

# Ethical Theories and Contemporary Issues (L1)

Syllabus (September 4, 2024)\*

Course Code:	HUMA2921
Course Title:	Ethical Theories and Contemporary Issues
Course Offered:	Fall Semester 2024, September 2 to November 27
Course Schedule:	Monday 12:00 – 13:20pm; Wednesday 12:00 – 13:20pm
Course Location:	Rm 2306
Course Instructor:	Dennis PROOI (Lecturer, Philosophy, HUMA); hmdprooi@ust.hk
Office Hours:	Wednesday 13:30 – 14:30pm (Rm 3367)
Teaching Assistant:	Anish Mishra (PhD Student, Philosophy, HUMA); amishraac@connect.ust.hk Office hours: Monday, by appointment only

## Course Description

“What is the right thing to do?” is the leading question in ethics, the area of philosophy that concerns itself with the good and how we ought to act. This course introduces several influential normative theories and examines their application to a number of key topics in applied ethics. In the first part, we consider virtue ethics, utilitarianism, deontology, and the capability approach. In the second part, we apply these normative theories to such diverse issues as animal welfare, advertising, limits on wealth, artificial intelligence, and abortion.

## Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

1	Explain ethical theories and how they are applied to the understanding of contemporary moral issues.
2	Analyze some critical moral issues relating to the environment, business, information technology, and bioethics.
3	Reflect upon and articulate these issues through the rational tools of philosophical analysis.

<b>Course Outline</b>	
<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	
1. September 2 (Mo)	<b>What is “good”?</b> James Rachels, <i>The Right Thing to Do</i> , chapter 1
2. September 4 (We)	<b>“Is” and “ought”</b> David Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> , book III part 1 (final passage)
3. September 9 (Mo)	<b>What is “justice”?</b> Plato, <i>Republic</i> , part I, 327a-342e
4. September 11 (We)	<b>What is “justice”? (continued)</b> Plato, <i>Republic</i> , part I, 343a-354b
<b><u>Part One: Ethical Theories</u></b>	
5. September 16 (Mo)	<b>Virtue ethics</b> Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , book I, sections 1-5, 7, 13
6. September 23 (Mo)	<b>Virtue ethics (continued)</b> Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , book II
7. September 25 (We)	<b>Utilitarianism</b> J.S. Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , chapter 2
8. September 30 (Mo)	<b>Utilitarianism (continued)</b> Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek & Peter Singer, <i>Utilitarianism: A Very Short Introduction</i> , chapter 5
9. October 2 (We)	<b>Deontology</b> Onora O’Neill, “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics”
10. October 7 (Mo)	<b>Deontology (continued)</b> Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , section 1
11. October 9 (We)	<b>Capability approach</b> Amartya Sen, “Development as Capability Expansion”
12. October 14 (Mo)	<b>Capability approach (continued)</b> Martha Nussbaum, <i>Creating Capabilities</i> , chapter 2
13. October 16 (We)	<b>Midterm Exam</b>

<b><u>Part Two: Contemporary Issues</u></b>	
14. October 21 (Mo)	<b>Constructing an argument</b> James Rachels, <i>The Right Thing to Do</i> , chapter 2
15. October 23 (We)	<b>Essay composition</b>
	<b>A) The environment</b>
16. October 28 (Mo)	<b>Animals</b> Peter Singer, <i>Animal Liberation</i> , chapter 1
17. October 30 (We)	<b>Animals (continued)</b> Onora O’Neill, “Environmental Values, Anthropocentrism and Speciesism”
	<b>B) Business &amp; economics</b>
18. November 4 (Mo)	<b>Advertising</b> Robert L. Arrington, “Advertising and Behavior Control”
19. November 6 (We)	<b>Advertising (continued)</b> Alonso Villarán, “Irrational Advertising and Moral Autonomy”
20. November 11 (Mo)	<b>Limitarianism</b> Ingrid Robeyns, “Having Too Much”
21. November 13 (We)	<b>Limitarianism (continued)</b> Robert Huseby, “The Limits of Limitarianism”
	<b>C) Information technology</b>
22. November 18 (Mo)	<b>Artificial intelligence</b> John Basl & Joseph Bowen, “AI as a Moral Right-Holder”
23. November 20 (We)	<b>Artificial intelligence (continued)</b> Judith Donath, “Ethical Issues in our Relationship with Artificial Entities”
	<b>D) Bioethics</b>
24. November 25 (Mo)	<b>Abortion</b> Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
25. November 27 (We)	<b>Abortion (continued)</b> Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”

<b>Assessment</b>		
1	<p><b>Midterm exam</b></p> <p>Exam questions are based on the readings and lectures of the first part of the course. Students have 80 minutes to answer four out of five questions.</p>	30%
2	<p><b>Essay</b></p> <p>Students write a 1000-word essay in which they formulate their own argument about an ethical issue by applying one of the normative theories from the first part of the course to a topic treated in the second part, minimally citing two of the course readings. Workshops on argument construction and essay composition will be provided on October 21 and 23. Deadline for the essay: TBA (most likely one week after the last class). Students are allowed and encouraged to hand in a draft version of their essay before the last class on November 27 in order to receive feedback for improvement. Students who wish to treat a topic other than those introduced in the second part of the course must obtain approval from the instructor.</p>	50%
3	<p><b>Participation</b></p> <p>Participation takes the form of the online discussion of motions introduced in the lectures. Students write a minimum of eight 200-word posts or replies on the Canvas discussion board over the course of the semester. Details will be announced in class.</p>	20%

Additional notes:

- All readings will be available on Canvas.
- No marks are awarded for attendance. Failure to attend class on a regular basis will result in a penalty. Further details regarding attendance requirements will be announced in class.
- HKUST upholds academic integrity and has a no plagiarism policy (see: <https://registry.hkust.edu.hk/resource-library/academic-integrity>). Plagiarism will result in failure of the course.

\* Be prepared for changes in the schedule. Regularly check Canvas for updates.