

Course Outline

School / Portfolio: Faculty of Education and Arts

Course Title: ETHICS AND THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Course ID: PHILO2008

Credit Points: 15.00

Prerequisite(s): (PHILO1004 Practical Ethics or equivalent AND One 1000 level Philosophy course)

Co-requisite(s): Nil

Exclusion(s): Nil

ASCED Code: 091701

Program Level:

AQF Level of Program						
	5	6	7	8	9	10
Level						
Introductory	■	■	■	■	■	■
Intermediate	■	■	✓	■	■	■
Advanced	■	■	■	■	■	■

Learning Outcomes:

Knowledge:

- Examine key thinkers and movements in the field of ethics in the Western philosophical tradition, from the late eighteenth century until the present, with a particular emphasis on the Deontological and Utilitarian approaches.
- K1.** Examine the influence of the broad philosophical movement known as the Enlightenment upon the development of western ethics.
- K2.** Understand specific philosophical approaches to ethics in relation to their respective historical contexts.
- K3.** Identify, analyse, evaluate and critically engage with contemporary ethical issues through the lens of Enlightenment ethical theories.
- K4.**

Skills:

- S1.** Demonstrate proficiency in critical textual analysis and exegesis
- S2.** Articulate an informed perspective
- S3.** Analyse, evaluate and critically engage with philosophical positions
- S4.** Undertake independent research to deepen critical understanding of the Enlightenment philosophical and ethical traditions and texts.

Application of knowledge and skills:

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- A1.** Recognise and reflect on the relations between different ethical theories and models and their cultural and historical contexts.
- A2.** Articulate and justify a philosophical position in a clear and well-structured manner in verbal or written form, demonstrating proficiency with the conventions and techniques of philosophical scholarship.
- A3.** Apply Deontological and Utilitarian ethical models to contemporary ethical issues.
- A4.** Articulate and evaluate the influence of Enlightenment ethical theories on contemporary ethical issues and arguments.

Course Content:

The aim of this course is to explore the development of western philosophical ethics in conjunction with the project of the Enlightenment. In his famous answer to the question 'What is Enlightenment?', the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) replied that the motto of Enlightenment is to 'Have the courage to use your own understanding!' This phrase, penned in 1784, heralded a new approach to ethics in western philosophy. Broadly speaking, the philosophers of the European Enlightenment sought to follow Kant's dictum by replacing the adherence to natural law and religious dogma with a spirit of free, rational inquiry into all issues of ethical significance.

Beginning with a brief account of pre-Enlightenment approaches to ethics in classical philosophy and the Christian tradition, the course will examine in depth the two dominant streams of ethical thought that emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and which still dominate contemporary ethical debates: Deontology and Utilitarianism. Deontological approaches to ethics focus upon determining, through rational examination, the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions, regardless of their consequences. Students in the course will explore, in detail, one of the most famous texts in the deontological tradition, Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). Utilitarianism concerns itself not so much with the rightness of actions in themselves, but rather with their consequences, with a view to calculating and securing the maximum possible happiness for subjects. Students will examine the key text for Enlightenment thinkers in the Utilitarian tradition: *Utilitarianism* (1861) by the English Philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Following their study of Deontology and Utilitarianism, students will apply these two models of ethics to contemporary ethical problems such as famine and our treatment of animals.

Leading up to the twentieth century, many Western philosophers became increasingly dissatisfied with the project of Enlightenment: that of securing human progress through rational inquiry, technological advancement and the formulation of universal moral axioms. These thinkers argued that, due to internal contradictions within reason itself, rational progress does not always amount to moral progress. In the latter stages of this course, students will be introduced to one of the key critiques of Enlightenment ethics written by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900): *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). Finally we take a look at how some of Nietzsche's concerns have been upheld and manifested in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Values and Graduate Attributes:

Values:

- V1.** Develop the capacity to see philosophical and ethical models and arguments within their cultural and historical contexts.
- V2.** Recognise and respect the variety of perspectives on and critical approaches to ethical problems.
- V3.** Respect the procedures of disciplined philosophical argumentation.

Graduate Attributes:

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Attribute	Brief Description	Focus
Continuous Learning	Students will develop skills in comprehension, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and creative thinking	High
Self Reliance	Students will build on their skills in continuous learning, personal organisation, communication, independent thinking, initiative, and creativity	Medium
Engaged Citizenship	Students will refine their skills in ethical argument, as well as their understanding of the role of ethical argument in addressing ethical problems	High
Social Responsibility	Students will refine their understanding of ethical argument and the role of the individual in striving to build a more ethical society	High

Learning Task and Assessment:

Learning Outcomes Assessed	Assessment Task	Assessment Type	Weighting
K1, K2, S1, S3, A1, A2	Demonstrate critical understanding of key concepts, arguments and texts in response to self and peer developed short answer questions.	Reading & Comprehension Exercise	25-35%
K3, K4, S1, S2, S3, S4, A1, A2, A3, A4	Analysis, research and argument. Develop and defend a position on a contested philosophical topic by marshalling support, comparing competing viewpoints and drawing conclusions.	Research Essay	35-45%
K1, K2, S2, S3, S4, A2, A3	Present ideas and arguments pertinent to one course topic.	Presentation	10-15%
K2, K3, S1, S2, S3, S4, A2, A3, A4,	Make informed contributions to course activities and discussion; discuss course texts and ideas in a clear and coherent manner.	Participation & Contribution	5-10%

Adopted Reference Style:

Chicago