

**ANTH 2360/UGED 2666/ANTH 5385**  
**Ethics and the Human Experience**  
**Fall 2024**

Lecture: Wednesday 10:30 AM – 12:15 PM, UCC C5  
 UG Tutorials: Wednesday 4:30 PM – 5:15 PM, NAH 401  
                   Wednesday 5:30 PM – 6:15 PM, NAH 401  
 MA Tutorial: Wednesday 12:30 PM – 1:15 PM, UCC 102

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 Office Hours: By appointment



(By Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*)

This course introduces students to the study of ethics and morality from a sociological and cross-cultural perspective. Ethics and morality may appear to be an abstract subject for philosophers, but this course shall demonstrate how they are in fact a close part of our everyday lives.

We study a select number of cases to examine how social institutions and discourses condition and constrain the thinkable and the doable. We will consider how human attention and energy may be invested in very different projects for different purposes. And we will explore how problematic and profound the ordinary can be.

“Ethics and the Human Experience” prioritizes context in the study of ethics. Rather than make opinions about what people “should” do, we will instead aim to observe and make sense of *what* people *actually* do, or don’t do, in responding to the demands and difficulties of their circumstances. Ultimately, the class aims to expand our moral imagination beyond the usual concerns, and to understand the human experience more deeply.

### Learning Outcomes

1. Students will acquire intellectual resources for thinking about ethics and morality from a holistic perspective.
2. Students will learn to identify how factors and trends combine to create unique circumstances, dilemmas, and aspirations.
3. Students will learn to connect the seemingly mundane to broader philosophical themes.
4. Students will have a better understanding of their own life experience.

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## GRADE DESCRIPTORS

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Criteria for 1) the course and 2) for coursework</i>
A	<p>1) Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.</p> <p>2) The work has creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas in an original way. Observations are nuanced, the argument is logical and cohesive, the discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. Concrete evidence corresponds to statements and claims. The work responds directly to the assignment prompt.</p>
A-	<p>1) Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.</p> <p>2) The work synthesizes course materials and key ideas in an original way, but there are areas for improvement.</p>
B-range	<p>1) Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.</p> <p>2) The work demonstrates a solid grasp of course materials and key ideas. There are areas for improvement with respect to handling complexity, building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence. Response to the assignment prompt may not be sufficient.</p>
C-range	<p>1) Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.</p> <p>2) The work shows some effort, but course materials have not been sufficiently engaged. The argument and the writing is not clear, and/or there is no evidence for statements and claims made. Understanding of course materials and key ideas has not been demonstrated.</p>
D-range	<p>1) Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.</p> <p>2) The work shows little effort to engage course materials. There are major problems with clarity of argument and writing.</p>
F	<p>1) Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.</p> <p>2) The work has failed respond to the assignment prompt.</p>

## Required Texts

All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

## Evaluation

<i>Grade Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Midterm Paper	35%	November 4
Final Paper	45%	December 16
Participation in lecture and tutorial	20%	--

Paper questions and choices will be posted ahead of time.

UG students and MA students will have different requirements.

All assignments must be submitted to VeriGuide, and declarations uploaded to Blackboard.

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NOTE: “📖” indicates required readings for both UGs and MAs, “📖📖” indicates required readings for MAs.

### Week 1 (September 4): Course Introduction

☞ No readings and no tutorial.

## Ethics in Context

### Week 2 (September 11): Economic Context and the Fragility of Goodness

📖 Rebecca LESTER, “Brokering Authenticity: Borderline Personality Disorder and the Ethics of Care in an American Eating Disorder Clinic.” *Current Anthropology*. (Only pp. 281-293 required.)

📖📖 Patrick MCKEARNEY and Megha AMRITH, “Care.” In *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*.

### Week 3 (September 18): No class

☞ Mid-Autumn Holiday

### Week 4 (September 25): The Social Life of Moral Rhetoric

📖 Nancy SCHEPER-HUGHES, “The Last Commodity: Post-Human Ethics and the Global Traffic in ‘Fresh Organs.’” In *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*.

📖📖 Nancy SCHEPER-HUGHES, “The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology.” *Current Anthropology*. (Only pp. 409-420 required.)

🎬 *Dirty Pretty Things* (2003) (Watch the entire film either this week or next, on your own. A DVD copy is on reserve at New Asia Library. We will discuss in class next week.)

### Week 5 (October 2): The Unintended Consequences of “Good Intentions”

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- 📖 Miriam TICKTIN, “Where ethics and politics meet: The violence of humanitarianism in France.” *American Ethnologist*.
- 📖📖 Didier FASSIN, “Introduction: Humanitarian Government.” In *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. (Read up to pg. 13 only.)
- 📖📖 Hubert L. DREYFUS and Paul RABINOW, “Power and Truth.” In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. (Read pp. 184-188 only.)

#### Week 6 (October 9): The Morality of Bureaucracy

- 📖 Lisa STEVENSON, “Cooperating.” In *Life Besides Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*.
- 📖📖 David GRAEBER, “The Utopia of Rules, or Why We Really Love Bureaucracy After All.” In *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*.

**“Wherever there are societies, there is altruism...” – Durkheim**

#### Week 7 (October 16): The Sociological Foundation

- 📖 Catherine LUTZ, “Morality, Domination, and the Emotion of ‘Justifiable Anger,’” in *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll*
- 📖📖 James LAIDLAW, “Ethics/Morality.” In *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*.

#### Week 8 (October 23): Local Moral Worlds

- 📖 Jason THROOP, “Subjectivity, Embodiment, and Social Action.” In *Suffering and Sentiment: Exploring the Vicissitudes of Experience and Pain in Yap*.
- 📖📖 Émile DURKHEIM, “Division of Labor in Society: Consequences.” In *Émile Durkheim: On Morality and Society*.
- 📖📖 Émile DURKHEIM “Division of Labor in Society: Conclusion.” In *Émile Durkheim: On Morality and Society*.
- 🎧 Yap... *How Did You Know We'd Like TV?* (1981) (Clips only)

MIDTERM PAPER DUE: November 4

📖 Guiding questions will be posted October 24, by 5:00 p.m. Paper is due on November 4, no later than 11:59 p.m.

### **Why Ethics? Why Now?**

#### Week 9 (October 30): The Burden of Self-Development in Neoliberal Times

- 📖 Nancy ABELMANN, So Jin PARK, and Hyunhee KIM, “On their Own: Becoming Cosmopolitan Subjects beyond College in South Korea.” In *Global Futures: Youth, Nation, and the New Economy in Uncertain Times*.

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📖📖 Hae-joang CHO. “The Spec Generation Who Can’t Say ‘No’: Overeducated and Underemployed Youth in Contemporary South Korea.” *positions: asia critique*.

Week 10 (November 6): Ethics as Self-Formation

📖 Michel FOUCAULT, “Self-Writing.” In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*.

📖📖 Michel FOUCAULT, Introduction to *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*.

Week 11 (November 13): The Case of Vipassanā Meditation

📖 Joanna COOK, “Meditation as ethical imperative.” In *Meditation in Modern Buddhism: Renunciation and Change in Thai Monastic Life*.

📖📖 Joanna COOK, “Hierarchy, gender and mindfulness.” In *Meditation in Modern Buddhism: Renunciation and Change in Thai Monastic Life*.

☞ We will do small group discussion of 📖 in class instead of a lecture, followed by group presentations. Discussion will continue in tutorial under guidance of instructor or tutor.

Week 12 (November 20): No class

☞ I will be attending the American Anthropological Association conference.

**Ordinary Ethics**

Week 13 (November 27): Ordinary Ethics and the Everyday

📖 Lotte MEINERT, “Every Day: Forgiving after War in Northern Uganda.” In *Moral Engines: Exploring Ethical Drives in Human Life*.

📖📖 Veena DAS, “Engaging the Life of the Other: Love and Everyday Life.” In *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*.

(Optional) Lotte Buch SEGAL, “Caring for the Ordinary in Palestine: When Ongoing Occupation Becomes Maddening.” *Anthropological Quarterly*.

Week 14 (December 3, make up class): The Ethics of Care

📖 Janelle TAYLOR, “On Recognition, Caring, and Dementia.” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*.

📖📖 João BIEHL, “Care and Disregard.” In *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*.

🎬 *Still Alice* (2014) (Clips only)

FINAL PAPER DUE: December 16

📄 Guiding questions will be posted December 4, by 5:00 p.m. Paper is due December 16, by 11:59 p.m.

## TIPS & POLICIES

### Opinions vs. Arguments

There is a difference between opinion and argument. Your personal viewpoints are welcome during class discussion, but your papers will be evaluated based upon your ability to formulate an argument rather than your ability to express an opinion.

An argument is analytical. Arguments propose relationships between variables, and they support assertions with empirical evidence – either ethnographic data, or, in the case of studying theory, passages from original texts that illustrate how a particular writer formulated an idea.

There is also a difference between opinion and perspective. An opinion usually contains some kind of judgment about how the world should or should not operate. A perspective, on the other hand, is a way of looking at the world. In other words, having perspective involves the ability to see patterns and themes, or differences and divergences, which may not be obvious at first glance. Having an opinion is easy. Having the insight that comes with perspective is much harder.

### Research Component

Conducting original research is not required for this class, but I encourage you to develop a bibliography listing published research that is relevant to our topics and taking note of the world around you. Final paper questions may invite you to share observations or discuss additional cases.

### Late Submissions

Papers submitted after the due date will suffer a fraction of a grade deduction for every day it is late. For example, an A- will become a B+, a B will become a B-, et cetera.

### Academic Honesty

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on academic honesty, and adopts a policy of *zero tolerance* on cheating in examinations and plagiarism. Any such offence will lead to disciplinary action including possibly termination of studies at the University. Students should know how to properly use source material and how to avoid plagiarism. Students should read the detailed guidelines and examples for the acknowledgement of sources in the University's website at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty>. Students are required to submit all papers through VeriGuide, which is also explained at the above website.

### Use of AI Tools

Use of generative AI tools for course papers is strictly prohibited. You are expected to work independently, and to cite sources for any and all information you did not collect yourself.