

Introduction to Ethical Theory via Life is Strange

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Course Description

This course will be an introduction to ethical philosophy, exploring a variety of ethical theories and practicing their application, using the game, Life is Strange as a set of morally interesting cases.

Why Life is Strange?

One of the main difficulties students tend to have when being introduced to ethical philosophy, or philosophy in general, is a seeming lack of applicability. While hypothetical scenarios can be useful in this regard, they are often so detached from the day to day lives of the average undergraduate that they fail to inspire critical engagement with the theories that they are meant to explore. Meanwhile, students generally come into the course with opinions on ethically relevant real life cases, and pre-formed judgments on the cases can prevent students from thinking about the cases in the terms of philosophies they are less familiar with.

Life is Strange presents a solution to this pedagogical issue. It is a story focused video game, released in five episodes, and while it includes some limited puzzle solving, the gameplay mostly consists of making decisions that affect the outcome of the story. The game explores ethical themes that directly relate to the roll of the will, consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, ethics of care, feminism, killing versus letting die and the trolley problem. Thus, *Life is Strange* offers a perfect place for students to try out and explore ethical theories in a manner that is both entertaining and safe from necessitating real life consequences.

Learning Objectives

- Students should understand various ethical philosophies to such an extent that they can be applied to the choices presented in Life is Strange.
- Students should be able to evaluate Life is Strange as a piece of moral fiction.
- Students should learn to articulate moral arguments in favor or against making given decisions in Life is Strange.

Course Requirements and Grading

Cold Calls (30%): During lecture each student will be called upon to briefly dialogue about an ethical theory or dilemma. Students that are unable to speak publicly will have the option of turning in a written question and an assertion involving a given ethical

theory or dilemma (the topics will be given at the beginning of lecture as well as the students being called—written responses can be turned in at the first break and will be read aloud to the class). Each student will be called on 3 times over the length of the course. This assignment will be graded on a pass/fail basis, and is meant to help ensure the completion of readings, a high rate of attendance and participation in lecture.

Decision Reports (30%): Each student will write 3 short (2-3 pages) reports on one decision they made in the most recently assigned episode (students have the option of which episode to write reports on). They will be required to describe the dilemma, how it relates to one or more ethical theories presented in the class, the ethical basis they used to make the decision, the outcome of the decision, and whether they feel that the game accurately presented a plausible outcome of acting on the described theory.

Final Paper (40%): Each student will be required to write a 4-6 page final paper on the course. They will have the option to write on the basis of a prompt or on an approved topic they are independently interested in. They will be required to apply two or more moral theories to the events of Life is Strange and defend a thesis relevant to both theories as they relate to the game.

Attendance: Lecture attendance, while not correlating with a percentage of the final grade, will be mandatory, and missing more than two lectures will result in failure of the class (exempting emergencies). There will be two lectures each week and these lectures will be three and a half hours long.

Resources

Content notes (in both spoiler free and spoiler forms) will be available on the course website.

All readings will be available in pdf on the course website.

Learning Support Services offers resources to help with academic success, free of charge, including writing tutors. For more information visit <http://www2.ucsc.edu/lss/> UCSC's Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides resources and support for students with documented disabilities. Any student who thinks they are in need of accommodation, based on the impact of a disability, should contact me privately to submit their Accommodation Authorization and discuss specific needs, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. Please contact the Disability Resource Center at 831-459-2089 in room 125 Hahn Student Services or by e-mail at drc@ucsc.edu to coordinate those accommodations.

UCSC's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides a wide range of shortterm and long-term mental health services. Counseling services are confidential and free of charge to all UCSC students. For more information, contact CAPS at 831-459-2628 or visit <http://caps.ucsc.edu/>.

Cheating/Plagiarism Policy

Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will be dealt with in accordance with university policy. For more information, please see the University policy on academic integrity for undergraduate students at http://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_integrity.

Course Materials/Schedule

While the students will have to procure a copy of Life is Strange (it is available on Windows, OS X, Linux, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360 and Xbox One and usually retails for \$20), all of the assigned readings will be made available as pdfs. If none of these platforms are available to a student, speak to the instructor and we can line up either access to a platform or videos of gameplay if no other option is available.

Week 1, Lecture A

- Episode 1 of Life is Strange
- Introduction to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article, "Free Will"

Week 1, Lecture B

- Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapter 2
- Kant, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, Section 1

Week 2, Lecture A

- Episode 2 of Life is Strange
- Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Women, Chapters 1 and 2

Week 2, Lecture B

- Cudd, "Oppression by Choice"

Week 3, Lecture A

- Episode 3 of Life is Strange
- Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book I, Chapters 1-7, Book 2, Chapters 1-8

Week 3, Lecture B

- Gilligan, "In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and of Morality"

Week 4, Lecture A

- Episode 4 of Life is Strange
- Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus"

Week 4, Lecture B

-Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"

Week 5, Lecture A

-Episode 5 of Life is Strange

-Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect"

Week 5, Lecture B

-Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"

This course is dedicated to the memory of James Marder, the punkest punk who ever lived