

The University of Hong Kong
Department of Politics and Public Administration
CCHU9009 Moral Controversies in Contemporary Society

Course Credits: 6

Course Level: Introductory

Semester: First Semester 2022-2023

Course Time: Wednesday, 18:30 - 20:20

Course Location: CPD-LG.01 (Grand Hall)

Offering Department(s): Department of Politics and Public Administration - 100%

Course Instructor: David Birks

Email: birks@hku.hk

Office Hours: Wednesday 13:00-15:00

Office Location: Room 9.47, Jockey Club Tower

Tutor: Natalie Tyrwhitt-Drake

Email: ntdrake2@hku.hk

Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course critically examines some moral controversies in contemporary society. It aims to help students develop their ability to think in intellectually sophisticated ways about difficult issues of personal and public morality. The course focuses on controversial moral topics: euthanasia, assisted suicide, abortion, organ sales and donation, human enhancement through biomedical technologies, and the use of animals. These topics concern not only personal morality but also social or public morality. Students will be asked to discuss not only whether the above practices are moral or immoral, but also whether they should be prohibited, regulated, recognized, or supported by law. It is hoped that students will be better equipped to evaluate opposing arguments about the proper use of law in regulating personal conduct and social interaction. In the course of discussing these topics, students will be introduced to major moral approaches, such as consequentialism, and deontology, as well as methods of critical thinking in moral reasoning.

Study Load

Activities	Number of hours
Lectures	24
Tutorials	9
Reading / Self-study	60
Assessment: Essay writing	50
Assessment: In-class test (incl preparation)	2
Total:	146

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Course Learning Outcomes and Alignment with Common Core Programme Learning Outcomes

[Please refer to [Appendix A](#) for the set of Common Core Programme Learning Outcomes (CC PLOs).]

Course Learning Outcomes – On completing the course, students will be able to:		Alignment with Common Core Programme Learning Outcome(s)
1.	Open-mindedly consider different viewpoints in moral controversies.	CC PLO(s): 1, 2
2.	Identify the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical and popular arguments in the topic areas of the course.	CC PLO(s): 1, 2
3.	Demonstrate understanding of the major moral philosophical approaches and techniques in moral reasoning.	CC PLO(s): 1, 2
4.	Formulate and critically assess personal positions/convictions.	CC PLO(s): 1

TEACHING METHODS

The course is taught through a series of lectures and tutorials. The lectures will introduce the topics and thinkers studied, and also provide the opportunity for questions and discussion.

It is important to be clear that lectures are not intended to be a substitute for the required reading. Rather, the aim of the lecture is to highlight the interesting elements of the reading, while raising possible objections.

The tutorials will provide an opportunity to clarify and debate the arguments of the readings. Throughout the semester, students are expected to keep up with the reading and to participate in class discussions during tutorial sessions.

Course performance is assessed through 100% coursework, as described below.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment Method	Details of Assignment [Limit: 250 characters]	Weighting	Alignment with Course Learning Outcome(s)
Tutorial participation	Students will be graded on the basis of involvement in tutorial discussion.	10	CLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4
Tutorial presentation	Students are required to give one 8-minute presentation to their tutorial group during the semester.	15	CLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4
Mid-term essay	1000 words.	25	CLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4
Final essay	2000 words.	40	CLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4
In-class assessments	Answer a question in only 3 sentences in class (3 to 4 times).	10	CLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4

ASSESSMENT TASKS

1. *Tutorial Participation*

Tutorials will be conducted in a discussion format. Students must complete all assigned readings carefully before the tutorial. It is crucial that all students come prepared with questions and comments on the reading. **Active participation during tutorial discussions is required.**

Attendance of tutorials is mandatory. If you expect to be absent from a tutorial for any reason, you must contact your tutor beforehand for permission.

2. *Presentation*

You will give one 8-minute presentation to your tutorial group during the semester. Sign up for your presentation at the first tutorial. The presentation is not to be a simple summary of the readings. Instead, you should answer a specific question. **Students are welcome to come up with their own questions**, but they must check with their tutor first.

Each presentation should take into account the following three points:

- i. The presentation should begin by clearly stating your answer to the question.
- ii. The presentation should briefly set out your main arguments in support of this answer.
- iii. The presentation should then consider the most powerful objections to your arguments.

It is particularly impressive if the following point is also addressed:

- iv. What are the possible responses to these objections?

Students must produce a handout for their presentation. The handout should be a minimum of one page, and the student should prepare enough copies for all his/her classmates and tutor in the tutorial group. Students may also prepare a PowerPoint slideshow if they wish.

3. *Paper*

The writing requirement consists in two analytical papers in response to the questions I will provide in due course. The first essay must be approximately 1,000 words, the second must be approximately 2,000 words.

The first paper is due **Friday 21 October at 17.30**.

The second paper is due **Monday 5 December at 17.30**.

Upload your paper on Turnitin via your Moodle account by the deadline. For late papers, see below.

It is important that the papers follow the following format:

- The essay question must be the title of the essay.
- It must be typed in at least 12 point in a readable font.
- It must be double spaced.
- It must include a bibliography and references. Any standard referencing style is acceptable.
- It must include page numbers.
- It must include your word count at the end of the essay.

The word limit is fairly strict. Essays within 10% words of the word count are acceptable. Outside of this range you will lose significant marks. The bibliography and references do not contribute to the word count.

4. *In-Class Assessment*

In some of the lectures, you will be asked to answer a question in no more than three sentences. These are graded in accordance with the rubric below. However, a good answer does not require knowledge of the literature.

All grades are final and cannot be appealed.

It is permitted that your presentation could be on the same topic as one of your essay topics, but your two essays should be on different topics from each other. So, for instance, you can give a presentation on the topic of organs, and write your essay on the topic of organs, but you should not also write your second essay on organs too.

LATE WORK AND TUTORIAL ABSENCE POLICY

Late papers will receive a whole letter grade deduction for every day late (for example, from A to B, from B- to C-), and papers will not be accepted more than three days late. The time stamp of your submission on Moodle will determine the date/time of submission. Students with extenuating circumstances that may affect their tutorial attendance or submission of any written work (including tests) must speak with me in advance.

CLASS EXPECTATIONS

Lecture Recordings: The lectures **will not be recorded**, and they **will not be available** via Zoom. The primary reason for this is that the lectures are interactive, and it will inhibit free discussion too much if students know that whatever they ask or say will be saved and be replayed by their peers in subsequent weeks. It is crucial that everyone feels welcome to ask *any* question, or state *any* answer, no matter how silly they think it might sound.

Laptops and Phones: People who take notes on laptops tend to learn less effectively than those who take notes on paper.¹ Smartphone and laptop users who text-message, answer email, and browse the internet become distracted and are also distracting to others.² So, **please keep laptops, phones and other devices put away during lectures**. Please talk to me if this is a problem. I will make an exception to the policy if there is a compelling reason.

EMAIL EXPECTATIONS

I strongly encourage you to email me, or to post a question on the Moodle Forum if you have any questions at all about the course content. It is always a pleasure to hear from you, and I'm very happy to help. However, it is important to clarify that while I do my best to answer emails as quickly as possible, you should expect that it can sometimes take up to **two working days** to receive a response. I do not check email in the evenings or on the weekend. So, for instance, if you email on Friday night, it might take me until the end of Tuesday to get back to you. But again, please do feel welcome to reach out.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The Department of Politics & Public Administration expects that all students work will conform to the highest standards of academic integrity. Student's work will be scrutinized for academic misconduct, which includes plagiarism of other's words and/or ideas, falsification, fabrication, and misuse of data.

All students' submitted work will be scrutinized for plagiarism through use of Turnitin via Moodle. In the event a student submits work that appears to be plagiarized—whether essays, presentations, or other course material—they will be asked to explain themselves to the lecturer.

¹ P. Mueller and D. Oppenheimer, "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Notetaking," *Psychological Science* 25 (2014).

² S. M. Ravizza, M.G. Uitvlugt, and K.M. Fenn, "Logged In and Zoned Out: How Laptop Internet Use Relates to Classroom Learning," *Psychological Science* 28 (2017).

The Department does not tolerate plagiarism, whether direct, indirect, or self-plagiarism. Direct plagiarism is intentionally and completely lifting the words, equations, charts, graphs or artistic material of another author or authors. Indirect plagiarism is failing to cite completely or accurately, and/or copying themes, ideas, or sources the student has not read from another author or authors. Self-plagiarism is recycling papers, documents, equations, and so forth from a document previously submitted by the student without quotation, citation, or attribution of the previous work.

Double submissions are not permitted; all work must be original to this course. Acts of plagiarism could result in heavy penalties, including disciplinary action. For more information about the policy on plagiarism at HKU, please visit: <http://www.hku.hk/plagiarism>.

PROVISION OF FEEDBACK

Department policy on provision of feedback for coursework assignments and written examinations can be found here: <http://www.ppaweb.hku.hk/pages/ppa-feedback-policy>. Feedback on the final paper will be provided in accordance with department policy.

COURSE READINGS

Unless otherwise stated, all references below are for papers included in the following textbook:

Kuhse, H, Singer, P. (eds.) 2015. *Bioethics: An Anthology*, Blackwell.

It is not necessary to buy this book, as all of the papers are easily available online.

I have placed some of the more difficult to find papers on the course Moodle page.

Recommended General Books:

The following are helpful general books:

Buchanan, A., Brock, D., Daniels, N., & Wikler, D. 2000. *From Chance to Choice: Genetics and Justice*. Cambridge University Press.

Glover, J. 1991. *Causing Death and Saving Lives*. Penguin.

The following is a good website to help you search for further papers on a topic:

www.philpapers.org

For a helpful introduction to moral principles see:

Shafer-Landau, R. 2010. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford University Press. Especially Chapters 9, 12, and 16.

For a nice introduction against moral scepticism see:

Shafer-Landau, R. 2004. *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* Oxford University Press.

Thomas Sinclair has put together a helpful website that might address any moral scepticism concerns you have:

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~lady2916/RealistFAQ/>

COURSE OUTLINE

Date	Topic	Required Reading	Recommended Reading
7 September	Introduction	No Reading Required	
14 September	Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide	Pence, G. 'Why Physicians Should Aid the Dying' in <i>Ethics in Practice: An Anthology</i> , ed. H. LaFollete (1997) Oxford: Blackwell.	Rachels, J. 'Active and Passive Euthanasia'
21 September	Euthanasia and Physician-	Velleman, J, D. 'A Right of Self-Termination?' in <i>Ethics</i>	

	Assisted Suicide	(1999) Vol. 109, No. 3, pp. 606-628	
28 September	Organs	Harris, J 'The Survival Lottery'	Radcliffe Richards, J., 1996, "Nephrrarious Goings On: kidney sales and moral arguments", <i>The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy</i> , 21: 375–416.
5 October	Organs	Fabre, C. 'Justice and the Compulsory Taking of Live Body Parts.' in <i>Utilitas</i> (2003) vol. 15 issue 2.	
12 October	No Lecture – Reading Week		
19 October	No Lecture – Essay Due 21 October 17:30		
26 October	Abortion	Tooley, M. 'Abortion and Infanticide'	Thomson, J.J. 'A Defence of Abortion'
2 November	Abortion	Marquis, D. 'Why Abortion is Immoral'	
9 November	Enhancement: Designer Babies	Savulescu, J. Kahane, G. 'The Moral Obligation to Create Children with the Best Chance of the Best Life' in <i>Bioethics</i> (2009) Vol. 23 No. 5, pp. 274–290 [Parts One and Two only]	de Melo-Martín, I 'On Our Obligation to Select the Best Children: A Reply to Savulescu'. in <i>Bioethics</i> (2004) Vol. 18 pp. 72-83. Roberts, M. A., "The Nonidentity Problem", <i>The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
16 November	Enhancement: Moral Enhancement	Douglas, T. & Pugh, J. 'Neurointerventions as Criminal Rehabilitation: An Ethical Review', in J Jacobs and J	Douglas, T. 'Moral Enhancement' <i>Journal of Applied Philosophy</i> 2008; 25(3): 228-245.

		Jackson (eds) Routledge Handbook of Criminal Justice Ethics (Routledge, 2016)	
23 November	Animal Rights	Singer, P. 'All Animals are Equal'	<p>Kant, I. 'Duties Towards Animals' (an extract from his Lectures on Ethics, trans. Louis Infield, London: Methuen, 1930. pp. 239-41)</p> <p>Williams, B. 'The Human Prejudice' in Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline (ed. A.W. Moore) (Oxford: Princeton University Press). pp. 135-154.</p>
30 November	What Have We Learned?	No Reading Required	

TUTORIAL OUTLINE

All tutorials will be conducted face-to-face. You can sign up for your tutorials from **8 September 2022 (Thursday) 10:00am** via the “Tutorial Sign-up” mobile app or the “My eLearning” tab on HKU Portal. Spaces will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. If you have an unavoidable time clash, please email Ms. Samantha Wong at wssw@hku.hk (cc’ing Natalie at ntdrake2@hku.hk) with your current timetable.

Please come to class according to this tutorial schedule, NOT the schedule on the Tutorial Sign-Up Management System.

#	Monday	Tuesday	Friday	Tutorial/Presentation Topic
1.	19 Sept	20 Sept	23 Sept	Housekeeping matters (attendance required)
2.	26 Sept	27 Sept	30 Sept	Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide
3.	3 Oct	18 Oct	7 Oct	Organs
4.	17 Oct	25 Oct	21 Oct	Organs
5.	31 Oct	1 Nov	28 Oct	Abortion
6.	7 Nov	8 Nov	4 Nov	Abortion
7.	14 Nov	15 Nov	11 Nov	Enhancement: Designer Babies
8.	21 Nov	22 Nov	18 Nov	Enhancement: Moral Enhancement
9.	28 Nov	29 Nov	25 Nov	Animal Rights

POSSIBLE TUTORIAL PRESENTATION QUESTIONS

Euthanasia

1. Assess this argument: 'Killing is wrong if and only if it deprives a person of a valuable future life; some terminally ill people do not have a valuable future life; so it is not wrong to kill them'.
2. If the argument for voluntary euthanasia is based on autonomy, should only 'terminally ill' cases be permitted?

Organs

1. 'We ought not take organs from the dead if they have requested not to donate their organs, or if their family does not want their organs to be donated.' Discuss.
2. Do we have a duty to give any part of our body as a matter of distributive justice?

Abortion

1. If abortion is morally permissible, is infanticide also morally permissible?
2. If abortion is morally impermissible, is contraception also morally impermissible?

Designer Babies

1. 'It is not wrong to choose to have a deaf child, but it is wrong to deafen a child'. Analyze.
2. Should we accept the Principle of Procreative Beneficence? Why?

Moral Enhancement

1. 'Even if it were technically possible and legally permissible for people to engage in biomedical enhancement, it would not be morally permissible for them to do so'.
Discuss
2. Can a criminal offender give valid consent to receive a neurointervention as an alternative to incarceration?

Animals

1. Is it wrong to kill animals in order to eat meat?
 2. 'If it is not wrong to experiment on animals, it is also not wrong to experiment on severely mentally disabled humans.' Do you agree? Why/Why not?
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THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**COMMON CORE CURRICULUM****Programme Learning Outcomes for the Common Core Curriculum**

Programme Learning Outcomes Upon successful completion of the Common Core Curriculum, students will be able to:	Common Core Goals	University Educational Aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none">articulate a broader perspective and a deeper critical understanding of the complex connections between issues of profound importance	Goal 1: to enable students to develop a broader perspective and a critical understanding of the complexities and the interconnectedness of the issues that they are confronted with in their everyday lives	University Educational Aims 1, 2 and 3. To enable students to develop capabilities in: - pursuit of academic / professional excellence, critical intellectual enquiry and life-long learning - tackling novel situations and ill-defined problems - critical self-reflection, greater understanding of others, and upholding personal and professional ethics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">better navigate the similarities and differences between their own and other cultures	Goal 2: to cultivate students' appreciation of their own culture and other cultures, and the inter-relatedness among cultures	University Educational Aims 2, 3 and 4. To enable students to develop capabilities in: - tackling novel situations and ill-defined problems - critical self-reflection, greater understanding of others, and upholding personal and professional ethics - intercultural understanding and global citizenship
<ul style="list-style-type: none">more fully participate as individuals, members of social groups, and citizens in global, regional, and local communities	Goal 3: to enable students to see themselves as members of global as well as local communities and to play an active role as responsible individuals and citizens in these	University Educational Aims 2, 4 and 5. To enable students to develop capabilities in: - tackling novel situations and ill-defined problems

	communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intercultural understanding and global citizenship - communication and collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate the creative, collaborative, and communication skills that will contribute to the quality of their own and others' lives 	Goal 4: to enable students to develop the key intellectual skills that will be further enhanced in their disciplinary studies	University Educational Aims 2, 5 and 6. To enable students to develop capabilities in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tackling novel situations and ill-defined problems - communication and collaboration - leadership and advocacy for the improvement of the human condition

Course Grading Rubric

Grade/ Competency	A+, A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D+, D	F
Use of vocabulary and concepts	Student accurately and creatively uses concepts and key course vocabulary throughout the assignment, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of each.	Student accurately uses concepts and key course vocabulary throughout the assignment, but does not demonstrate creativity in use or fluency.	Student uses concepts and key vocabulary from the course, but in a manner that does not demonstrate understanding or proficiency; use of concepts and vocabulary is perfunctory.	Student rehearses concepts or key course vocabulary but not in a way suggesting understanding at a university level.	Student fails to use concepts or key vocabulary correctly or at all.
Deployment of theories and argumentation	Student deploys theoretical arguments well using their own voice and substantive arguments in a sophisticated way.	Student deploys theoretical arguments well although voice, style and substantive critiques are similar to the source.	Student deploys theoretical vocabulary in a way commensurate with rules for argumentation, but does not show creativity or sophistication in substance or style.	Student rehearses theories and bits of argumentation from others and not in a way suggesting understanding at a university level.	Student fails to attempt argumentation or use of theoretical tools from the course.
Creativity	Students choice of topic, sources, assignment completion modality, arguments, and solutions show sophistication and critical thinking at a high level.	Students choice of topic, sources, assignment completion modality, arguments, and solutions show critical thinking skills.	Students choice of topic, sources, assignment completion modality, arguments, and solutions are average and “modal”.	Student shows no more creativity than what is required to complete the task.	Student misunderstands creativity or fails to complete the assigned task.
Persuasiveness	Student makes an argument using appropriate language and rhetorical style necessary to persuade the reader to accept or accommodate their viewpoint.	Student makes an argument using appropriate language and rhetorical style necessary to complete the assignment.	Student makes an argument using either inappropriate language and/or rhetorical style. Ranting or editorializing.	Student rants or editorializes considerably, but stays largely on message.	Student rants incoherently.
Use of fact and empirical evidence	Student brings factual evidence to bear upon the arguments and supports	Student brings factual evidence to bear upon some arguments and	Student brings some facts into their arguments but fails to provide	Students factual claims are questionable or unsupported.	Factual claims, if any are incorrect, ill supported, or incoherent

	factual claims with adequate support from reputable sources.	supports factual claims with support from limited or questionable sources.	support consistently for factual claims and uses trite or prohibited sources as support (e.g., Wikipedia).	Student rehearses facts from unacceptable sources (e.g., Yahoo answers).	within the argument.
Grammar and spelling	Students writing is grammatically correct and there are no spelling errors.	Students writing is grammatically correct in most instances and there are few spelling errors.	Students writing is grammatically correct in many instances but spelling errors are found throughout the document, consonant with ESL students.	Grammatical infelicities and spelling errors appear frequently in the document, but these are errors common to ESL students.	Grammar and spelling are unacceptable for university level writing for any student.
Mechanics and style	Students writing is fluid, fluent, and in an appropriate style for the task.	Students writing is fluent but stilted and/ or is an odd style for the task.	Students writing is halting and imbalanced and may be inappropriate for the task.	Students writing is only marginally acceptable for university level courses.	Students writing needs significant remediation by outside sources.
Citations	Student accurately and completely cites all sources, whether factual, argumentative, or theoretical claims according to the appropriate citation scheme.	Student accurately cites all sources, whether factual, argumentative, or theoretical claims but does not provide complete citations or uses an inappropriate citation scheme.	Student cites most expected sources, but does not provide accurate or complete citations.	Students citations are incomplete and inconsistent throughout the paper.	Student fails to cite at all.
Sources	Students choice of sources demonstrate sophisticated use of research resources. Sources are from reputable, academic sources.	Students choice of sources indicate a notable level of use of research resources. Sources are from reputable, academic sources.	Students choice of sources show minimal use of research resources. Sources are from a mix of academic and non-academic sources, some of questionable provenance.	Students include only minimal outside sources from sophomoric or prohibited sources (e.g., Encyclopedia Britannica online).	Student fails to demonstrate appropriate outside research.