

Teacher Manual  
for  
*Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction*  
(Routledge Press, 1998, first edition)

Harry J. Gensler  
Loyola University Chicago  
Chicago, IL 60660 USA

Using the Textbook 2
Using the EthiCola Software 12

Last modified on January 9, 2018

© 2009 Harry J. Gensler

This manual (along with the EthiCola instructional software  
and class slides) can be downloaded from:

<http://www.harryhiker.com/ec>  
or <http://www.harrycola.com/ec>

# Using the Textbook

My *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction* introduces the issues and controversies of moral philosophy. While suitable for a general audience, the book was written for undergraduate college students who have had one or two previous philosophy courses. The book can be used in ethics courses in various ways, for example:

- as the sole text in an introductory ethics course.
- as one of several texts in an introductory ethics course. For example, it could be used with (a) an general ethics anthology (such as *Ethics: Contemporary Readings* [Routledge, 2004], which I co-edited with Earl W. Spurgin and James C. Swindal), (b) longer historical or contemporary works, or (c) a book on applied ethics (about business or medicine or general moral issues).
- as supplemental reading for an upper-level ethics course.

My Web site (<http://www.harryhiker.com/ec> or <http://www.harrycola.com/ec>) has two book supplements that you may want to use of in your course:

- EthiCola – a Windows instructional program for helping students to learn about moral philosophy. This manual will later talk about what the program does, how to assign exercises from it, and how to record EthiCola scores.
- Downloadable classroom slides in Acrobat format for individual chapters (these slides are also accessible from within the EthiCola program). If your classroom has a computer connected to a projector, you can show these slides directly from the computer. Or you could print the pages and use them with an overhead projector.

The rest of this part sketches how I cover the book in 36 class periods of 50 minutes each during the semester; I spend some further periods on exams and sometimes on other readings. While you may go faster or slower than me, and may want to adapt the material to your own teaching style, you may find my notes helpful. I break my course into four parts: A – B – C – D.

## Part A (Intro and Chapters 1 to 3): 9 classes

### Class A-1: First Class

I spend my first class on the syllabus and course requirements. I explain why it's important to study moral philosophy. And I point out the Web address that students can use to install the EthiCola instructional program to their computer or flash drive. (The program is free for anyone.)

Homework for next class: Read Sections A and B of the book's Introduction and write out the answers to the study questions for these two sections. Also install EthiCola on your computer or flash drive. (I ignore the appendix on the computer exercises, which is out of date.)

#### Class A-2: Sections A and B (Introduction)

I spend a few minutes going through names and making a seating chart. Then I talk about the ethics software; I bring my notebook computer and give a demonstration of how to start the program.

I explain the definition of philosophy. I ask students what definition of philosophy (if any) they had in their previous philosophy courses – and for further examples of ultimate questions.

[If I were pushed, I'd explain "ultimate question of life" (in my definition of philosophy) as "basic question that affects our general outlook on life but that isn't resolvable by ordinary experimental or mathematical means." This is rough, but still useful. If you think of a better definition, send it to me.]

To get clearer on what philosophy is, I sketch how other disciplines (history, psychology, theology, literature, etc.) might approach belief in God (or racism, or free will, or whatever) – and how philosophy involves rationally debating the issue. A drama where the characters reason about the existence of God can be both philosophy and literature; so the different disciplines can overlap.

To get clearer on the nature of reasoning, I describe how we reason about non-philosophical areas (like about what computer to buy or who committed the murder) and how this resembles philosophical reasoning. I also spend some time on the central notions of logic, the importance of looking for absurd implications of a view, and the role of both reasoning and personal commitment in forming our philosophical beliefs.

Homework: Finish the Introduction, including the study questions and computer exercise. Read Section 1.1 and do the study questions.

#### Class A-3: Section C (Intro) to Section 1.1 (Chap 1)

I spend some time on the nature of moral philosophy and the distinction between metaethics and normative ethics. I ask students whether various views would be "metaethical" or "normative"; students often have trouble with this.

The rest of the period introduces cultural relativism. I stress the importance of trying to understand before we criticize; so I lay down the rule that we won't criticize a view until we're done explaining it. I try to present cultural relativism in a fair and plausible way. Most younger students find the view very attractive at first.

Homework: Read Sections 1.2 to 1.3 and do the study questions.

#### Class A-4: Sections 1.2 to 1.3

I ask students about their initial reactions to CR; most tend to like and accept it, but a few perceptive ones have objections. Then we go through some strong criticisms of the view. It's important to do this thoroughly, because it teaches students that their initial impressions can be wrong – and that they need to reason about things instead of just accepting a view because it sounds plausible.

We spend some time on how CR applies to racism and moral education; I try to relate most of the views that we take to these two topics. Then we go into the subgroup problem.

We talk about moral diversity between cultures and how, if we believe in objective values, we might, by seeing how other cultures do things and how they react to what we do, try to correct errors in the values of our own culture.

I ask students how intelligent foreigners criticize American values. In my experience, criticisms center around things like our (1) weak commitment to family life, (2) materialistic values, (3) short-range approaches to long-range problems, (4) high crime rate, and (5) wide gap between rich and poor. These criticisms seem correct to me.

Homework: Finish Chapter 1, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class A-5: Sections 1.4 to 1.5

I summarize what we've done so far. Then we talk about objective values and the three arguments against them.

I ask students whether cultural relativism is a liberal or a conservative view. Many say that it's liberal – because it denies the traditional objective approach to values. But some see it as highly conservative, because it makes it impossible to criticize the values of our culture.

We talk a little about Kohlberg's stages and how CR fits in. Then I ask students what we can learn from CR – either positive things to incorporate into our own view of morality or challenges that we need to answer.

Homework: Read Sections 2.1 to 2.2 and do the study questions.

Class A-6: Sections 2.1 to 2.2

I explain subjectivism and ask students how they react to the view; again, most students tend to like the view. Then we go through criticisms.

Homework: Finish Chapter 2, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class A-7: Sections 2.3 to 2.4

I explain the ideal observer view and ask students how they react to it. Then we go through criticisms. I emphasize that the ideal observer view, even though it needs more work, is a great improvement over cultural relativism and subjectivism.

I also pass out the oral exam schedule (ten minutes per student) and have students sign up. I tell them a little about what the oral exams are like.

About this time, I collect the students' folders with their answers to the study questions. I read or skim the answers, and write a few comments. Work is graded as "+0 good" (satisfactory), "+1 pretty good" or "+2 very good" (1 or 2 bonus points), "-1" or "-2" with criticisms (1 or 2 penalty points), or "-4" if the student didn't do the questions.

Homework: Read Sections 3.1 to 3.2 and do the study questions.

Class A-8: Sections 3.1 to 3.2

I explain supernaturalism. Students of a religious background often find this approach very plausible. Differences sometimes surface on how we can know God's will; some Protestants stress the Bible while some Catholics (especially conservative ones) stress church authority.

I pass out the oral exam schedule again. Students who haven't yet signed up can do so, and others can review or revise their times.

Homework: Finish Chapter 3, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class A-9: Sections 3.3 to 3.6

I ask students about their initial reactions to supernaturalism, and what they like or dislike about the view. Then we go through objections and how morality and religion could connect closely even if supernaturalism were false.

I pass out the oral exam schedule for the third time.

Homework: By the oral exam, have computer exercises 00, 01, 02, 03, 03r, and 03v done – and e-mail me your scores or bring a flash drive with your scores with you. For the class after, read Sections 4.1 and 4.2 and do the study questions.

Part A Exam: Intro and Chaps 1 to 3

For the oral exam, students come to my office for individual 10-minute slots. If they didn't send me their EthiCola scores by e-mail, they bring a flash drive with their scores and I use EthiSkor to process the scores. Then I pick a random index card from three cards – each of which has one of these questions:

- Tell me about cultural relativism.
- Tell me about subjectivism (and then the ideal observer view).
- Tell me about supernaturalism.

Some students take the ball and run with it; I may break in with further questions as they go along. Other students prefer that I keep asking them questions. In either case, I try to find out what students know more than what they don't know.

If there is time, I like to ask “Which view struck you as the most plausible (or the least plausible) – and why?”

I grade students on the basis of (a) clarity, (b) accuracy, (c) detail, and (d) personal appropriation. The best students are very good on all four points; they can explain the views and arguments in a clear, accurate, and detailed way; and they show that they’ve thought about and struggled with the issues themselves. The poorer students have a more basic idea of the theories, sometimes jumble things up, and have struggled less with the issues.

### Part B (Chapters 4 to 6): 9 classes

Class B-1: Sections 4.1 and 4.2

I say a few words to set the context for the next three views – views that have been very popular with 20th century philosophers. Then I talk about intuitionism and its main claims, stressing the indefinability of “good” (with Hume’s Law as a corollary) and the objectivity of moral truths (which is based on taking commonsense moral practice seriously).

Homework: Read Section 4.3 and do the study questions.

Class B-2: Section 4.3

First I review the first two claims of intuitionism, and the arguments for these claims. Then I explain the third claim (about ethics being based on self-evident truths), the arguments for this, and some objections that come from misunderstandings.

Homework: Finish Chapter 4, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class B-3: Sections 4.4 to 4.5

After reviewing the main claims of intuitionism, and hearing student reactions to the view, we consider objections.

As the class ends, I warn students not to get too depressed over emotivism (a view that students generally hate); I tell them that they need to be tested by the terrors of skepticism before we can move to something more constructive. I also tell them that I will in the following class pretend to hold emotivism and that they should try to attack my view if they can; the pretending is fun, gets students to take the view seriously, and encourages students to develop their critical powers.

Homework: Read Section 5.1 and do the study questions.

Class B-4: Section 5.1

I come in with a bandage on my head and tell my students that I became converted to emotivism when I fell and hit my head on the previous day. I explain and defend emotivism as if I

held it and I ask students to raise objections and problems. I stress the logical positivism argument and the claim that there are no moral truths.

Homework: Read Sections 5.2 to 5.3 and do the study questions.

Class B-5: Sections 5.2 to 5.3

Still wearing my bandage, I explain the emotive nature of moral judgments, how this provides the simplest and best explanation for morality, and how this view lets us reason about some moral issues but not about basic moral principles. Students give their (usually negative) reactions.

Homework: Finish Chapter 5, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class B-6: Sections 5.4 to 5.6

After telling the class that I recovered from my head injury, I explain objections to emotivism.

About this time, I collect the students' folders with their answers to the study questions (see the comments about this for class A-7 above). I try to return the folders the following class.

Homework: Read Sections 6.1 to 6.3 and do the study questions.

Class B-7: Sections 6.1 to 6.3

Many students at this point are confused and feel that the course isn't going anywhere; they are getting better at attacking views but they aren't learning how to make better moral judgments. I talk about their frustration – and how they need to clear out bad views first before they can make progress. I tell them that the next view, prescriptivism, has some breakthrough insights.

I carefully explain some of the basic ideas of prescriptivism; many students find this view very attractive but subtle and confusing. I also pass out a sign-up sheet for the next oral exam.

Homework: Read Section 6.4 and do the study questions.

Class B-8: Sections 6.3 to 6.4

After reviewing the basic ideas of prescriptivism, I explain how the view helps us to think rationally about ethics; I emphasize GR consistency and the argument against Nazis. I also pass around the oral sign-up sheet again, in case students need to change their times.

Homework: Finish Chapter 6, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class B-9: Section 6.5

I go over the major objections to prescriptivism. I also pass around the oral sign-up sheet again and go over what will be on the oral exam and how to prepare for it.

Homework: By the oral exam, have computer exercises 04, 05, 06, 06r, 06v, and 06z done – and e-mail me your scores or bring a flash drive with your scores with you. For the class after, read Section 7.1 and do the study questions.

Part B Exam: Chapters 4 to 6

This works like the first oral exam, except that students get one of these questions:

- Tell me about intuitionism.
- Tell me about emotivism.
- Tell me about prescriptivism.

By this time, students are more comfortable with the oral-exam process.

### Part C (Chapters 7 to 9): 9 classes

Class C-1: Section 7.1

After reviewing the previous approaches to morality (and the stalemate they seem to lead to), I introduce the basic idea of the next three chapters – that, to guide our moral thinking, we can appeal to moral consistency principles that make sense from various perspectives.

I emphasize the parallel with mathematics and logic. Here too, we have principles that are formal (expressible using variables and abstract constants) and largely noncontroversial in their content – even though philosophers disagree on how to defend them (as based on independent self-evident objective truths, language conventions, empirical data, ideas in God’s mind, psychological laws, etc.).

Homework: Read Sections 7.2 to 7.3 and do the study questions.

Class C-2: Sections 7.2 to 7.3

I explain the usefulness and limitations of the logicity and conscientiousness principles – which appeal to consistency. I ask students what questions they’d ask to test the consistency of someone who claims to be Napoleon.

Homework: Read Sections 7.4 to 7.5 and do the study questions.

Class C-3: Sections 7.4 to 7.5

I spend some time on how to appeal to consistency and factual accuracy to refute racist arguments. This shows the general usefulness of the proposed method, and how it breaks the stalemate that the other approaches lead to. I also start a little into the section on impartiality.



Homework: Finish Chapter 7, including the study questions and computer exercise. Also read Section 8.1 and do the study questions.

Class C-4: Sections 7.5 to 8.1

I explain the impartiality requirement, show its usefulness, and distinguish it from other similarly sounding requirements (like the view that we should always act the same way in the same sort of situation). Then I talk about the various ways to answer the question, “Why be consistent?” Then I briefly introduce the “golden rule” formula of Chapter 8.

Homework: Read Section 8.2 and do the study questions.

Class C-5: Section 8.2

I explain the “golden rule” formula and its derivation. Then I bring up objections to the “literal golden rule” – and try to show how we can avoid the problems by wording the rule more carefully. Some of the distinctions here are subtle; students need help to get it straight.

Homework: Read Sections 8.3 to 8.4 and do the study questions.

Class C-6: Sections 8.2 to 8.4

After reviewing the materials in the previous class (emphasizing the distinctions important to understanding the golden rule), I explain the masochism problem and how to deal with it.

I talk about questions on the golden rule, emphasizing question 1 (about the universality of the rule), 2 (how it relates to “love thy neighbor”), 4 (how it relates to “Treat others as they treat you”), and 9 (multi-party versions of the golden rule).

Homework: Finish Chapter 8, including the study questions and computer exercise. Also read Section 9.1 and do the study questions.

Class C-7: Sections 8.4 to 9.1

I finish discussing further questions on the golden rule (emphasizing question 1, 2, 4, and 9). Then I talk about how the golden rule could be based on various approaches on how to justify moral beliefs; I stress the appeal to social conventions, self-interest, God’s will, and self-evident truths. Then I start into the Chapter 9 conditions of moral rationality, starting with the requirement to be informed. I also pass out the oral exam schedule and have students sign up.

About this time, I collect the students’ folders with their answers to the study questions (see the comments about this for class A-7 above).

Homework: Read Section 9.2 and do the study questions.

Class C-8: Section 9.1 to 9.2

I finish the discussion on the conditions for rational moral beliefs and rational desires (emphasizing facts, imagination, and consistency).

I ask the class to suppose that they have two roommates, both desiring to become doctors. For one roommate, the desire is well thought out and rational; for the other roommate, the desire is not very well thought out and not very rational. I ask the class in what concrete ways the “rational student” and the “irrational student” would differ. I also ask them how they’d help a roommate to become more rational in deciding whether to become a doctor. I pass out the oral exam schedule again, in case students want to change their times.

Homework: Finish Chapter 9, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class C-9: Section 9.3 to 9.5

We consider how to apply the full view to racism and to moral education. I pass out the oral exam schedule for the third time.

Homework: By the oral exam, have computer exercises 07, 08, 09, 09r, 09v, and 09z done – and e-mail me your scores or bring a flash drive with your scores with you. For the class after, read Sections 10.1 to 10.2 and do the study questions.

Part C Exam: Chapters 7 to 9

This works like the previous oral exams, except that students get one of these questions:

- Tell me about consistency.
- Tell me about the golden rule.
- Tell me about moral rationality.

By now, students are fairly comfortable with the oral-exam process.

### Part D (Chapters 10 to 12): 9 classes

Class D-1: Sections 10.1 to 10.2

I come in with a bandage on my head and tell my students that I became converted to classical utilitarianism when I fell and hit my head on the previous day. I explain and defend utilitarianism as if I held it and ask the students to raise objections and problems.

Homework: Read Sections 10.3 to 10.4 and do the study questions.

Class D-2: Sections 10.3 to 10.4

Still wearing my bandage, I finish my explanation of utilitarianism. Students give their (usually negative) reactions. Then, suddenly, I tell my students that my medicine has taken effect and I no longer believe in classical utilitarianism. So I add my own objections to the view. I also discuss various ways that utilitarians could respond to objections.

Homework: Read Section 10.5 and do the study questions.

Class D-3: Sections 10.4 to 10.5

I further discuss objections to classical utilitarianism. Then I explain pluralistic rule utilitarianism and how it can get around many of these objections.

Homework: Finish Chapter 10, including the study questions and computer exercise. Also read Section 11.1 and do the study questions.

Class D-4: Sections 10.5 to 11.1

I finish the discussion of pluralistic rule utilitarianism – and point out some problems with the view. Then I begin the discussion of Ross’s nonconsequentialist view.

Homework: Read Section 11.2 and do the study questions.

Class D-5: Section 11.2 to 11.3

I finish Ross’s view and bring up some objections.

Homework: Read Section 11.3 and do the study questions.

Class D-6: Sections 11.3

I consider the role of exceptionless principles in ethics.

Homework: Finish Chapter 11, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class D-7: Sections 11.4 to 11.6

I consider views on distributive justice. As time permits, I briefly mention some of the other topics in the chapter: the ten commandments, virtues, and rights. I emphasize that some of these topics are very large and would require a whole course in themselves.

About this time, I collect the students’ folders with their answers to the study questions (see the comments about this for class A-7 above). I also pass out the oral exam schedule and have students sign up.

Homework: Read Sections 12.1 to 12.2 and do the study questions.

Class D-8: Sections 12.1 to 12.2

I explain some of the standard nonconsequentialist and consequentialist approaches to the morality of abortion. I also pass out the oral exam schedule again, in case students want to change their times.

Homework: Finish Chapter 12, including the study questions and computer exercise.

Class D-9: Sections 12.3 to 12.5

I explain how the various metaethical views apply to abortion. Then I explain the golden rule approach to the issue, emphasizing its strengths and limitations. I pass out the oral exam schedule for the third time.

Homework: By the oral exam, have computer exercises 10, 11, 12, 12r, 12v, and 12z done – and e-mail me your scores or bring a flash drive with your scores with you.

Part D Exam: Chapters 10 to 12

This works like the previous oral exams, except that students get one of these questions:

- Tell me about consequentialism.
- Tell me about nonconsequentialism.
- Tell me about abortion arguments.

By now, students are quite comfortable with the oral-exam process.

## Using the EthiCola Software

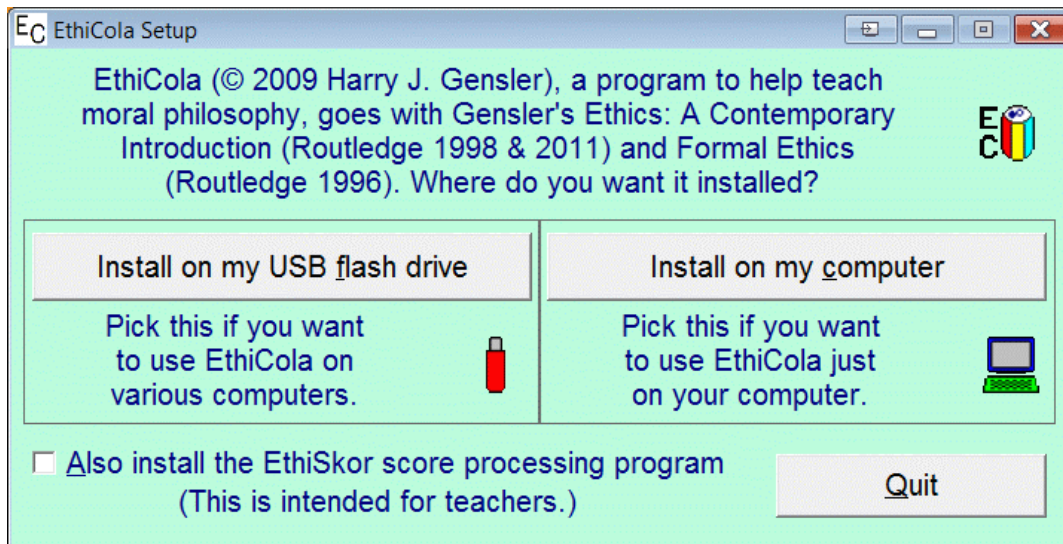
EthiCola is a computer program to help students learn about moral philosophy. Each book chapter has a corresponding computer exercise, consisting of short summaries followed by multiple-choice questions (which are presented in a random order). EthiCola also keeps track of the highest percentage of correct answers that a given student achieved on a given exercise. Most students find EthiCola to be a fun way to learn. EthiCola runs in Windows; you can download EthiCola (with this teacher manual and class slides) from these Web addresses:



<http://www.harryhiker.com/ec>  
or <http://www.harrycola.com/ec>

These Web pages also talk about how to run EthiCola in Linux or Macintosh using a free program that allows you to run Windows programs under these non-Windows platforms.

EthiCola's Setup program looks like this:



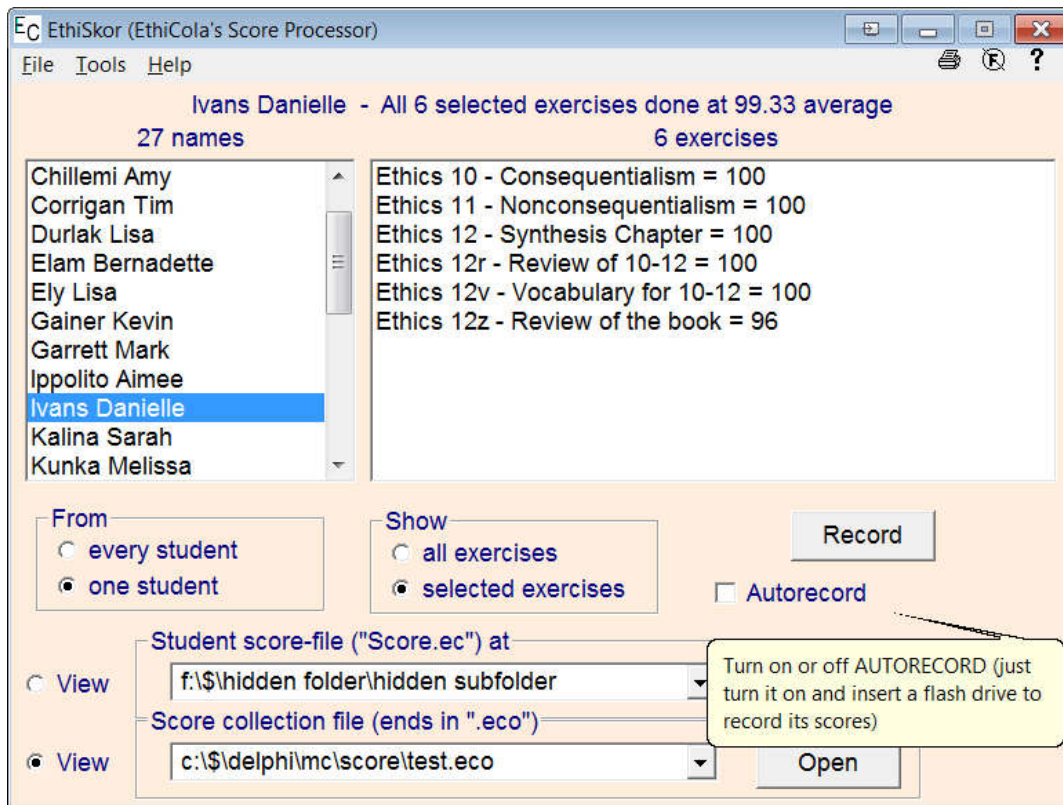
EthiCola can be installed on either a USB flash drive (which is best if you want to use EthiCola on various computers) or on your computer's hard drive (which is best if you want to use EthiCola just on your computer). Teachers can at the same time install the EthiSkor score processing program (for recording and analyzing EthiCola scores).

While you might just encourage your students to do the exercises and leave it at that, I suggest rather that you assign specific exercises that go with the chapters that you cover and then record student scores. I break my ethics course into four parts and assign these exercises for each part:

- Ethics 00, 01, 02, 03, 03r, and 03v.
- Ethics 04, 05, 06, 06r, 06v, and 06z.
- Ethics 07, 08, 09, 09r, 09v, and 09z.
- Ethics 10, 11, 12, 12r, 12v, and 12z.

Sometimes I say this in my syllabus: "You're required to get at least 90 on each assigned exercise (if you don't get 90 the first time, you can do it again until you get 90); for each exercise not done at this level, your corresponding exam score is lowered by 2 points." Sometimes I say this: "You're required to get at least 85 on each assigned exercise (if you don't get 85 the first time, you can do it again until you get 85); for each exercise not done at this level, your corresponding exam score is lowered by 2 points; and if your overall average on assigned exercises is 97 or above, then you get a 2 point bonus added to your exam score." While there are various ways to work the computer exercises into course grading, I strongly suggest that students be given some grade-motivation for doing the exercises.

Using EthiCola requires that you (or someone else) record and process student scores. As mentioned above, you can install the EthiSkor score processing program at the same time as you install EthiCola itself. EthiSkor is easy to use and looks like this (note the "balloon help" – if you point to something then the program will pop up a brief explanation):



EthiSkor itself has a help file (click the HELP menu or the F1 key or the "?" icon) which tells you how to use the program.

If you give oral exams, as I like to do with ethics, you can record scores when students come in to take their exam. They bring in their flash drive, I plop it into my machine, and the program records scores in about five seconds (using AUTORECORD). If you give exams in your classroom, you can have students bring their flash drives to class; then you can use a classroom computer (or bring your laptop), attach two or three USB extension cords to the computer (some USB hubs work more reliably than others), start EthiSkor, check AUTORECORD, and have your students insert their USB flash drives into the extension cords. Scores record automatically. When the student's name appears on the screen (and the student can see this or else I call the student's name), then scores have been recorded and the student can remove the flash drive. AUTORECORD automatically records scores from all folders of inserted flash drives (and floppies); several flash drives can be inserted at once. The first time, it takes a few seconds to register each flash drive; things go faster the next time.

If this is more convenient, students can send you scores by e-mail. To do this, students should bring up TOOLS | VIEW SCORES within EthiCola, click PASTE TO E-MAIL, and then follow the directions. You'll receive an e-mail with score data and directions about how to process this data.

If you want to assign EthiCola (and I hope you do), you need to be familiar with EthiCola and its help file, this section of the teacher manual, and the EthiSkor program and its help file. Your students will find EthiCola to be an easy program to use and a fun way to learn about moral philosophy – and a very effective learning tool.