University of St.Gallen

Course and Examination Fact Sheet: Spring Semester 2025

8,756: Verantwortung/Responsibility: Ubuntu, Ethics and Human Rights

ECTS credits: 3

Overview examination/s

(binding regulations see below)
decentral - Presentation, Analog, Group work group grade (50%)
Examination time: Term time
decentral - Written work, Digital, Individual work individual grade (50%)
Examination time: Term time

Attached courses

Timetable -- Language -- Lecturer
8,756,1.00 Verantwortung/Responsibility: Ubuntu, Ethics and Human Rights -- English -- Ngosso Mathieu Thierry

Course information

Course prerequisites

None

Learning objectives

Upon the successful completion of the course, students will be able to

- understand the meaning of the concept of Ubuntu and its importance in African contemporary thought.
- understand the ethical dimension of Ubuntu from its application to some selected issues (ethical foundation of political organizations, human rights, hospitality, transitional justice, intergenerational justice).
- discuss the connection of Ubuntu with some issues of classical contemporary theories of justice.

Course content

The word "*Ubuntu*" comes from the Bantu languages of the southern part of Africa and refers to the idea of humanity (*ntu* = human being). It is often used in proverbial expressions like "Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang" (in the Sotho language) or "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (in Xhosa and Zulu languages), which means, respectively : "A person is a person through other persons" and "I am, because we are" (Mabogo P. More, "Philosophy in South Africa Under and After Apartheid", in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004, p. 157). This concept has been used by scholars (see course literature) as a normative tool for thinking about ethics, social, political and economic issues.

The course is going to discuss, in the framework of Ubuntu, the relationship between the individual and the community and its implications on the definition and implementation of Human rights. It will help to see in particular how this distinction make it possible to think what is now referred to as transitional justice, and how it continues to feed contemporary debates on social, political and economic justice.

The concept of Ubuntu will also be critically analysed in the framework of contemporary debate on some special issues as business ethics, theories of development, environmental ethics, intergenerational justice and ethics of migration.

The general objective of this course is to help students understand the meaning and scope of Ubuntu, a concept that can be discussed both in terms of its contribution and its limits in examining contemporary questions of ethics, justice, politics and economics.

Course structure and indications of the learning and teaching design

The course will include a part devoted to the presentation of the main subjects related to the theme and a second part which will be devoted to comparative analyzes, carried out by the students, with some subjects chosen in contemporary debates concerning Business Ethics, Environmental Ethics and Development theories,

Part I (lecturers' presentation and discussions): Meaning and scope of the concept of Ubuntu

- Ubuntu, personhood and communalism
- Ubuntu, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- Ubuntu and ethnocultural justice in African contemporary States
- Ubuntu and transitional Justice (Is the South African case exportable?)
- Ubuntu, common goods and poverty

Part II (students' presentations and discussions): Ubuntu and contemporary debates

- Ubuntu and business ethics
- Ubuntu and contemporary theories of development
- Ubuntu and global environmental justice
- Ubuntu and intergenerational justice: comparing western and "African" policies
- Ubuntu, hospitality and migration crises

Contextual Studies are considered part of **Contact Learning**; thus, taking part properly implies **regular attendance**. It is the students' own responsibility to ensure that there is **no timetable clash** between the courses they have chosen. A detailed course outline and all relevant documents will be made available on **StudyNet**. Only the current timetable as published on **Courses** does apply.

Course literature

A more extensive list will be made available on StudyNet.

Gade, Christian B.N., *A Discourse on African Philosophy. A New Perspective on Ubuntu and Transitional Justice in South Africa*, Lexington Books, 2017.
Gary Behrens, Kevin, "Moral obligations towards future generations in African thought", *Journal of Global Ethics*, 2012, 8:2-3, 179-191, DOI: 10.1080/17449626.2012.705786.
Gary Behrens, Kevin, "An African Relational Environmentalism and Moral Considerability", *Environmental Ethics*, Spring 2014, Vol. 36, Number 1, pp. 63-82
Karsten, Luchien and Illa, Honorine (2001), "Ubuntu as a management concept", *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 15, No. 1-2, p. 91-112.
Lutz, David W. (2009). African Ubuntu Philosophy and Philosophy of Global Management. *J. of Business Ethics*, 84:313-328
Metz, T., "Two Conceptions of African Ethics" *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, XXV, nos. 1-2, 2011, pp. 141-161.
Motsamai Molefe, "A Defence of Moderate Communitarianism: A Place of Rights in African Moral-Political Thought", *Phronimon*, Volume 18 |2017 | pp. 181-203, https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/Phronimon https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/2668
Nussbaum, B. (2003), "Ubuntu and business, reflections and questions", *World Business Academy*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 1-16
Patricia, P. and Scheraga, A., "Using the African philosophy of Ubuntu to introduce diversity into the business school", *Chinmaya Management Review*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 1998.

Additional course information

Thierry Ngosso is a Cameroonian political philosopher interested in global justice, with a strong focus on comparative philosophy and business ethics regarding human rights, climate change, and migration. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Louvain, Belgium, and has been affiliated with the Catholic University of Central Africa in Cameroon where he founded and manages the Ethics and Public Policy Laboratory (EthicsLab) and the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland, where he co-founded and manages the Competence Center for African Research (CCAR).

Examination information

University of St.Gallen

Examination sub part/s

1. Examination sub part (1/2)

Examination modalities

Examination type	Presentation
Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Oral examination
Examination mode	Analog
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Asynchronous
Examination location	On Campus
Grading type	Group work group grade
Weighting	50%
Duration	--

Examination languages
Question language: English
Answer language: English

Remark
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Examination-aid rule
Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

Supplementary aids
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2. Examination sub part (2/2)

Examination modalities

Examination type	Written work
Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Written work
Examination mode	Digital
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Asynchronous
Examination location	Off Campus
Grading type	Individual work individual grade
Weighting	50%
Duration	--

Examination languages
Question language: English
Answer language: English

Remark
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Examination-aid rule
Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

Supplementary aids
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Examination content

1. Written assignment: Students prepare an **individual paper** (2500-3000 words) on topics related to the course. They can work either on an Issue or on a specific Case of their choice or based on course content or on a paper selected from the course literature. The course director will approve topics as well as cases upstream. In both cases, students will hand in a one-page proposal paper plan with a title, a clear research focus or question (for Issues) or description of the issue/problem underlying a specific case (for Cases) and an abstract underlying the structure of the argument of the analysis. There will be no duplication of topics: application of a first come first serve rule.

Please, note the following: Proposal are due beforehand, the earlier you have your proposal approved, the more time you will have to complete your paper. More detail on examination content will be given during the first class.

2. Students will also have prepare a **group presentation** on one of the five topics indicated in the syllabus. Each group will consist in 5 students max. Presentation and discussion will last 45 minutes (around 20 minutes for the presentation and 25 minutes for discussion). All presentation groups must consult with the course director on the content of the presentation.

Examination relevant literature

More detail about the necessary examination literature will be given in class.

Please note

Please note that only this fact sheet and the examination schedule published at the time of bidding are binding and takes precedence over other information, such as information on StudyNet (Canvas), on lecturers' websites and information in lectures etc.
Any references and links to third-party content within the fact sheet are only of a supplementary, informative nature and lie outside the area of responsibility of the University of St.Gallen.

Documents and materials are only relevant for central examinations if they are available by the end of the lecture period (CW21) at the latest. In the case of centrally organised mid-term examinations, the documents and materials up to CW 13 (Monday, 25 March 2025) are relevant for testing.

Binding nature of the fact sheets:

- Course information as well as examination date (organised centrally/decentrally) and form of examination: from bidding start in CW 04 (Thursday, 23 January 2025);
- Examination information (supplementary aids, examination contents, examination literature) for decentralised examinations: in CW 12 (Monday, 17 March 2025);
- Examination information (supplementary aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised mid-term examinations: in CW 14 (Monday, 31 March 2025);
- Examination information (regulations on aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised examinations: two weeks before ending with de-registration period in CW 15 (Monday, 07 April 2025).