

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: The Ethics of War and Peace
Course Code	: PHI3374
Recommended Study Year	: Any
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional approach
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours per week
Category	: Programme Elective - Ethics and Practical Philosophy
Prerequisite(s)	: NIL
Co-requisite(s)	: NIL
Exclusion(s)	: NIL
Exemption Requirement(s)	: NIL

Brief Course Description

This course introduces students to contemporary philosophical debates surrounding the ethics of war and peace. Central questions explored include whether war can ever be morally justified, what makes defensive violence permissible, and under what conditions peace should be accepted or pursued. The course examines traditional just war theory, including key principles such as proportionality, necessity, and the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. It further explores moral complexities associated with pre-emptive and preventive wars, humanitarian interventions, and emerging technologies such as drones. Additional topics include the ethical treatment of prisoners of war, the moral status of terrorism, the permissibility of torture, and ethical obligations during post-conflict periods, including justice, reconciliation, and reconstruction.

Aims

The main aim of this course is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of philosophical debates regarding the ethics of war and peace. It aims to enhance students' abilities to analyze and evaluate complex ethical issues arising in contemporary warfare and peacebuilding.

Learning Outcomes

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

LO1: Explain key theoretical frameworks in contemporary just war theory.

LO2: Evaluate moral principles underlying decisions to wage war.

LO3: Evaluate ethical considerations in the conduct of war.

LO4: Apply ethical theories to contemporary issues such as terrorism, drone warfare, and post-war reconstruction.

Indicative Content

Unit 1: Foundations of the Ethics of War

- The morality of self-defense
- Proportionality and necessity
- Individualist vs collectivist approaches to war ethics

Unit 2: Jus Ad Bellum: Justifications for War

Students explore principles governing moral justifications for going to war, including just cause, proportionality, legitimate authority, right intention, reasonable chance of success, last resort, and public declaration.

Unit 3: Ethics During War (Jus in Bello)

This unit addresses moral constraints on wartime conduct, focusing on non-combatant immunity, collateral damage, and the moral status of combatants.

Unit 4: Contemporary Ethical Challenges in War and Peace

This unit critically examines ethical questions posed by modern warfare scenarios, including terrorism, torture, humanitarian interventions, drone warfare, and the ethical dimensions of post-conflict peacebuilding and justice.

Teaching Method

The course includes interactive lectures, discussion-based analysis of assigned readings, and critical evaluations of contemporary cases (LO1-LO4). Students participate in structured debates and write short analytical responses to weekly readings. In-class tests assess students' grasp of key philosophical debates (LO1-LO4). A final paper enables students to explore a specific ethical issue related to war and peace in depth (LO1-LO4).

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Class Participation (5%): Students are expected to actively participate in discussions, demonstrating their understanding of readings and lecture materials (LO1-LO4).

Four In-class Tests at the end of each unit (20% each): Each test will include short-answer questions designed to assess students' comprehension of the theoretical frameworks (LO1), critical analysis skills regarding jus ad bellum (LO2), evaluation of jus in bello principles (LO3), and application of ethical theories to contemporary issues (LO4).

Final Paper (15%): Students will write an argumentative essay (1000 words) exploring one of the course's central ethical issues. The essay should clearly articulate and critically evaluate relevant ethical arguments, demonstrating the student's ability to synthesize and apply course material (LO1-LO4).

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Methods		
	Class Participation (5%)	In-class Tests (20% x 4)	Final Paper (15%)
Explain key theoretical frameworks in contemporary just war theory	☑	☑	☑*
Evaluate moral principles underlying decisions to wage war	☑	☑	☑*
Evaluate ethical considerations in the conduct of war	☑	☑	☑*
Apply ethical theories to contemporary issues such as terrorism, drone warfare, and post-war reconstruction	☑	☑	☑*

* = each student will choose the specific topic and thus which aspect of the learning outcome to further enhance.

Assessment

1. Class participation (5%): corresponding to LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4.
2. Four In-class tests (20% each X 4): corresponding to LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4.
3. Final paper (15%): one among LO1, LO2, LO3, or LO4, at the student's discretion.

Required/Essential Readings

Frowe, Helen. (2023). *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Recommended/Supplementary Readings

Bazargan-Forward, Saba. (2015). Non-Combatant Immunity and War-Profitteering. In Seth Lazar & Helen Frowe (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of War*. Oxford University Press.

Fabre, Cécile. (2020). The Morality of Treason. *Law and Philosophy* 39, 4:427-461.

Simpson, Thomas & Vincent C Müller. (2016). Just War and Robots' Killings. *The Philosophical Quarterly*

66, 263: 302-22.

Lazar, Seth. (2012). Necessity in Self-Defense and War. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 40, 1: 3-44.

McMahan, Jeff. (2009). *Killing in War*. Oxford University Press.

Pattison, James. (2015). The Morality of Sanctions. *Social Philosophy and Policy* 32, 1: 192-215.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. (1991). Self-defense. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20, 4: 283-310.

Walzer, Michael. (1977). Just and Unjust Wars. *Measurement of Learning Outcomes*:

-Class Participation (5%)

-Four In-class Tests at the end of each unit (20% each)

-Final Paper (15%)

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 and Coursework. 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/>.
- (5) Students must adhere to the University’s guidelines and practices when using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The official documents “*Guidelines for Using GAI Tools at Lingnan University*” and “*Best Practices for Ethical and Responsible Use of GAI Tools in Course Assessments*” can be found here: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices>.

The Ethics of War and Peace Assessment Rubrics

Class Participation (5%) Grading Rubric

Excellent (90-100%)	Good (80-89%)	Fair (70-79%)	Pass (60-69%)	Failure (0-59%)
Attempts frequently to answer or raise questions; comments are mostly cogent and relevant.	Attempts frequently to answer or raise questions; comments are often cogent and relevant.	Attempts sometimes to answer or raise questions; comments are sometimes cogent and relevant.	Seldom attempts to answer or raise questions, but can sometimes offer relevant answers when asked.	Almost never makes cogent or relevant comment, even when asked.

In-class Test (20%) Grading Rubrics*

Excellent (90-100%)	Good (70-89%)	Fair (50-69%)	Pass (40-59%)	Failure (0-39%)
Provides compelling, original and clearly structured answers to the questions.	Provides accurate and clear answers to the questions.	Provides a largely correct answer that is not very clear or accurate.	Provides answers with some of the previously mentioned elements.	Provides no answer or answers that are entirely off the point and confused.

*=more specific details will be given in advance for each test. Differences among them will be minimal and will depend on the final content of each unit.

Final Paper (15%) Grading Rubric

	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (70-89%)	Fair (50-69%)	Pass (40-59%)	Failure (0-39%)
Knowledge of Course Material (Weight: 10%)	Demonstrated knowledge goes substantially beyond what is expected of students in this course.	Demonstrates knowledge of most important points; shows understanding of the basic philosophical positions and disagreements.	Demonstrates knowledge of most important point, and the most important points of disagreement, but with some unclarity or inaccuracy.	Some of the basic points are understood, but the student shows substantial misunderstandings.	Student's understanding deviates significantly from the positions discussed in class/Student fails to write on the assigned topic.
Argumentation and Originality (Weight: 50%)	Presents compelling arguments, shows understanding of important objections, and offers novel arguments or ideas.	Presents compelling arguments and shows understanding of important objections. Novel aspects are less compelling or absent.	Presents arguments that successfully motivate the main claims, but details are overlooked, and objections are not handled as well.	Arguments are often vague and impressionistic, or supported with dubious claims or fallacious modes of reasoning.	No discernible arguments/ No engagement with the ideas of the class.
Organization (Weight: 30%)	Ideas are clearly arranged to allow easy understanding of their relations.	As excellent, but with slightly more mistakes in arrangement of ideas.	Basic structure is good, but sometimes arrangement of ideas is confusing.	Essay seems to switch topics at points or is difficult to follow due to unclear structure.	Lack of organizational structure/ Largely incomplete.
Writing (Weight: 10%)	Clear, engaging writing, with almost no mistakes in grammar or spelling.	Occasional mistakes in grammar or spelling which do not interfere with comprehension.	Substantial mistakes that sometimes make comprehension difficult.	Significant portions cannot be accurately assessed because of problems with the writing.	The content is difficult or impossible to evaluate.