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## PHIL 322X "Ethics"

3 Credits

**INSTRUCTOR:** Dr. Eduardo Wilner

**OFFICE LOCATION:** 703a GRUE

**OFFICE HOURS:** Please request appointment via email for a meeting in person, via phone, or Skype ("dr.e.m.wilner"). **Before requesting an appointment, please see "Office Hours Policies" below for details.**

**EMAIL ADDRESS:** [emwilner@alaska.edu](mailto:emwilner@alaska.edu)

### Course Description

"Ethic"--from the Greek "ethos" meaning character, custom, usage. The discipline of Ethics (a subdiscipline of Philosophy) studies the nature of morality – our set of ideas and norms regarding right and wrong.

In the first part of this class, we will make sure everybody has the necessary tools of the trade: the tools of critical analysis. Most importantly, after this first section, we will be able to understand the distinction between fact and opinion, and understand also the methodology behind fact-finding.

In this class, of course, the facts we're after are those regarding morality. We will study, first, the nature of human moral thinking (what is sometimes called "neuro-ethics," or "moral psychology"). We will discover that moral thinking is very predictable in our species, and that it was primarily shaped by the process of natural selection.

Understanding the way we *actually* think about morality, we will move next to critically analyze the way we *should* think about it. In other words, the third leg of our journey will consist of the study of some of the most important elements in Ethical Theory. We will study first the meta-ethical angle, through theoretical stances such as Divine Command Theory, Relativism, and Realism. Next, for the final main section in our class, we will cover three of the most important theories in substantive ethics: Utilitarianism, Kantian Deontology, and Aristotelian Virtue Ethics.

For the very last section, we will come full circle and consider the marrying of moral psychology and ethical theory.

### Prerequisites

Placement in ENGL F111X or higher, Junior standing or permission of instructor. Recommended but not required: two courses in the Perspectives on the Human Condition baccalaureate core.

### Instructional methods

Students are required to read lecture materials, supporting documents from experts in the field, and or to view lectures. The instructor provides assignments that are thought provoking and designed to help the student better comprehend and assimilate the material.

### TEXTS & OTHER MATERIALS

Collection of readings and audiovisual materials were prepared by the instructor. You are expected to carefully read, watch, or listen to this material when the instructor assigns it.

### Overview

This course will review and analyze some central questions regarding right and wrong. What follows is a tentative thematic list of the topics to be covered. This list is tentative because it might mutate and evolve slightly to reflect the class' interests and composition. The course will be roughly divided into 4 broad topics:

- Understanding the nature and practice of philosophical inquiry and the logic of argumentation.
- Considering questions about the existence of the values Right and Wrong.
- Understanding the actual moral psychology that describes our species-subjective values of Right and Wrong.
- Understanding the major Ethical Theories that provide us with objective values of Right and Wrong.

### Units, Topics, & Exams

Unit Number	Topics	Due Date	Points
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EXAM (BONUS) 1 - SYLLABUS</li> </ul>	October 30	30
Unit 1 Fact Finding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Nature of Philosophy</li> <li>The Nature of Facts &amp; How to find them               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Argument reconstruction                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Induction</li> <li>Deduction</li> <li>Abductions</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>Facts &amp; Science</li> <li>EXAM 2</li> </ul>	November 7	100
Unit 2 The Science of Right	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Evolution of Right and Wrong</li> </ul>		

<b>&amp; Wrong</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Nature versus Nurture</li> <li>○ The Moral Equalizer</li> <li>• <b>EXAM 3</b></li> </ul>	<b>November 15</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Unit 3 Metaethics &amp; Religion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metaethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divine Command Theory: Religious Thinking vs Ethical Theories</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>EXAM 4</b></li> </ul>	<b>November 23</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Unit 4 Utilitarian Ethical Theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilitarian Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism</li> <li>○ John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>EXAM 5</b></li> </ul>	<b>December 1</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Unit 5 Deontological Ethical Theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kantian Deontology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Moral Maxims</li> <li>○ The Role of Reason</li> <li>○ The Categorical Imperative</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>EXAM 6</b></li> </ul>	<b>December 9</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Unit 6 Virtue Ethical Theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aristotelian Virtue Ethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Virtue</li> <li>○ Character</li> <li>○ The Doctrine of the Means</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>EXAM 7</b></li> </ul>	<b>December 17</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>MAXIMUM TOTAL POINTS FOR CLASS</b>			<b>600</b>

## Student Learning Outcomes & Additional Information

- A. You will be able to identify different types of argument and consequently apply the appropriate criteria for argument analysis.
- B. You will understand the notion of *fact* and understand that science, as our most extreme form of critical analysis, produces the most reliable facts.
- C. You will understand the nature of our evolved, “*moral grammar*” as disclosed by our present scientific understanding.
- D. You will understand the major ethical theories (traditional and modern).
- E. You will be able to apply these theoretical frameworks to any kind of moral dilemma in question.

## Professional Community of Practice

The University of Alaska Fairbanks has a (very) active Philosophy Student Club: “The Socratic Society.” For this class, one of the Socratic Society’s most relevant activities is their participation on the “Ethics Bowl;” a national debate on ethical issues. For information about Socratic Society events and proceedings, visit <http://groupspaces.com/socraticsociety> and <http://groups.google.com/group/uaf-socratic-society>. To sign up for news and events (promise you wont be spammed!) email: [uaf.socratic.society@gmail.com](mailto:uaf.socratic.society@gmail.com).

## COURSE POLICIES

- **Studying.** Materials for each class will be assigned at the beginning of each unit. You will be required to *critically study* this material. Studying is *not* the same as reading. Studying is *not* the same as reading repeatedly either. Studying requires a careful attempt at getting the idea/s that are being put forth in every paragraph. And then, once you have those, studying requires you to reconstruct the reasoning behind the entire piece in question.

To achieve the above, you will first, find it necessary to underline and write down the key ideas in the material. Later on, in order to assimilate it, you will find that it helps to re-write these key points you have just extracted, but translated into your own – not verbatim from text or lecture. You will go to this collection of your notes when you’re reviewing the material. Naturally, you wont be able to understand every piece you are required to study. You will record, just as carefully, these pieces that make no sense. These notes will be crucial and necessary to help me help you during our office hours meetings (see below).

- **Emails.** Email inquiries are welcomed and you should expect to receive a response within 48 hours (*no email responses after 4:30 pm and on weekends*). All emails should be written in proper form. Please remember that you’re not chatting or writing a text message. Every email should start with a “Dear,” and end with something like a “Thank you” line, followed by your name. You should always reply within the thread in question (i.e. do not start a new thread with every email), unless you need to start a new one for some good reason (that way, our email history is always available). Every email should provide, in your subject line, your full name and your course’s name and number.

As a good general rule, if you do not hear back from me within the time frame specified above, please write again – something went wrong.

- **Withdrawal.** Students whose performance is determined by the instructor to be less than required by assignments due; participation; and/or attendance will be withdrawn from the course.

- **Incomplete Grades.** Students should consult with the course instructor well in advance of the final examination to establish that an incomplete grade for the course is warranted. Students must have been performing minimally at “C” level and completed more than 50% of the required coursework to warrant an incomplete. According to UAF grade policy, an “I” not changed to a letter grade converts to an “F”.
- **Late Assignments.** Assignments are to be submitted when due unless previous arrangement has been made with the instructor to allow for mitigating circumstances. Papers submitted late without prior arrangement might not be accepted or they might be assigned a late penalty. If graded, they will be graded before final grades are due and may not receive any comments.

## Office Hours

I cannot overemphasize how necessary office hours are. The material for this class is subtly (and I would say, “deliciously”) complex. Unfortunately, it seems that we have evolved to avoid considering these deliciously complex foundational issues. Please let me help you navigate through them. In fact, and let me stress this emphatically: I *do not* recommend you attempt this on your own. Please do not underestimate the material.

Being an online class, office hours usually take the form of phone, or a Skype conversation (you will need to get a -- free -- Skype account to do this at: <https://login.skype.com/account/signup-form>). You must schedule a meeting time via email. To do this, provide a **number** of alternative time slots that could possibly fit your schedule. With that in hand, I can then see which of your proposed alternatives also fit mine. If none does, then I’ll propose a number of other possible alternatives, and we’ll go from there. Just make sure you give me enough advance notice: 48 business hours notice (the same goes for cancellations).

## How You Must Prepare for Our Meeting

Office Hours work only when you can be precise about the points to be discussed.

Typically, you should want to meet with me knowing where is it that you are getting stuck, confused, or lost. But sometimes, it’s also a good idea to meet in order to check your understanding of a critical point or position. Such rehearsals (to call them something) require as much precision as the problem-driven meetings. You should come prepared to present and defend the position or point in question in very simple, 12-year-old type of terms. For such a presentation and defense, you should be able to explain why we should accept your point (not simply claim we should accept it).

So, it is important (for both kinds of meetings!) to understand the difference between explaining something, versus simply claiming or describing something. When you are explaining something, you would not, for instance, just say: “Plato thinks that truth lays in the Realm of the Forms.” You should be able to explain that Plato argued that truth must lay outside of the realm of everyday type of stuff, because every day type of stuff is always in flux, or continuously changing. But truth, on the other hand, he continued, is change-less. So, truth, he concluded, must be in a completely different realm, a change-less, time-less one. Plato called that the realm of the “Forms” (to call it something).

Now, for the more typical, problem driven office hours meetings, the point would be to discuss those elements in the material that have you confused, even after you’ve tried to figure them out on your own. I can’t help you if you come with something like “I don’t understand anything about this or that topic.” The vaguer you are about your problems with the material, the least helpful office-hours will be (to the point that we might simply have to agree that you need to work some more before we can

schedule a new office hours appointment). The state you're aiming for is what, in this syllabus, I call one of "clear confusion." So please understand that office hours require you to do the necessary groundwork that will put you in that state.

So, before our office hours meeting, you should do the following:

For problem-with-the-material type issues:

1. Study the required material and prepare a detailed list of all the sections that are causing you trouble (identified by page number, or some other analogous marker — like context, if you're dealing with a lecture).
2. For each item in this list, write a small description of what is it in this section that is giving you trouble, given your understanding of the context of that section (like: "X does not make sense because I understand Y, Z, and W from our previous, or contextual studying material). (Writing "X does not make sense (period)!" is, of course, not enough.)

For rehearsal type issues: you should come prepared to explain and defend the position or point in question in very simple, 12-year-old type of terms.

*Please remember: no emails, or office hours appointments after 4:30 pm and on weekends.*

### Academic Integrity

As described by UAF, scholastic dishonesty constitutes a violation of the university rules and regulations and is punishable according to the procedures outlined by UAF. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an exam, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating includes providing answers to or taking answers from another student. Plagiarism includes use of another author's words or arguments without attribution. Collusion includes unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing written work for fulfillment of any course requirement. **Scholastic dishonesty is punishable by removal from the course and a grade of "F."** For more information go to Student Code of Conduct. ([http://www.uaf.edu/catalog/catalog\\_08-09/academics/regs3.html#Student\\_Conduct](http://www.uaf.edu/catalog/catalog_08-09/academics/regs3.html#Student_Conduct))

### DISABILITIES SERVICES

You should also be aware that the UAF Office of Disability Services implements the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and insures that UAF students have equal access to the campus and course materials. I will work with the Office of Disabilities staff (located at Center for Health and Counseling, Whitaker Building.474-7043) to provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities.

### Evaluation & Grades

There will be seven exams in this class – no extra credit opportunities will be available. These exams will require the application of the material discussed in each of its units (they will **not** be about your reflections on the material, or your opinions about the material). Exams will be available at least 1 week before their due date. **See syllabus for due dates.**

These exams consist of multiple-choice, open "book" questions. In an online class, this means that you can have notes and supportive material at hand while completing the test. Mind you, this also means that you should expect your questions not to be about searching for the right quote, or answer. These questions gauge your understanding of the material (not your memorizing of it). The exams will not be proctored, and they will be open for completion for a whole week (that is, the week before their due date).

So, please understand that these exams **are not** your average multiple-choice exams. Their questions are not designed to be answered in a rush, or by resorting to simple memorization (whether stored in your head, our materials, or scraped by Google). They are designed to demonstrate your mastery of our class' materials. I recommend you tackle them in the following way.

First, you read, and re-read the *question*, in order to make sure you understand what the question is about. Then, before you even look at the alternative choices, you review the class' materials on the topic in question. For instance, if the question is about the criterion of plausibility, then you review abductions until you feel positively on top of it. Then, **and only then**, you read the alternative possible answers. The correct answer should glare at you. If it does not, that is a signal to you that you need to go back to reviewing and studying. So, if all alternative answers sound the same, that is signaling that you are not on top of the material you're being tested on. The answers are not tricky, nor do they incur subtle word play. Only one answer is correct, the others typically include a common conceptual mistake or misunderstanding.

So, yet again, if when you read the alternative answers they all sound the same, or kind of okay, **that means that the multiple-choice evaluation tool is doing its job. It is detecting that your understanding lacks the necessary level of resolution required to detect common confusions or misunderstanding regarding the issue at hand. Bottom line then, if the alternative answers sound the same, then back to studying because you have not yet reached the conceptual clarity required to to answer that question.**

Please also note that:

- **EXAMS CANNOT BE SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL (AND WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED IF THEY ARE).**
- **EXAMS DO NOT ALLOW FOR MULTIPLE ATTEMPTS– please note this, as Blackboard can be misleading regarding this point!**

Total Points for Semester: xxx points

Final Grade Distributed as Follows (in percentages of total, 250 points):

- A (100-90%)
- B (89-80%)
- C (79-70%)
- D (69-60%)
- <60=F

Bear in mind the *meaning* of this numerical/letter grades. From our UAF catalog and policies:

**"A"** (including A+ and A-) indicates a thorough mastery of course content and outstanding performance in completion of course requirements.

**B** "B" (including B+ and B-) indicates a high level of acquired knowledge and performance in completion of course requirements.

**C** "C" (including C+ and C-) indicates a satisfactory level of acquired knowledge and performance in completion of course requirements.

**D** "D" (including D+ and D-) indicates a minimal level of acquired knowledge and minimal performance in completion of course requirements. This grade does not satisfy requirements for courses in the major, minor, core or graduate programs.

**F** "F" indicates failure to meet a minimal level of understanding of course content and/or performance in

completion of course requirements. All F grades, including those earned in pass/fail courses, are included in the GPA calculations.

*For general information, please refer to: <https://uaf.edu/catalog/current/academics/regs1.html>*

**THERE WILL BE NO EXTRA-CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES IN THIS CLASS.**