I come from a time before the internet, so my sensibilities may be a bit different from yours. If you're writing me a note, please be considerate and take care to write something civilized, not something that reads like a text message. I'll always extend you the same courtesy.

College-wide policies

- **Academic conduct**

Students are expected to conform to the Standards of Academic Conduct detailed at http://www.ithaca.edu/attorney/policies/vol7/Volume_7-70104.htm.

Please familiarize yourself with these standards. Violations will be reported to the Ithaca College Conduct Review Board. Additionally, you will receive a grade of zero on any assignment that is not completed according to these standards.

- **Disability accommodation**

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities on a case-by-case basis. Students must register with Student Disability Services and provide appropriate documentation to Ithaca College before any academic adjustment will be provided.

- **Mental health**

Diminished mental health, including significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, or problems with eating and/or sleeping can interfere with optimal academic performance. The source of symptoms might be strictly related to your course work; if so, please speak with me. However, problems with relationships, family worries, loss, or a personal struggle or crisis can also contribute to decreased academic performance. Ithaca College provides a Counseling Center to support the academic success of students. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides cost-free services to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your academic success and/or well-being. In the event I suspect you need additional support, expect that I will express my concerns (and the reasons for them) to you and remind you of resources (e.g., CAPS, Health Center, Chaplains, etc.) that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I am concerned and that help, if needed, is available.

Schedule of Readings and Class Events

All readings are from “The Ethical Life” except the first. Readings marked with * are available on the course site. Dates refer to the Monday of each week.

Unit 1		
Week of	Tuesday	Thursday
9/3	*Introduction to “The Fundamentals of Ethics” *Introduction to “The Ethical Life”	*Gensler, “Cultural Relativism”
9/10	Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values”	Smith, “Realism”
9/17	Bambrough, “Proof”	Exam 1 **Self-assessment form 1 due**
Unit 2		
Week of	Tuesday	Thursday
9/24	Mill, “Hedonism”	Nozick, “The Experience Machine”
10/1	Kazez, “Necessities”	Plato, “Euthyphro”
10/8	Rand, “The Ethics of Emergencies”	Smart, “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism” **Self-assessment form 2 due**
10/15	Kant, “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative”	<i>Fall break</i>
10/22	Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics”	Foot, “Natural Goodness” Midterm grades submitted
10/29	Lindeman, “What is Feminist Ethics?”	Exam 2 **Self-assessment form 3 due**
Unit 3		
Week of	Tuesday	Thursday
11/5	Thompson, “A Defense of Abortion”	Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”
11/12	Foot, “Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”	LaFollette, “Licensing Parents”
11/19	<i>Thanksgiving break</i>	<i>Thanksgiving break</i>
11/26	Rachels, “The Morality of Euthanasia”	Harris, “The Survival Lottery”
12/3	Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”	Exam 3 **Self-assessment form 4 due**
12/10	<i>Final project videos</i>	<i>Final project videos</i>