



# Independent Study | in Idaho

**Phil 103  
Introduction  
to Ethics**

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# Course Guide

Independent  
Study | in Idaho

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## Philosophy 103 Introduction to Ethics

University of Idaho  
3 Semester-Hour Credits

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4 – Phil 103

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## 4-Phil 103: Introduction to Ethics

3 Semester-Hour Credits: U of I

### Welcome!

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Whether you are a new or returning student, welcome to the Independent Study in Idaho (ISI) program. Below, you will find information pertinent to your course including the course description, course materials, course objectives, as well as information about assignments, exams, and grading.

### Policies and Procedures

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#### Important!

As you read this section, you will see the following icon:



Use this icon to direct yourself to essential ISI information. Students are responsible for following ISI's policies. Refer to ISI's website at [www.uidaho.edu/isi](http://www.uidaho.edu/isi), select *About ISI, Policies* for the most current policies and procedures. The *Registration Confirmation Letter* sent to you upon registration provides your course instructor's contact information and lesson guidelines. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the ISI office for clarification before beginning your course.

### Course Description

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Introduction to philosophical reasoning through historical study of Western moral thought. U-Idaho students: May be used as core credit in J-3-d.

*Required: Internet access*

*7 graded written papers, 2 graded journal submissions, 7 graded self-administered quizzes*

This is a course in ethical thought throughout the world. There are no prerequisites to this course.

In this class, students will explore ethical traditions through course themes including:

- The ethics of virtue and character in contrast to ethics based on principle or rules
- The summum bonum: What is the best life or the highest good?
- Human nature
- The roles of reason and emotion in ethics
- The roles of motives and consequences in ethics
- Universality and particularity
- Absolutism/universalism and relativism

### Course Materials

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#### Required Course Materials

- Rachels, James, 1941-2003; Rachels, Stuart, University of Alabama. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 7th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2012. ISBN-10: 0078038243 ISBN-13: 9780078038242
- Weston, Anthony. *A Practical Companion to Ethics*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN10: 019973058X ISBN13: 9780199730582

### **Recommended Course Materials**

In your lesson PDF's, which are found in your Units in Canvas (BBL), there are URL's pointing to additional readings. Each URL is followed by parenthetical instructions:

- Required reading: information you need to know **(R)**
- Take a peek: information you should skim over **(TP)**
- Not Required but possibly of interest to you **(NR)**

**Please note:** in order to save money, you are welcome to use older versions of the listed texts (back to Edition Four in Rachels and Edition Three in Weston). It will be up to you to properly adjust the required reading's page numbers.

Independent Study in Idaho course materials are available for purchase at the VandalStore (University of Idaho bookstore). Your *Registration Confirmation Letter* contains the VandalStore's contact information.

Independent Study in Idaho courses are updated and revised periodically. Ordering course materials from the VandalStore at the time of registration allows you to purchase the correct edition(s) of textbooks and supplemental materials. Contact the VandalStore directly for questions regarding course materials that you have ordered.

If purchasing textbooks from another source, refer to the ISBN(s) for the textbook(s) listed for this course to ensure that you obtain the correct edition(s).

### **Course Delivery**

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The course is delivered through Canvas, which is an online course management system that hosts readings, hyperlinks to web materials, lessons, assignments and quizzes. Refer to your *Registration Confirmation Letter* for instructions on how to access Canvas.

### **Course Introduction**

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The word "philosophy" literally means the love of wisdom. To be a philosopher is to care about wisdom, to care about developing a deeper understanding of ourselves, our communities, and the world. When we study philosophy we seek a deeper understanding of what it is to be a human being, to uncover the very heart of who we are and what we value in order to live wisely.

And discovering what we value, what really matters to us is important because our thoughts and actions express what we value, and those thoughts and actions impact ourselves and others.

### **Course Objectives**

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Throughout this course, students will:

- Improve their understanding of the historical foundations of Western and Eastern ethical traditions.
- Learn to assess strengths and weaknesses of ethical theories.
- Improve their ability to evaluate questions of virtue and moral character.
- Improve their ability to analyze an ethical position or problem in writing.
- Improve their ability to read original source material and find the main ideas.
- Make connections between this course and other courses, as well between this course, their lives, and the world beyond.

## **Written Papers**

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I will edit your papers strictly, and then keep in mind that this is a 100 level course when I grade them. Final grades in my classes generally average 83%.

Here are the general criteria with which I will grade your papers.

### **Basic Mechanics (BM):**

- Take all grammar seriously! If you have poor grammar, your ideas will not be conveyed well, and your grade will suffer.
- Use paragraphs effectively to convey meaning and separate ideas

### **Quality of Prose (P):**

- Your papers should flow well. I suggest you read your papers slowly and out loud to yourself or someone else to pick up prose problems.
- Precision, parsimony, and explanatory power: in word choice and sentence structure.
- Start with a strong thesis claim.
- Walk me through your paper using a road map style: A>B; B>C; C>D; D>E, etc., where you clarify previous ideas in each transition to a new idea.
- Use meaningful segues between ideas.
- Draw a clear conclusion that reflects your thesis claim.

### **Accuracy and Understanding (T):**

- This is the bulk of your grade.
- Do not waste your space or my time with fluff. I can't stress this enough: start with a clear thesis claim and make sure you stay on that topic.
- Depth of explanation. Did you skim across the surface or dig deeply into the question being considered?

### **Short Papers**

There are seven short papers in this course. Specific instructions for each paper can be found in the actual Lesson PDF (which is linked within each lesson in Canvas) where a paper is required. Be sure to follow those specific instructions precisely.

The links to where you submit each paper can be found within the unit in Canvas where the paper is required.

### **Ethical Toolkit**

In each lesson you will come across different methods for dealing with ethical issues, i.e. "tools" that we can use to help us decide how to act in ways that we determine to be ethical. For example, the German philosopher Emmanuel Kant tells us (Lesson 9) that it is imperative that we look to our duty. So, the tool that we take away from Kant is that by rationally exploring what our duty is we can discover what the right thing to do is.

Throughout the semester, I will ask you to keep a journal that we might call an Ethical Toolkit, in which you will be expected to carefully craft:

- Theoretical explanations and practical examples for each of the tools in every lesson
- Your thoughtful personal reflections on each tool and lesson

- Contrasts and comparisons between the various tools
- Your thoughtful personal reflections on philosophical ethics in general

I will leave the layout of your journal up to you, but I ask that you make sure that the work is appealing to the eye and that there are appropriate headings and subheadings so that it is easy to distinguish between the various tools themselves and your personal reflections.

An **abbreviated** example of an entry might look like this. Note the use of the dictionary definition to drive my ideas forward. **I have not included examples of the personal reflections requirements:**

<p>The Role of Duty</p>
<p><b>Theoretical Explanation:</b></p> <p>When faced with an ethical dilemma, it is crucial that we explore our duty in that situation.</p> <p>Duty can be defined as “An act or a course of action that is required of one by position.” (<a href="http://www.thefreedictionary.com/duty">http://www.thefreedictionary.com/duty</a>)</p> <p>By rationally discovering the “course of action” we should take based upon our “position” in the situation, we can then contrast our duty with our emotional responses to the issue. Oftentimes we will find that our duties bring us back in line with what is ethical, whereas our emotions want us to consider only those outcomes that will make us feel good.</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>On one occasion, without his knowledge, I took my brother’s bicycle for a ride and one of the tires went flat. I wanted to quickly return it to the garage without him finding out and let him deal with the flat tire. Instead, I realized that being honest with him, because he is fellow human-being and my brother, was the right thing to do rather than taking the easy path which I thought would make me feel good.</p>

**Important Note:** I require students in all my classes to keep journals and I can tell you that it is easier if you cut, paste, cite, and edit material as you work in each lesson and how sad you will be if you procrastinate. Since this is a course-long project and will be submitted both at midterms and at finals, I strongly suggest that you add to your journal as you work in each lesson when the material is both fresh in your mind, thus making your personal reflections easier to express, and when some of it can be copied, pasted into your journal, cited, and carefully edited for precision.

**Submission**

Please Paste the chart below into the top of all of your papers:

<p>Your Grade:</p> <p>Basic Mechanics, Grammar:</p> <p>Prose, Precision, Parsimony, and Flow:</p> <p>Theoretical Understanding, Depth:</p>
--

Final Grade: Comments:
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In order to help me organize the 600 or so papers that I grade every semester, please:

- Please write your paper using word processing software.
- All papers should be double-spaced in a reasonable font size.
- Save your document on your computer as a DOC, DOCX or an RTF file (I cannot open other formats).
- Use your last name, and the assignment number as the filename, so for the first assignment, I personally would save my file as “feldman1” and second would be “feldman2” etc.
- Upload the file to Canvas by clicking on the hyperlink to the correct assignment, then click on the “browse”, “Add Attachments” and “submit” buttons. Be sure your paper is actually submitted.
- **Do not paste the text of your file into the text box in the assignment.**



Refer to your *Registration Confirmation Letter* for further details on your instructor’s lesson guidelines and requirements. Also refer to the *ISI Policies and Procedures* for essential ISI policies on submitting lessons to your instructor.

## **Quizzes**

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- You must wait for grades and comments on lessons prior to taking subsequent exams.
- For your instructor’s exam guidelines, refer to your *Registration Confirmation Letter*.

There are seven quizzes in this course. Links to the individual quizzes can be found within the unit where the quiz is required.

If you have made a good-faith effort on your readings, then you should have no problem at all with the quizzes. The quizzes are also open book, so you are welcome to refer back to your readings if you wish to.

The self-administered quizzes are graded automatically by Canvas so you will see your grade when you complete each quiz. If you are not happy with the grade on your first attempt, then you are welcome to redo the quiz. But note, even though some of the questions will be the same, some will not. In the second attempt you will get a somewhat different randomized set of questions.

Quizzes are limited to 30 minutes, so once you begin you will need to complete the quiz within that time frame. The second attempt, should you want one, will be an additional 30 minutes.

## **Grading**

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The course grade will be based upon the following considerations:

Written Papers: 35%

Ethical Toolkit (journals): 40%

Quizzes: 25%

The final course grade is issued after all lessons and exams have been graded.

### **Written Papers:**



At the conclusions of lessons 2, 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, and 15 you will be required to write a short paper. The grades on these seven short papers will account for 35% of your final grade, thus each paper is worth 5% of your final grade.

**Your Ethical Toolkit:**

Throughout the course, you will be expected to keep a journal of your work that will be submitted both as your midterm and final projects. The midterm grading will account for 15%, and the final grading will account for 25%, of your final grade.

**Quizzes:**

At the conclusions of lessons 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13, you will be required to take a short quiz, for a total of seven quizzes. These quizzes will be automatically graded by Canvas when you complete them. The grades on these seven quizzes will account for 25% of your final grade, thus each quiz is worth 3.6% of your final grade.

**Canvas**

You will find all of your assignments, submit all of your papers to me, retrieve your graded assignments and access your grades via <https://canvas.uidaho.edu/> If you have any questions regarding your work or your grades, please contact me immediately.

Canvas automatically emails me when assignments are submitted. I will then grade your assignment within a week and upload it to Canvas with a “g” added to your filename.

It is crucial that you return to the assignment, click on the “Submitted” tab, and look at my comments in your paper in order to understand my grading and to improve your work over time.

Sometimes I will allow you a redo on papers should I believe that doing so will help you improve your work and set you on the course of substantially improving future papers. If I offer you one, your redo must be done within four days of my grading the original, so you should set your notifications on Canvas to get an email from me when I have uploaded a graded assignment.

**Academic Honesty**

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Be sure that you understand what plagiarism is and you quote and cite material appropriately: [http://www.webs.uidaho.edu/info\\_literacy/modules/module6/6\\_4.htm](http://www.webs.uidaho.edu/info_literacy/modules/module6/6_4.htm) I encourage my students to discuss the content of the class and the assignments, but once work on the assignment begins, I expect the student to work by him or herself. All of the work should be exclusively the student's.

All incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs. Individuals guilty of academic dishonesty will be expelled from, and receive a failing grade for the course.



Refer to the *ISI Policies and Procedures* for information about confidentiality of student grades, course completion, time considerations, and requesting a transcript.

## **About the Course Developer**

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My name is Jay P. Feldman. Please feel free to call me, "Jay".

I am a Florida native, and have lived outside Boston and in San Francisco, Tucson, and Honolulu. I moved to Idaho in 1986 and so I have resided in Latah County for almost 30 years now.

My first career spanned almost 20 years as a professional wine taster and chef, and my second career lasted almost 15 years as a carpenter. I still enjoy cooking and remodeling, so most evenings I am busy in the kitchen, and every summer I spend some time remodeling our home in Moscow.

I returned to school in 1994 and received my Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Idaho in 1999. I then went to graduate school at the University of Hawaii, also in philosophy, with a focus on eastern philosophy. I transferred back to UI to finish my Master of Arts degree in philosophy in 2003. I currently am employed as a lecturer at the University of Idaho.

I teach courses in, and my research focuses on Buddhist philosophy and the philosophy of happiness. I also have interests in, as well as teach courses in ethics, and critical thinking.

Please do feel free to contact me if I can be of help to you in any way.

## **Contacting Your Instructor**

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You will receive specific course requirements and instructor contact information in your *Registration Confirmation Letter*, which you will receive upon registration. Please copy the ISI office at [indepst@uidaho.edu](mailto:indepst@uidaho.edu) when corresponding with your instructor.

## **Disability Support Services**

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Refer to the *ISI Policies and Procedures* for information on *Disability Support Services (DSS)*.

<b><u>Assignment Submission Log</u></b>				
<b>Lesson</b>	<b>Projected Date for Completion</b>	<b>Date Submitted</b>	<b>Grade Received</b>	<b>Cumulative Point Totals</b>
1 Quiz				
2 Written Paper				
3 Quiz				
4 Written Paper				
5 Quiz				
6 Written Paper				
7 Quiz				
<b>Ethical Toolkit Submission 1</b>				
9 Quiz				
10 Written Paper				
12 Quiz				
13 Written Paper				
14 Quiz				
15 Written Paper				

<b>Ethical Toolkit Submission 2</b>				
<b>Final Grade</b>				

## **Lesson 1**

### **General Introduction**

#### **Lesson Objectives**

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The first two lessons in this course introduce you to the entire class project, and prepare you to do the work you are going to do for the rest of the course. This first lesson will address what ethics is and why we bother with it in the first place.

#### **Reading Assignment**

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Weston's book, *A Practical Companion to Ethics*, 4th edition, makes the project of ethics very personal. He addresses the practical side of ethics by addressing the importance of ethics in each of our lives and how to become more critical and creative ethical thinkers.

*A Practical Companion to Ethics*, 4th edition: Preface: vii – ix, Chapter 1, pp. 3 – 18, Chapter 2, pp. 23 – 43, Chapter 3, pp. 45 – 47

As you read, please consider these takeaways and be sure to add whatever you think valuable to your midterm and final project, your "Ethical Toolkit."

1. Note how, in his preface, Weston argues that being ethical means developing skills to help us in our ethical decision-making, and in Chapter 1 he addresses both feelings and careful thinking. The roles of careful thinking and feelings are going to be discussed throughout the class, so keep them in mind.
2. Note the ideas of acting and thinking out of habit as compared to what he calls "mindful thinking." One of the goals of this class is to make us more "mindful" thinkers, to explore our unexplored and habitual ways of thinking and acting.
3. What is the relationship between thinking for yourself and being ethical? What is the role of thinking for yourself in becoming an autonomous and self-determined individual, in becoming your own person?
4. Weston points out how our personal history and authorities in our lives undermine our desire to be autonomous, to be our own persons. Is he correct?
5. Note the very important difference between a Moral Teacher and a Moral Authority.

***Links to additional short online readings for this assignment on Canvas.***

#### **Important Terms**

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- Autonomy
- Axiology
- Ethics, Ethical
- Morality, Moral
- Philosophy
- Self-reflective, Introspective
- Theory, as in "ethical theory"

#### **Introductory Lecture**

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This lesson is designed to introduce you to the study of ethics and its value in each of our lives.

**WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED THIS LESSON**

- You should have a basic understanding of the project of philosophical ethics.
- You should begin to note the sometimes tense relationship between the use of reason and the use of emotion in our ethical deliberations and understanding.
- You should have a basic understanding of the importance of critical thinking in ethics and, in particular, autonomous critical thought.
- You should note the introduction of the idea of an ethical toolkit, which we can use to help us in our ethical decision-making.

**PHILOSOPHY, WISDOM, AND ETHICS**

The word “philosophy” literally means the love of wisdom. To be a philosopher is to care about wisdom, to care about developing a deeper understanding of ourselves, our communities, and the world. When we study philosophy we seek a deeper understanding of what it is to be a human being, to uncover the very heart of who we are and what we value in order to live wisely.

And discovering what we value, what really matters to us is important because our thoughts and actions express what we value, and those thoughts and actions impact ourselves and others.

Consider something as simple and commonplace as making up your grocery list and then going to the grocery store. In the foods we select, we make choices that express our values regarding cloning, bioengineering, and human health. By choosing a particular store we express our values regarding worker’s rights, the impacts of disposables on the environment, and a particular store’s social agenda.

We express values in choosing to take this class and to be a student rather than hanging out in Mexico on the beach (an appealing option as I sit here on a snowy, sub-freezing, dark winter day in Moscow, ID). This is not to mention the values we hold regarding marriage, children and family, obligations arising from being a member of society, our vacations, vocations, and avocations.

Whether we take the time to understand them or not, our lives are deeply impacted by what we value.

**ACTING WITHIN RELATIONSHIPS**

So, let’s begin our study of being human and what humans value by considering the claim that developing understanding arises in understanding our relationships. After all, as a human being, relationships are inescapable.

Think about that for a moment. Did you make the clothes you are wearing or the chair you are sitting on? Did you build the building you are sitting in or grow the food you have eaten today? Did you deliver to your home the electricity you are using to read this or the water that you have been drinking or washing with? What about drilling for the oil you have used for your energy needs? Then of course we are relying on the families of the people who made all these things possible, not just current families, but generations of people, cultures, societies, etc. going back throughout history. And this is not to mention the environments and ecosystems that supported all these activities. So many relationships, with people, with objects, and with so many other living beings of so many other kinds!

So to study human values is to study the very complex interconnected relationships between ourselves and others of all sorts: human, non-human, living, non-living, organic, inorganic, and very importantly, ourselves individually.

Think about how we relate to others, and the impacts on ourselves and others when we choose to marry, to have children, to buy a new car/house/snowmobile, to get a college education, to live as we live. Each of one's choices, one's actions and non-actions as well, demonstrate one's real values, and those actions have consequences, have non-neutral impacts on others, can both harm and benefit ourselves and others.

So, if it is the case that non-neutral impacts arise from our actions, then it seems crucial that one explores just what it is that motivates one's actions so that one might then act wisely in ways that reflect truly worthy values.

### ***ETHICS, BELIEFS, AND HUMAN FREEDOM***

I think that each of us would like our actions to be based on truly worthy values. We would like each of the choices that we make to be based on what we deeply believe to be right, to be just, fair, our duty, and what will bring about true happiness. Yet, often, these beliefs, these values that guide our actions are deeply hidden, unarticulated, and unexplored.

Think about it for a moment. How much conscious deliberation have you done regarding eating bioengineered or irradiated foods, the environmental impact of disposable packaging, and the issues surrounding worker's rights? Yet every time you go to the grocery store, or act under any circumstances, your choices reflect your hidden beliefs about these and other ethical issues.

Studying ethics is about exploring those very values, those very beliefs, and we do so by studying what others before us believed and valued. We do this to make ourselves more self-aware and more aware of our impacts on others and the world. At bottom, hopefully, studying ethics allows us to live a more purposeful human life, a life that is more consciously self-directed and not simply lived unreflectively on autopilot.

The self-exploration I mentioned above allows each of us to determine for ourselves what is worth valuing and thus how best to live, rather than simply living a life based upon the values we have unreflectively absorbed from others, our society, and media. Such self-exploration is the heart of what allows each of us to be a free human being, and this class is designed to help each student to develop the skills that underpin such self-awareness and freedom. The goals of the class include helping students to better analyze and justify the student's own beliefs, others' beliefs, and the societal beliefs that guide one's choices and actions.

The ability to analyze and justify beliefs arises from developing critical thinking skills and by comparing currently held beliefs to the historical philosophical insights found in western and eastern ethical thought. Thus, in this class we will explore and evaluate what some philosophers believe(d) to be the most basic principles of ethical action and relate their ideas to the ethical issues that we encounter daily. With these tools at our disposal, hopefully each of us will be better able to address ethical issues as they arise and then to act in ways that truly reflect our most worthy beliefs about what is ethical.

In this class you will not study ethics to simply memorize facts nor will you be taught the 'right' thing to do or believe. We will not study ethical theory with the goal of writing papers on obtuse philosophical

points. Rather, you will read and study portions of the classics in western and eastern ethical thought with the goal in mind of extracting the historical philosophical insight from those texts so that you can then develop the tools that allow you to apply such insight to your own life and the lives of others.

### ***SO, WHAT IS 'ETHICS'?***

Ethics is a branch of axiology which is one of the four main branches of philosophy. It deals with theories of value - how we determine the worth of things, where the term "things" is meant in its broadest sense. This branch of philosophy includes:

- Aesthetics: which considers theories that evaluate beauty
- Political philosophy: whose theories evaluate humans beings in their political relationships
- Ethics: which considers concepts such as "ought, should, duty, moral rules, right, wrong, obligation, responsibility, etc." (Angeles, Peter, Dictionary of Philosophy, Barnes and Noble, 1983).

So, ethics, which you will study in this course, deals with questions such as the following:

- What does it mean to live a good life?
- What is good character and virtue?
- What is right action?
- What is justice?
- What is virtue and how and should one develop it?
- What is happiness and in what forms is it worth pursuing?
- What is duty, and to whom, human and non-human do I have duties?

Each of these questions and others are explored in this course through a study of the history of ethical thought and thus, through the study of some of philosophical ethic's various theories and the challenges to those ethical theories from various fronts. For example, our discussion of duty and obligation will be centered on Kant's deontological theory but it will be challenged by Feminism's Care Ethics. While our discussion of good character and virtue will center on Aristotle's and Buddhism's virtue theories both are challenged by Utilitarianism's Principle of Utility.

And again, our studies will not simply be intellectual exercises in theory, because the value of ethics lies, more importantly, as I suggested above, in bringing ethics to life, in the exploration of how these theories and the challenges to them impact our actual lives. Such insights can be used to improve our lives individually and collectively.

Let's now turn to our texts for a deeper understanding of ethics and its value in our lives.

In order to carefully introduce you to our project, this lesson is the longest lesson of the course, so please take your time and hang in there.