

**Division of Humanities**  
**Course Syllabus**

<b>Course Code:</b>	HUMA 2921
<b>Course Title:</b>	Ethical Theories and Contemporary Issues
<b>Course Offered in:</b>	Fall 2017
<b>Course Instructor:</b>	Nahum Brown
<b>Class Schedule:</b>	Tuesdays and Thursdays, 15:00- 16:20
<b>Classroom:</b>	4620
<b>Office Hours:</b>	Tuesdays, 16:30- 18:30
<b>Office:</b>	3334
<b>Prof. Email:</b>	hmnahumbrown@ust.hk
<b>Teaching Assistant</b>	Tung Tin WONG (Sigmund)
<b>TA Email:</b>	ttwongae@connect.ust.hk

**1. Course Description:**

This course introduces students to three of the most important ethical theories in the history of philosophy and offers resources for how to apply these theories to contemporary issues in our everyday lives. The first section of the course focuses on virtue ethics and deontology. Students learn about Aristotle's principle of the mean, his insights about habit, virtue, and happiness, and also contrast Aristotle's conception of virtue ethics with Eastern counterparts in Confucius and Daoism. Students then look at the theory of deontology through the lens of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and his momentous categorical imperative. The second section of the course focuses on consequentialism. Students analyze the greatest happiness principle by reading Jeremy Bentham's *Classical Utilitarianism* and John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*. The last section of the course situates these three ethical theories through discussions of the concept of rights, including human rights (crime and punishment; hunger and poverty), animal and inter-species rights, as well as environmental rights generally, with readings from Peter Singer and Aldo Leopold, among others.

\*This syllabus may go through modifications during the semester so please look for further versions on Canvas.

**2. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs): Upon completion of this course, students are expected to be able to:**

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<b>1</b>	Rehearse important arguments about human nature in the history of ethical thought
<b>2</b>	Critically analyze contemporary debates about ethical philosophy
<b>3</b>	Develop argumentation and reasoning skills
<b>4</b>	Develop clear writing and clear thinking skills

**Course Outline:**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Date</b>	
<b>1</b>	Sept 5	Introduction to the course
<b>2</b>	Sept 7	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Bk 1 and 2)
<b>3</b>	Sept 12	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Bk 2)
<b>4</b>	Sept 14	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Bk 2 and 7)
<b>5</b>	Sept 19	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Bk 10); May Sim; "Respect for Differences: The Daoist Virtue," by Yong Huang
<b>6</b>	Sept 21	Kant's <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
<b>7</b>	Sept 26	Kant's <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
<b>8</b>	Sept 28	Kant's <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
<b>9</b>	Oct 3	Kant's <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
--	Oct 5	No Class: Holiday
<b>10</b>	Oct 10	Quiz 1
<b>11</b>	Oct 12	Bentham, <i>Classical Utilitarianism</i>

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<b>12</b>	Oct 17	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>
<b>13</b>	Oct 19	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>
<b>14</b>	Oct 24	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>
<b>15</b>	Oct 26	Topic: Crime and Punishment: "Does Punishment work," John Paul Wright, etc.
<b>16</b>	Oct 31	Topic: Crime and Punishment: "Punishment and Desert," James Rachels
<b>17</b>	Nov 2	Quiz 2
<b>18</b>	Nov 7	Topic: Hunger and Poverty: "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Peter Singer
<b>19</b>	Nov 9	Topic: Hunger and Poverty: "Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid," John Arthur
<b>20</b>	Nov 14	Topic: Animal Rights: "All Animals are Equal," Peter Singer
<b>21</b>	Nov 16	Topic: Animal Rights: "We Have only Indirect Duties to Animals," Kant "The Case Against Animal Rights," Cohen
<b>22</b>	Nov 21	Topic: the Environment: "Our Duties to the Environment," Pojman (introduction); "What has Posterity Ever Done for Me?," Robert Heilbroner; Inter-generational Ethics
<b>23</b>	Nov 23	Topic: the Environment: "The Tragedy of the Commons," Garrett Hardin; "People or Penguins: the Case of Optimal Pollution," William F. Baxter
<b>24</b>	Nov 28	Topic: the Environment: "The Land Ethic," Leopold
<b>25</b>	Nov 30	Quiz 3

**4. Requirements**

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Students are expected to read each week's assigned text carefully and in advance. There will be a number of individual and group exercises that combine with class lectures.

**5. Readings:**

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Mill, *Utilitarianism*

LaFollette, *Ethics in Practice*

Besser-Jones and Slote, *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*

Pojman, *The Moral Life*

**6. Assignments:**

Attendance: 17% (1% x 17 out of 18 classes)

Three Quizzes: 83% (Quiz 1: 30%; Quiz 2: 23%; Quiz 3: 30%)

**7. Attendance and Lateness Policy**

Students are expected to attend classes regularly and on time. Attendance will be checked only at the beginning of class. Missing one or more classes makes it increasingly difficult to keep up with the material. Attendance and punctuality will affect your grade (cf. course evaluation). As a general rule, there will not be any make-up exams for quizzes or other assignments.

**8. Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind will not be tolerated. Any evidence of plagiarism will result in immediate failure of the assignment or exam. I also reserve the right to take further appropriate steps, including consultation with the dean and the possibility of expulsion from the University.