The Chinese University of Hong Kong
2025/26 2nd semester
PHIL3253 Practical Ethics
Course Outline

Instructor: Dr. Kwok Pak Nin, Samson
Time: Thursday 13:30-15:15
Venue: LSK 515
Tutorial Section: TBA

Course overview:

This course provides a rigorous examination of ethical dilemmas prevalent in modern society, employing philosophical methodologies to analyze and address these challenges. Students will develop the ability to discern pertinent ethical principles, engage in critical reflection, and formulate reasoned responses to complex moral issues. Topics covered may include normative ethical theories, abortion, capital punishment, human enhancement, the ethics of warfare, animal rights, and ethical considerations surrounding artificial intelligence.

*Advisory to Majors: to be taken in year 2 or above.

Learning outcomes:

1. Understand the characteristics and value of ethical theories.
2. Understand the characteristics and importance of some controversial and difficult ethical-social issues.
3. Ability to apply normative ethics to the issues and form considered judgments concerning them.
4. Ability to explain and assess different moral stances in a perspicuous, non-doctrinaire way.

Learning activities and workload:

1. **Lecture**: 2 hours each week.
2. **Interactive tutorial**: one 2-hour session every two weeks. Students are required to discuss, and present reading material assigned.

Assessment:

Task nature	Description	Weight
Tutorial	Discussion and Presentation	30%
Quiz	In-class short quiz	30%
Term Paper	Term-end paper	40%
*Participation**	*Students who actively participate in both class and online discussions may receive a bonus of up to 5% on their final grade*	

Details of course website:

Lecture notes and information on assignments will be posted on the Blackboard Learn website.

Late submission policy:

Assignments submitted after the due date will incur a 5% grade reduction per day. Extensions will only be granted in cases of unexpected or exceptional circumstances beyond the student's control.

Grade Descriptors:

http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf

Course schedule:

Week	Date	Lecture Topic	Reading	Remark
1	Jan 8	Introduction: Meta-Ethics, Normative Ethics, and Applied Ethics	Hugh LaFollette, "Theorizing about Ethics"	
2	Jan 15	Abortion	Mary Ann Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"	
3	Jan 22	Abortion	Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion'	1st Tutorial: Hugh LaFollette, "Theorizing about Ethics"
4	Jan 29	Capital Punishment	Stephen Nathanson, *An Eye for an Eye?*, Ch 2, 4-6.	
5	Feb 5	Capital Punishment	Larry Alexander, "Retributivism and the inadvertent punishment of the innocent"	2nd Tutorial: Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion'
6	Feb 12	Human Enhancement	Nick Bostrom, "Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up"	
7	Feb 19	***Lunar New Year Holiday***	"	
8	Feb 26	Human Enhancement	Michael Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection: What's Wrong with Designer Children, Bionic Athletes, and Genetic Engineering"	3rd Tutorial: Larry Alexander, "Retributivism and the inadvertent punishment of the innocent"
9	Mar 5	***Reading Week***		
10	Mar 12	***In-class short quiz #1*** The Ethics of War	Michael Walzer, "Terrorism and Just War"	4th Tutorial: Michael Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection: What's Wrong with Designer Children, Bionic Athletes, and Genetic Engineering"
11	Mar 19	The Ethics of War	Frances Kamm, "Terror and Collateral Damage: Are they Permissible?"	
12	Mar 26	The Moral Status of Animals	Peter Singer, "Equality for Animals"	5th Tutorial: Frances Kamm, "Terror and Collateral Damage: Are they Permissible?"
13	Apr 2	The Moral Status of Animals	Shelly Kagan, "What's Wrong with Speciesism?"	
14	Apr 9	The Ethics of A.I.	Mark Coeckelbergh, "Robot rights? Towards a social-relational justification of moral consideration"	6th Tutorial: Shelly Kagan, "What's Wrong with Speciesism?"
15	Apr 16	***In-class short quiz #2***		

Recommended learning resources:

General References:

Cohen, Andrew I. & Wellman, Christopher Heath (eds.). (2013). *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*, 2nd edition, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell.

Frey, R. G. (ed.). (2005). *A Companion to Applied Ethics*, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell.

LaFollette, Hugh (ed.). (2013). *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 4th edition, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell.

Glover, Jonathan. (1977). *Causing Death and Saving Lives*, Harmondsworth.

Lippert-Rasmussen, Kasper, Brownlee, Kimberlee, & Coady, David (eds.). (2017). *A Companion to Applied Philosophy*, Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Mappes, Thomas A. & Zembaty, Jane S (eds.). (2006). *Social Ethics: Morality and Social Policy,* 7th edition. McGraw Hill Higher Education.

Rachels, James. (2003). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy,* 4th edition. McGraw Hill Higher Education.

Singer, Peter. (2011). *Practical Ethics*, 3rd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Olen, Jeffrey and Barry, Vincent (eds.). (2004). *Applying Ethics*, 8th Edition, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

Reading list:

Topic-specific lists of references, required and suggested readings will be given in lecture notes and bibliographical notes (separate) for each topic.

Contact:

Lecturer	
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Consultation Hours	
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Feedback for evaluation:

1. Students are strongly encouraged to provide feedback on the course via email or meetings with lecturer.
2. Students evaluate the course through a survey and written comments at the end of the term as well as via regular feedback between teacher and students. This information is highly valued and is used to revise teaching methods, tasks, and content.

Academic honesty and plagiarism:

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/ .
With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.
For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

Guidelines on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Use only with prior permission
Students may use AI tools for Term Paper, but not for other assignments. These tools can be used for: 1. Checking grammar and 2. Polishing arguments. All use of AI tools must be cited or acknowledged.