

HUMA1920 Introduction to Moral Philosophy [Fall, 2023-24]

(Provisional Syllabus)

Instructor

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Office No.: To Be Updated

Office Hours: 13:00-14:00, Mon & Tue (by appointment)

Class Time & Venue

18:00-20:50, Mon, Room 4621

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.

Learning Outcomes

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 assess the logical cogency of arguments pertaining to these ideas and issues.
4. Critically interpret the significance of the values that are espoused.

Course Outline

Textbooks:

1. (EC) Burnor, R., & Raley, Y. (2022). *Ethical choices: An introduction to moral philosophy with cases* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
2. (EP*r*) LaFollette, H. (Ed.). (2020). *Ethics in practice: An anthology* (5th ed.). Wiley Blackwell.

Week 1: Introduction

- What is morality?
 - Understanding ethics
 - Debating right and wrong
 - Unravelling moral concepts
- ♣ Reading: No reading for the first week. Congrats!

Module 1: Moral Theories (Weeks 2-6)

Week 2: Consequentialism/Utilitarianism

- The importance of happiness
 - The principle of utility
 - Rule consequentialism vs. act consequentialism
- ♣ Reading: EC – “Chapter Seven: Consequentialist Ethics: Act Utilitarianism”, “Chapter Eight: Consequentialist Ethics: Rule Utilitarianism”

Week 3: Deontology

- Universal moral rules
 - Our moral duties
 - Limits of consequences
 - Deontology vs. consequentialism
- ♣ Reading: EC – “Chapter Nine: Deontological Ethics”

Week 4: Virtue Ethics

- The virtuous character
 - Building character
 - Acting with virtue
 - Living a moral life
- ♣ Reading: EC – “Chapter Twelve: Virtue Ethics”

Week 5: Social Contract Theory

- The moral foundation of society
 - Agreement among citizenry
 - Our natural rights
- ♣ Reading: *EC* – “Chapter Eleven: Social Contracts and Rights”

Week 6: Feminism

- Challenging patriarchy
 - Empowering equality
 - Rethinking traditional ethics
- ♣ Reading: *EC* – “Chapter Thirteen: Feminism and Care Ethics”

Module 2: Applied Ethics (Weeks 7-12)

Week 7: Abortion (with the Midterm Quiz)

- Abortion as killing or saving
 - Women vs. fetus
 - Rights and responsibilities in life
- ♣ Reading: *EPr* – “10. A Defense of Abortion”, “12. An Argument that Abortion is Wrong”, “14. Virtue Theory and Abortion”

Week 8: Euthanasia

- Life vs. dignity
 - End-of-life autonomy
 - The morality of helping someone die
- ♣ Reading: *EPr* – “5. Justifying Physician-Assisted Deaths”, “6 Against the Right to Die”

Week 9: Wars

- The moral importance of war
 - Preemptive war: invading before being invaded
 - Saving lives through intervention
- ♣ Reading: *EPr* – “64 War and Moral Consistency”, “66 The Justifiability of Humanitarian Intervention”

Week 10: Environment

- Caring non-humans
- Future generations’ rights

- Environment vs. development
- ♣ Reading: *EPr* – “23 The Value of Nature”, “26 A Perfect Moral Storm”

Week 11: AI

- Omnipotent AI and its impact on human roles
- Information freedom vs. privacy
- AI and criminal responsibility
- ♣ Reading: “Chapter 4: Trust and Fairness in AI Systems”, “Chapter 5: Responsibility and Liability in the Case of AI Systems” From *An Introduction to Ethics in Robotics and AI* (Springer, 2020).

Week 12: Pornography

- Free speech vs. censorship
- Feminism for/against porn
- Ethical porn: Can porn be morally good?
- ♣ Reading: “Introduction: What Is Pornography?” From *Pornography: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

Week 13: Synthesis and Conclusion

Assessment

Grading Breakdown:

Attendance: 10%

Midterm Quiz: 25% (excluding Hard Question Bonus: 5%)

Essay I: 30%

Essay II: 35%

Class Participation Bonus: 5%

Explanation:

- *Attendance (10%)*

Each attended class contributes 1% to your final grade, meaning you should attend at least 10 lessons to obtain the full 10% for attendance.

During the lesson, I will circulate the attendance sheet. Students are expected to mark their attendance by ticking the appropriate box. The sheet will be available for signing until the end of the class.

Punctuality: Since the class starts at 18:00, arriving up to 30 minutes late is acceptable. However, please make an effort to be punctual to maintain an uninterrupted learning environment. If you arrive late, enter the classroom quietly and mark your attendance on the sheet to avoid disrupting the class.

Make-up classes: In the event that a class is canceled due to unforeseen circumstances (such as inclement weather or instructor absence), a make-up class will be scheduled, and attendance for the rescheduled class will be counted toward your attendance grade.

Nota Bene: If you are unable to attend class due to illness or other unavoidable circumstances, please inform me before the class and provide supporting documentation (such as a medical certificate) as soon as possible. This will help ensure that your absence is properly accounted for and will not adversely affect your attendance grade.

- *Midterm Quiz (25%)*

The midterm quiz, scheduled for the beginning of the Week 7 class, will have a one-hour time limit. It will cover all the course material in Module 1 (Weeks 2-6). The quiz is designed to consist of four sections:

1. **Multiple-Choice (easy, 10 points):** This section will test your understanding of various topics covered in Module 1 through a series of multiple-choice questions.
2. **Fill-in-the-Blank (easy and medium, 6 points):** In this section, you will be asked to complete sentences or statements related to Module 1 content by filling in the missing words or phrases.
3. **Short Written Answer (medium, 9 points):** This section will require you to provide concise written responses to questions that assess your ability to analyze and discuss the course material.
4. **Think-out-of-the-box Debate (hard, 5 bonus points):** As a bonus opportunity, you can participate in a thought-provoking debate that encourages creative thinking and challenges conventional perspectives on a relevant topic.

With the 1-hour time limit, students are expected to manage their time effectively to complete the quiz and demonstrate their comprehension and critical thinking skills across the diverse range of topics covered in Module 1.

Office hours (to be ascertained): I will hold regular office hours to provide personalized assistance with course material and quiz preparation. This is also an opportunity for students to discuss any other academic concerns. The specific schedule for office hours will be determined and communicated shortly.

Well-being support: It is important to recognize the impact of mental and emotional well-being on academic success. Students are encouraged to access available campus resources, such as counseling services, stress management workshops, and meditation sessions, to support their overall well-being.

Special arrangements for the quiz: If a student requires special accommodations or adjustments for the quiz due to a documented disability or other exceptional circumstances, they should notify the instructor in advance. Appropriate arrangements will be made to ensure equal access and opportunity for all students.

- *Essay I (30%) & Essay II (35%)*

For Essay I, you must compose a stand-alone essay of 1,000 (± 200) words on one of the 10 provided questions related to moral theories. Before beginning your essay, it is recommended that you discuss your chosen topic with me. Ensure that you delve deeply into the subject, presenting a coherent argument and showcasing your comprehension of the pertinent concepts.

For Essay II, you are required to write a 1,200 (± 200) word essay on a particular topic in applied ethics. The topics will not be provided by me, meaning that you have the freedom to choose the

subject you wish to investigate in applied ethics. Just like with Essay I, you are welcome to consult with me regarding your chosen topic for the Long Essay before beginning the writing process. Essay II should demonstrate a deep understanding of the subject matter, exhibit strong critical thinking, and present a cohesive and well-structured argument.

- *Class Participation Bonus (5%)*

Active engagement in class is highly encouraged. You can gain 1 point for each meaningful contribution made on the course's Canvas discussion forum, whether it's posting insightful questions or offering constructive feedback. This allows you to enhance your learning experience while contributing to the collective understanding of the subject matter.

Disclaimer about Sensitive Discussions

In this course, we will engage with various sensitive and potentially challenging topics, such as, euthanasia, abortion, war, and pornography. These subjects may evoke strong emotions or reactions, and some students may have personal experiences related to them.

As the instructor, my responsibility and promise to you are to facilitate a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment where diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged. To achieve this, I will:

1. Approach course content with sensitivity and thoughtfulness.
2. Be open and responsive to feedback from students regarding the handling of sensitive topics.
3. Provide guidance and support to help students navigate challenging discussions.
4. Encourage respectful dialogue and foster empathy among students.

I ask that you, as students, also adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Approach discussions with empathy and open-mindedness.
2. Be respectful of others' feelings and experiences.
3. Listen actively and engage constructively with your peers.
4. Prioritize your well-being; if you need to step away from a conversation/discussion or take a break, please mark your attendance in the attendance sheet before leaving the classroom.

By working together, we can create a supportive atmosphere that promotes meaningful and thoughtful discussions about sensitive topics.

Please note that if you have concerns or need additional support related to the course content, you are encouraged to reach out to me, a counselor, or other appropriate resources.