

Ethical Theories and Contemporary Issues (L2)

Syllabus (September 3, 2024)*

Course Code:	HUMA2921
Course Title:	Ethical Theories and Contemporary Issues
Course Offered:	Fall Semester 2024, September 2 to November 25
Course Schedule:	Monday 18:00 – 20:50pm
Course Location:	Rm 2502
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.

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

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

Assessment		
1	<p>Midterm exam</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>Essay</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. A workshop on argument construction and essay composition will be provided on October 21. 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 25 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>Participation</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.