

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Advanced Western Ethics
Course Code	: PHI3103
Recommended Study Year	: 3 rd Year
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Lecture and tutorial
Class Contact Hours	: 2 hours Lecture/week; 1 hour Tutorial/week
Category in Major Programme	: Ethics and Political Philosophy Unit - Western Tradition Elective
Prerequisite(s)	: PHI1003 Ethics: East and West (Note: This prerequisite is waived for BAPAI Senior Year students.)
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course is meant to provide philosophy students with a more in-depth understanding of the philosophical questions surrounding morality. It will focus on the three major contemporary ethical theories: Consequentialism, Kantianism, and Virtue Ethics. According to Consequentialism, our primary moral demand is to make the world as good a place as possible. According to the Kantian, our primary demand is to respect the decision-making powers, or freedom, of others and ourselves. The Virtue Ethicist, on the other hand, believes that ethics is primarily a matter of developing a good character. The course will conclude by looking at recent attempts to integrate these rival theories into new, hopefully more accurate hybrids.

In addition, the course will discuss several of the following issues and problems: Contractual Theories of Ethics; Natural Law Theories; secular and religiously sanctioned ethics; the ethical dilemmas posed by abortion, euthanasia, poverty, war, environmental problems, and the criminal law; moral relativism and moral absolutism; the historical origins of contemporary ethical theories and problems; the relationship between morality, rationality, and the emotions; the role of morality in the good life; issues in traditional moral psychology: such as free-will, responsibility, and the relationship between desire and moral judgment; the historical development of ethical thought in Western culture; and the impact of contemporary evolutionary and empirical psychology on ethical theorizing.

Aims

1. To provide an understanding of the nature, methods, and theories of moral philosophy;
2. To teach students to think critically about philosophical issues relating to ethical theories in general;
3. To improve students' skills in communicating about abstract issues and reading and interpreting complicated texts;
4. To provide the necessary background for more advanced work in ethics.

Learning Outcomes

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

1. describe the nature, methods, and theories of ethics
2. explain and evaluate various theories of ethics
3. think critically about philosophical issues of morality
4. construct their moral arguments clearly

Indicative Content

The following content will form the core of the class:

1. Consequentialist Theories of Ethics
2. Kantian Theories of Ethics
3. Theories of Virtue.
4. The relationship between value, obligation, and moral character.

In addition, each course will deal with several of the following issues:

1. Additional ethical theories like Contractualism, Natural Law, and Religiously Mandated Ethics.
2. Issues in practical or applied ethics.
3. Foundational Issues:
 - a. Moral Relativism and Absolutism
 - b. Morality, reason, and the emotions
 - c. Scientific explanations of moral thought and behavior
4. Questions of free will, moral judgment, self-control and responsibility.
5. The role of morality in an account of personal happiness.
6. History of ethical thought in the West

Teaching Method

Lectures and tutorials

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

1. Students will give oral presentations on assigned readings. They are expected to summarize, paraphrase and respond critically to the arguments in these texts (to measure Outcomes 1 and 2).
2. Students will write a philosophical essay, the topics of which correspond to the contents of the lectures. They are expected to present their interpretations and criticisms effectively (to measure Outcomes 1 – 4).
3. The examination will assess students' basic knowledge of concepts and theories of Western ethical theories (to measure Outcomes 1, 2 and 4).
4. In class work will test the students understanding of the material, and their ability to apply their knowledge to new and novel problems (to measure Outcomes 1-3).

Assessment

Assessment will be based on the presentation and performance in tutorials, a term paper and the final examination.

20% In-class work (attendance, participation, short answer responses, quizzes, short presentations, etc.)

Primarily to assess Outcomes 1 and 2, but also 3.

15% Mid Term

To assess Outcomes 1, 2, and 3.

25% Essay Assignments (The instructor will assign either 2 short essays or a longer term paper)

To assess Outcomes 2, 3, and 4.

40% Final Examination

To assess Outcomes 1-4.

Required Readings

Baron, Marcia W., Philip Pettit, and Michael Slote, *Three Methods of Ethics: A Debate*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997.

Selections from Mill, J.S., *Utilitarianism*, General Books LLC, 2010.

Selections from McIntyre, Alisdair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre

Dame Press, 2007.

Selections from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by Terence Irwin), Hackett Publishing Co., 1999.

Selections from Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals: with On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns* (translated by James Ellington), Hackett Publishing Co., 1993.

Velleman, J. David, “A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics,” in J. David Velleman, *Self to Self: Selected Essays*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Sher, George, *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings*, Harcourt College Pub., 1995.

Supplementary Readings

Bond, E. J., *Ethics and Human Well-Being*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996.

Cooper, David E. ed., *Ethics: The Classic Readings* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998.

Darwall, Stephen, *Philosophical Ethics*, Boulder, Colombia: Westview Press, 1998.

McNaughton, David, *Moral Vision*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988.

Rosen, Bernard, *Ethical Theory*, Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1993.

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 Course Work. 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>.