

Course Title	: Understanding Morality
Course Code	: CLB9032
Recommended Study Year	: Any
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional approach
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours per week
Category in Core Curriculum	: Humanities and the Arts Cluster
Discipline	: -
Prerequisite(s)	: Nil
Co-requisite(s)	: Nil
Exclusion(s)	: CCC8003 Understanding Morality and PHII1003 Ethics: East and West
Exemption Requirement(s)	: Nil

Brief Course Description

This course invites the students to reflect on some of the most central questions in ethics: What is morally right and wrong? What is the morally good life? Is there a single moral theory or are morals specific to particular cultures, epochs or even individuals? Is the rightness or wrongness of an action determined exclusively by the foreseeable consequences that it has? Is pleasure the only moral good or does the notion of virtue have a role in determining morality? What is the role of emotions in the process of making a moral choice? The course discusses some of the answers to the previous questions that the contemporary major ethical theories offer.

Much attention will be paid to constructing a critical and rational approach to a wider understanding of human values. This will mean seeking both to understand other viewpoints sympathetically, but also subjecting them, and one's own, to critical appraisal. As such, this course also tackles a range of specific moral problems including questions of cultural relativism, animal rights, euthanasia, and global poverty. The course will avoid technical terminology to the degree that avoiding it will not constitute a significant decrease in depth and understanding.

Aims

The course aims to:

- Introduce the students to some classic and contemporary theories of morality;
- Enable students to draw connections between moral theories and practical problems in everyday life;
- Present various theories of moral behavior;
- Provide students with the intellectual resources to develop their own views on what is right and wrong.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students should be able to:

- (LO1) Describe and discuss contemporary moral theories.
- (LO2) Specify the connections between moral theories and practical problems in everyday life.
- (LO3) Communicate their own moral views and present the reasons behind them.
- (LO4) Explain the reasoning behind the moral views of others.

Indicative Content

1. Cultural Moral Relativism
2. Religious Ethics
3. Social Contract Theory

4. Utilitarianism
5. Kantian Ethics
6. Aristotelian Virtue Ethics
7. Confucian Virtue Ethics
8. Animal Rights
9. Global Poverty
10. Immigration
11. Health Care Distribution

Teaching Method

Sectional:

Students will be assigned readings on the topics above; student will then attend two sections in a week which will incorporate a combination of short lecture periods and discussion, both focused on the previous reading; students will also receive feedback to their answers on the midterm exam and to their term paper. Reading, listening to lectures, engaging in discussion, and writing short essays or papers and receiving feedback will teach students skills in providing description and engaging in discussion of the relevant moral theories (LO1), in specifying the connections between the moral theories and issues from everyday life (LO2), in communicating their own moral views and presenting the reasons behind them (LO3), and in explaining the reasoning behind the moral views of others (LO4).

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Students will take/write:

- A midterm exam, in which they will answer short essay questions (to assess LO1 – LO4);
- A final exam, in which they will answer short essay questions on the content of the course (to assess LO1, LO2, LO3, and LO4);
- A short term paper (900 - 1300 words) on a topic of the course (to assess LO1 - LO4). The students will be provided with a list of readings related to the specific topic they choose to write about.

In addition, students are expected to participate in classroom discussions and demonstrate good preparation—for instance, they will have to demonstrate adequate knowledge of the required weekly readings when called by the lecturer (to assess LO1, LO2, LO3, and LO4).

Assessment

Participation and in-class discussion (10%)

Midterm (20%)

Paper (30%)

Final exam (40%)

Required Readings

“Morality and Advantage,” David Gauthier, *Philosophical Review*, 1967.

“A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics,” Onora O’Neill, 1985.

“Those Who Walk Away from Omelas,” Ursula K. LeGuin.

“Is There a Right to Migrate?” Michael Huemer, *Social Theory and Practice*, 2010.

Selections from: Rachels, James, and Stuart Rachels, *The Right Thing to Do*

Excerpts from:

Utilitarianism, J.S. Mill, language modernized by Jonathan Bennett, www.earlymoderntexts.com.

Van Norden, Bryan W., *An Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2011.

Haidt, Jonathan, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Religion and Politics*, Vintage, 2013.

Mencius, *Mencius*, translated by D.C. Lau, Penguin Classics, 2005.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Hirose, Iwao, and Greg Bognar, *The Ethics of Health Care Rationing*, Routledge, 2014.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>