Introduction to Moral Philosophy
HUMA 1920 – Fall 2020

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)

Lecturer:	Dr. T.Y. William Wong
Lecturer E-mail:	hmtywwong@ust.hk
Office Hours:	Weds 12-2pm (by appointment)
Lecture Location:	Online via Zoom (Link on Canvas)
Schedule:	M, Weds 9:00am to 10:20am (see lecture outline for public holiday exceptions)

HKUST Catalog Course Description

This introductory course examines various beliefs and questions underlying our moral lives. These include the relation between morality and religion, subjectivism, relativism, self-interest, the rights and wrongs of euthanasia, etc. Also, certain ethical theories claim to help us make the right moral decisions, e.g. utilitarianism. This course is a systematic exploration of such beliefs and theories, emphasizing critical thinking and reasonable justification.

Further Description

Roughly put, Moral Philosophy, or Ethics, is the study of what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'. In this Fall 2020 course, we will examine a number of major historical attempts at answering these two questions. In other words, we will examine a number of ethical theories, such as ethical egoism, cultural relativism, utilitarianism, that stipulate the conditions for what is deemed ethical behaviour. For example, one variant of utilitarianism might say that the ethical course of action is simply just to maximise the greatest amount of 'utility' in the world. But are these good theories and what, exactly, is 'utility' anyways? At the same time, we will consider a number of corollary ethical concepts, such as justice, pleasure, life, death, dying, and discrimination. This will comprise the first half of the course and will help us build up our conceptual tool kits in recognising, breaking down, and answering difficult ethical questions.

In the second half of the course, we will put some of these tools to the test, by way of entertaining a number of contemporary issues in Bioethics and AI ethics. For example, we will consider abortion, euthanasia, genetic editing, AI moral decision making, and algorithmic bias.

Interaction in the form of Zoom polls, Zoom breakout rooms, question and answer, and class discussion is highly encouraged. In this regard, we will start at a comfortable pace, but progress to a higher level of interaction. The aim of interaction is to help students develop important critical thinking and communication skills.

Lecture notes will be posted before each lecture, but these notes do not represent all of the content of each lecture. This is important because it is possible that the questions on the term test and short paper will draw on lecture material and mandatory readings that are not contained in the lecture notes.

Course Objectives

Students will gain an understanding of key ideas in ethical thought, as well as familiarity with some contemporary issues in bioethics and AI ethics. Importantly, the aim is not necessarily for students to be

able to rehearse common ideas in ethics. Rather, the aim is for students to, through the exploration of these ideas, to sharpen their critical thinking, writing, and speaking abilities. These are skills that can accompany the rest of students' lives. As such, the assessment has been shaped accordingly.

	HKUST HUMA 1920 Course ILOs
1	Recall and paraphrase various moral theories such as Utilitarianism (rightness of action based on consequences), Kantianism (rightness of action based on duty), Virtue Ethics (rightness of action based on virtue and character) and their relative merits in helping to resolve moral issues,
2	Articulate common moral ideas and issues such as the relation between morality and religion, relativism, egoism, euthanasia, etc.
3	Formulate their assumptions and to assess the logical cogency of arguments pertaining to these ideas and issues.
4	Critically interpret the significance of the values that are espoused.

Course Assessment

Participation (attendance and interaction) 10%
Term Test (conducted on 7th of October.; proctored online) 15%
Short Paper (~2 pages due on 3rd of November by end of day: 11:59:59pm) 25%
Long Paper (4-6 pages due on 10th of December by end of day: 11:59:59pm) 50%

Participation Policy

6% is dedicated to attendance. 4% is to interaction, in the form of classroom discussions with the instructor and peers. Interaction points are wholly subject to the instructor's discretion.

Attendance to all lectures is strongly encouraged but not strictly required. One can still obtain the 6%, if one does not miss more than 2 lectures. However, as mentioned, the term test and short paper may draw on material presented exclusively in the lecture.

Paper Assignments

Many of you may come from backgrounds in (inter alia) the sciences, engineering, and business. As such, many of you may have less experience in writing philosophy papers, or any argumentative paper, for that matter. The goal of a paper is to present a succinct and reasoned defense of some claim, say, 'Rachels' argument against moral relativity is wrong because X', or, 'according to utilitarianism, abortion can be justified by reasons X, Y, Z'.

There will be more guidance in class on how to research the ideas for papers, plan a paper, and write a good paper. And, before the long paper, but after the short paper, I will also offer an in-class paper lab (TBA), whereby the primary goal is to orientate students towards being able to write succinct, cogent, and well-structured papers.

For your reference: this is an excellent guide on writing philosophy papers and is mandatory reading for one of the lectures: http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html

The **short paper is ~2 pages**, and the **long paper is 4-6 pages**. For the short paper, a list of guiding questions will be posted, where students can choose one question to answer. Differently, the goal of the long paper is to primarily encourage one to conduct independent research. For this reason, students must select their own research topic.

Paper assignments are to be submitted by e-mail, with your name and student number.

Late Submission Policy

For each day a paper is submitted late, without justification, a five percent penalty will be applied.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and the course will follow University's guidelines in handling all forms of academic dishonesty. All papers will be checked with plagiarism detection software, and the one test will be proctored online (more details to follow.)

Introduction to Moral Philosophy
HUMA 1920 – Fall 2020

Lecture Outline

Date	Lecture # and Topic	Agenda	Readings
7th September 2020	1. **Introduction**	• What is Ethics? (And what it is not) • Course Overview & Aims • Course Expectations • Class Poll (Background and Year of Study) • An introductory survey of ethical theories • Is-Ought Distinction • How to do well in this course	Nil
9th September 2020	2. **First Pass: Divine Command**	• Divine Command Theory • Euthyphro Dilemma • Relationship between Ethics and Religion • General: what is a philosophical argument?	**Mandatory** Mark Timmons (2001). An Introduction to Moral Theory. Chapter 1 (Link Available)
14th September 2020	3. **First Pass: Moral Relativism**	• Moral Relativism • Is-Ought Distinction Revisited • Possible Bridges from Descriptive to Prescriptive • The nature of Ethical Disagreement • Introduction to Gyges Ring	**Mandatory** James Rachels (1986). The Challenge of Cultural Relativism.
16th September 2020	4. **Justice and Gyges Ring**	• Background on Plato, Socrates, and the Republic • The Dialogue • Anonymity as 'Dependent Variable' • Justice In Itself • Empirical Data: Moral Psychology (Batson et al.) • Class Discussion • Poll: What would you do?	**Mandatory** Excerpt of 'Gyges Ring' Dialogue from The Republic (Link Available) **Optional** Batson et al., (1999) Moral hypocrisy: appearing moral to oneself without being so.
21st September 2020	5. **Deontology I**	• Introduction to Kant • Categorical Imperative • Kant's Argument Structure • Class Discussion • Modern Deontology	**Mandatory** Excerpt of Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals (Link Available) Andrews Reath, 2010. Contemporary Kantian Ethics.

Date	Lecture # and Topic	Agenda	Readings
23rd September 2020	6. **Deontology II**	• Kant Revisited • Issues with Deontology • The Trolley Problem • Double Effect? • Introduction to Consequentialism	**Mandatory** Philippa Foot (1967). The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect.
28th September 2020	7. **Consequentialism I**	• Varieties of Consequentialism • Classic Utilitarianism • Push-Pin Scenario • Deontology vs Consequentialism	**Mandatory** IEP Entry: Consequentialism (Section 1). Excerpt of Jeremy Bentham (1830). The Rationale of Reward.
30th September 2020	8. **Consequentialism II**	• Rule Utilitarianism • Utilitarianism: For and Against • Class Discussion • What is 'Utility', anyways? • Empirical Approaches • Anonymous Feedback for Lecturer (Google Forms Link) • Introduction to Well-Being	**Mandatory** John Stuart Mill (1863) Utilitarianism. Chapter 1 (Link Available). (Very Short Reading) Bernard Williams and J. J. C. Smart, 1973. Utilitarianism: For and Against. (Two Essays; so, longer reading)
5th October 2020	9. **Well-Being**	• Well-being • Hedonism, Desire Theory, and Objective-list Theory • Empirical Methods: Well-Being • Questions & Answer Before Term Test	**Mandatory** Fletcher, G. (2016) The Philosophy of Well-Being: An Introduction. Chapter 1. **Optional** Klemmack et al. (1974). Measures of Well-being: An Empirical and Critical Assessment.
7th October 2020	10. **In-Class Test (30 min) & Course Review**	• Test, Proctored Online • Course Interim Summary • What's next? • Short Paper Questions Posted	**Mandatory** Nil
12th October 2020	11. **Introduction to Bioethics**	• Bioethics • Current Landscape • Contemporary Ethical Principles • How to do Applied Ethics	**Optional** Karen Rich (2015). Introduction to Bioethics. Chapter 2 (pg. 33–36)

Date	Lecture # and Topic	Agenda	Readings
14th October 2020	**12. Harm and Death**	• What constitutes 'harm'? • Different types of 'harm'? • Principle of Beneficence • Principle of Non-Maleficence • What's so bad about death?	**Mandatory** Barbara Levenbook (2013). Harming Someone After Death. Stephen Rosenbaum (1986). How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus.
19th October 2020	**13. Death and Dying**	• What's so bad about death? • What is life? • The Process of Dying	**Mandatory** Thomas Nagel, 1970. Death. Bernat et al. (1981). On the Definition and Criterion of Death.
21st October 2020	**14. Euthanasia I**	• Assisted Death • DNRs • Legality in different Jurisdictions • Active vs Passive Euthanasia	**Mandatory** Winston Nesbitt (1995). Is Killing No Worse than letting Die.
26th October 2020	**No Class** (*Public Holiday*)		
28th October 2020	**15. Euthanasia II**	• Distinction between Active vs Passive Euthanasia Recap • Wong's Ethical Argument in Favour of Active Euthanasia • Group Breakout room Discussion: Evaluate Wong's argument, and agree or disagree • Each group to present each argument to class	**Mandatory** James Rachels (1979). Active and Passive Euthanasia. Thomas D. Sullivan. Active and Passive Euthanasia: A Reply to Rachels **Optional** Thomas D. Sullivan. Active and Passive Euthanasia: A Reply to Rachels
2nd November 2020	**16. Abortion**	• Abortion • Harm vs Killing • Consequentialist vs Deontological Divide? • Timing • Infanticide?	**Mandatory** Judith Jarvis Thomson, 1971. A Defense of Abortion Don Marquis. Why Abortion is Immoral. **Optional** Marne Anne Warren, 1973. On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion.

Date	Lecture # and Topic	Agenda	Readings
4th November 2020	**17. Eugenics I** (*Short Paper Due on This Day*)	• Introduction to Genomic Editing Techniques • CRISPR • cf. Stem Cell Research? (Same or Different) • Naturalistic Fallacy	**Mandatory** Ronald Dworkin. Playing God: Genes Clones and Luck, from John Arthur, ed., Morality and Moral Controversies
9th November 2020	**18. Eugenics II**	• Prenatal Genetic Screening • Artificial Selection • GMO Poll • Parallel with GMO • Group Discussion: Argue for the difference.	**Mandatory** Excerpt from Rosamund Scott (2007) Choosing Between Possible Lives: Law and Ethics of Prenatal and Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis
11th November 2020	**19. Introduction to AI Ethics**	• Introduction to AI • Introduction to Machine Learning • International AI Standards • Class Discussion: Potential Issues with AI • AI Ethical Principles	**Mandatory** Nick Bostrom and Eliezer Yudkowsky (2014). The Ethics of AI Intelligence.
16th November 2020	**20. AI Ethics: Explicability**	• AI Ethical Principles Revisited • Explicability: why? • Parallel with Bioethics • Responsibility, Accountability • Epistemology vs Pragmatics	**Mandatory** SEP Entry: Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. Section 2.3 Luciano Floridi and Mariarosaria Taddeo, (2016). What Is Data Ethics?
18th November 2020	**21. AI Ethics: Explicability & Long Paper Introduction**	• Explicability: truly necessary? • Alternative Principles? • Long Paper Introduction (START NOW!)	**Mandatory** P. Jonathon Phillips Mark Przybocki (2020). Four Principles of Explainable AI as Applied to Biometrics and Facial Forensic Algorithms
23rd November 2020	**22. AI Ethics: Algorithmic Bias**	• Machine Learning Revisited • Training Sets • Systematic Bias • Outcome vs Process	**Mandatory** Osvaldo Simeone (2018). A Very Brief Introduction to Machine Learning With Applications to Communication Systems. Section 1 Only. SEP Entry: Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. Section 2.4

Date	Lecture # and Topic	Agenda	Readings
25th November 2020	**23. AI Ethics: Algorithmic Bias**	• What is Discrimination? • Systematic Bias • What to do about bias: Policy Recommendations? • Class Discussion	**Mandatory** Kristian Lum and William Isaac (2016). To Predict and Serve?
30th November 2020	**24. Paper Lab**	• What is Research • Planning • Writing • Originality • Referencing • Narrative Arc • Questions and Answers	**Mandatory** Jim Pryor's Guide: "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper".
2nd December 2020	**25. Course Conclusion**	• Ethical Theories • Bioethics • AI Ethics • Questions & Answers	
2nd–11th December 2020	**Long Paper Due by End of Day on on 11th December** (*Submissions welcome starting 2nd of December.*)		