

## ETHICS (PHL-2010)

TR 8:50–10:08 AND 10:15–11:33, FALL 2017

**Instructor:** Dr. Zita Toth

**Office:** St. Maur, room A 002

**Office hours:** TR 2:00–3:00 p.m., and by appointment. To make an appointment, please go to <http://zitavtoth.com/2016/01/19/Officehours/> and click on the desired slot.

**Phone:** 2924 (office extension); 917-544-3364 (cell; please use it with consideration).

**E-mail:** [ztoth@conception.edu](mailto:ztoth@conception.edu).

**Expected time required outside class:** Approximately 2 hours for every class hour.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

There are four (thin) required books for the course. There will be some additional primary and secondary material posted on Moodle. You will be responsible for accessing these, and, if you can, bringing a printed copy to class.

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 2nd edition. Hackett, 1999. ISBN: 9780872204645.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns*. 3rd edition. Hackett, 1993. ISBN: 9780872201668.
- Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Vintage Books, 2012. ISBN: 9780307951335.
- C.S. Lewis. *The Abolition of Man*. Harper Collins 2000. ISBN: 9780060652944.

### DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The Greek word ‘ethos’ originally meant ‘custom’ or ‘habit.’ We humans are rather obsessed with observing, explaining, evaluating, and attempting to influence our own habits and those of others. Perhaps this helps explain much of our moral posturing on the internet, why self-help books continue to sell despite their near-total ineffectiveness, and why it’s sometimes so hard to look away from reality TV. Ethical judgments are about the quality or worthiness of choices, customs, habits, or ways of life. In philosophical ethics, we ask how these judgments are justified. For instance, is the best life just the one that adds the most happiness to the world? Or is the goodness of a life independent of its actual consequences? Are these evaluations made true in different ways in different cultures? In this class we will look more closely to these suggestions and see where they lead.

## GRADING

### Grading scale:

Grade	GPA	Description
A	4.00	excellent, outstanding
A-	3.67	still excellent
B+	3.33	very good
B	3.00	good; solid, and above average
B-	2.67	good; still above average
C+	2.33	average
C	2.00	acceptable
C-	1.67	minimally acceptable
D	1.00	passing but unsatisfactory
F	0.00	failure

### Grade break-down:

Component	Percentage
In-class participation	15%
Notecards	20%
Papers total	30%
Midterm exam	15%
Presentation	10%
Final exam	15%

**Participation:** Conversation is essential to Philosophy. Everyone, even if they are bored or shy or anxious is expected to participate in class. Here are a few suggestions with regard to class discussion:

- Charity is very important in every engaging discussion. You should answer to your peers' suggestion according to the best interpretation you can give them.
- Criticism can be very useful, but be careful not to direct it towards the person instead of the idea.
- Please be willing to change your mind if the evidence so dictates.

**To prepare for class participation:** You will see that readings in Philosophy can be very difficult. Be sure to make notes about: (1) the main thesis or idea of the reading; (2) the main argument (if any); (3) the main examples the reading uses to illustrate the point; and any questions or remarks you have about the reading. There will also be some homework exercises (including writing), which you will be expected to complete.

**Notecards:** The notecards require that you show that you put effort into the readings and are prepared to participate well. After completing the readings for each class, write down at least two or three major questions that the authors of the texts are attempting to answer or problems that you see in the readings on a 3×5 notecard that you will put on my desk before the beginning of class. (If there are multiple readings for that day, each reading must be addressed by at least one of your questions). Strive

to be clear and to ask challenging, puzzling questions. Notecards are graded on a ✓-, ✓, ✓+ scale. A ✓+ is reserved for incisive, well-articulated questions. Because notecards are part of the preparatory work for class discussions, notecards cannot be turned in late. If you have an excused absence, that day will simply not count toward your average.

**Papers:** There will be three short paper assignments during the semester; detailed prompts will follow later. Here are the standards for distinguishing between Excellent, Good, Average and Poor papers:

- **Writing Quality:** Papers should demonstrate good grammar as well as good spelling. They should also be copy-edited to reduce or eliminate typos. Writing should be clear and exhibit good structure. Paragraphs should be cohesive and build towards a complete essay with a substantial thesis (as opposed to a string of disconnected thoughts).
- **Accuracy and Understanding:** Papers should be able accurately to recreate an argument or a position. They should find the relevant issues and argument(s) worthy of analysis.
- **Argument:** Papers should argue for or against a position rather than merely exchange opinions. Is the argument for or against a position constructed persuasively within the confines of the paper?

**Midterm and Final exam:** Details will follow; the final exam will cover all the material assigned throughout the course.

## COURSE POLICIES

**Electronic Devices:** Electronic devices are not allowed in class. They can be very distracting, and new research shows that even when computers are used solely for taking notes, learning is impaired, because the keyboard encourages taking verbatim notes while the pen requires you to process as you take notes.<sup>1</sup> Everyone is expected to leave their devices (phones, laptops, tablets, etc.) at home or keep them turned off and out of sight during class time. For any special concerns about this policy, please ask me directly.

**E-mail:** There will be some official communication via e-mail, and everyone is expected to check their e-mail accounts regularly and read their e-mails carefully. You can expect me to read and answer my e-mails within 24 hours; please do not send me e-mails at midnight expecting a response by the next morning class.

**Outside resources:** You will not have to do outside research beyond the assigned books. If you feel you must read more than what is assigned, please do not rely on wikipedia (which tends to be rather unreliable in philosophy). Instead, I recommend an excellent and free website, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: [plato.stanford.edu](http://plato.stanford.edu).

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1. Pam A Mueller and Daniel M Oppenheimer, "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science*, 2014,

**Plagiarism:** If you use or copy a source without properly citing it, you commit plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of stealing. It is very easy to detect, and will result in your automatic failure of the course.

**Lateness:** Late assignments will not be considered unless for very serious reasons. If you have such reasons, please let them know as soon as you can. I will not accept excuses related to technology (“my e-mail address wasn’t working,” “it remained in my Draft folder,” etc.) unless it is a major technical issue that affects the campus and the IT department knows about it.

This course complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Please present your written request for accommodation to me and the Academic Dean before the fourth day of class.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

The schedule is tentative, which means it might change at any point during the semester. I will post any changes at least a class in advance.

**Abbreviations:** M = on Moodle; NE = *Nicomachean Ethics*; GM = *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*; CSL = *The Abolition of Man*; DII = *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

Preliminary Considerations		
Aug 22	Introduction	Wallace (M)
24	Why be moral?	Wilde (M); Plato (M)
29	Moral relativism	Prinze (M); Midgley (M)
Utilitarianism		
31	Introduction	LeGuin (M); <b>student presentation</b>
Sep 5	Mill’s argument	Mill (M)
7	Social contract	Hobbes (M)
12	Applications: enviroment and famine	Singer (M); Singer (M)
14	Against utilitarianism	Nozick (M); Harris (M)
Deontology		
19	Introduction	Antigone OR Asimov (M); <b>student pres.</b>
21	Hume	Hume (M); UDHR (M); <b>first paper due</b>
26	Good will	GM 1–18
28	Categorical imperative	GM 19–48
Oct 3	Divine Command Theory	Adams (M)
5	Application: environment and famine	O’Neill (M); O’Neill (M)
12	<b>MIDTERM</b>	
Virtue Ethics		
17	Introduction	DII; <b>student presentation</b>
19	The big picture	Annas (M); <b>second paper due</b>
24	Virtue	NE book I
26	Virtue	NE book II

31	Good acts	NE book VII; Wolf (M)
Nov 2	Friendship	NE book XI; Murphy (M)
9	VE and relativism	Nussbaum (M)
14	Natural law	Aquinas (M)
21	Application: environment	Laudato si (sel.; M)
28	Application: famine	Slote (M)
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30	Moral progress	CSL, ch. 1–2
Dec 5		CSL, ch. 3
7	Final review	<b>third paper due</b>
TBA	Final exam	
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