

# PIA3315: ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

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## Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

## Part I Course Overview

### Course Title

Ethics in Government

### Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

### Course Number

3315

### Academic Unit

Public and International Affairs (PIA)

### College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

### Course Duration

One Semester

### Credit Units

3

### Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

### Medium of Instruction

English

### Medium of Assessment

English

### Prerequisites

Nil

### Precursors

Nil

### Equivalent Courses

SA 3315 Ethics in Government / POL3315 Ethics in Government

### Exclusive Courses

Nil

## Part II Course Details

### Abstract

This course is designed to develop student's capacity to critically analyze the terrain where politics and ethics intersect. It also examines some arguments for and against keeping the practice of politics separate from the sphere of ethics. It

explores the problems of “dirty hands” and “many hands” in government, public organizations and public life. It discusses some of the ethical dilemmas confronting public officials and powerful institutions and organizations which have major impact on the life of ordinary citizens in a democratic polity. It offers a reflective and methodological approach to develop moral reasoning and analytical skills to evaluate ethical issues and to guide decision-making in government and public life.

### Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

| CILOs |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Weighting (if app.) | DEC-A1 | DEC-A2 | DEC-A3 |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1     | Discover and critically assess the relationship between ethics and politics, based on different theoretical perspectives                                                                                                                                          |                     | x      | x      | x      |
| 2     | Acquire analytical skills to critically evaluate ethical responsibilities for problems of “dirty hand” and “many hands” in government and public organizations                                                                                                    |                     | x      | x      | x      |
| 3     | Discover various sources and modes of ethical dilemmas and moral issues in public life and politics (such as terrorism, corruption, whistle blowing, lying in public office etc.) and develop ideas on how to resolve them, especially in the democratic context. |                     | x      | x      | x      |
| 4     | Develop and acquire abilities to critically apply ethical theories to assess moral problems in the administration of Hong Kong (and Chinese) government and further apply such abilities in evaluating the governance of global politics                          |                     | x      | x      | x      |
| 5     | Empower each other to cultivate moral judgment that is politically practicable in a given socioeconomic and political/institutional context                                                                                                                       |                     | x      | x      | x      |

#### A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

#### A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

#### A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

### Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

| LTAs |                        | Brief Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | CILO No.   | Hours/week (if applicable) |
|------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------|
| 1    | Lectures               | To acquire a deep understanding of philosophical concepts and ethical and political theories regarding the relationship between politics and ethics ; to critically evaluate and analyse cases drawn from real life situations involving tensions between the goals of politics and the goals of morality; to acquire and develop analytical skills and critical reasoning about moral dilemmas in public life and discover politically relevant ethical responses to these dilemmas | 1, 2, 3, 4 |                            |
| 2    | Oral Exam              | To empower students with an ability to think critically key concepts and/or theories and to help them engage the readings critically and communicate their ideas effectively.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1, 2, 3, 4 |                            |
| 3    | Audio-visual Materials | To help students to discover the practical meaning of philosophical concepts and theories through the use of film excerpts or documentaries, or news clippings and critically evaluate them                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 2, 3       |                            |
| 4    | Take-Home Test         | To acquire and develop independent thinking, to critically assess ethical and political theory to real life issues in government and politics, to empower his/herself with analytical skills and moral reasoning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1, 2, 3, 4 |                            |

|   |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |               |  |
|---|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--|
| 5 | Class Participation | To master key concepts and theories, critically assess them by applying and in light of real political situations and institutional constraints, and discover various way to resolve ethical dilemmas in political life. Participation will be conducted in class and in brief responses to tasks set on Canvas. Student participation will include responses given to the instructor, engagement in team learning, and participation in class discussions with fellow students. | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 |  |
|---|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--|

**Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)**

|   | ATs            | CILO No.   | Weighting (%) | Remarks ("- " for nil entry)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Allow Use of GenAI? |
|---|----------------|------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Oral Exam      | 1, 2, 3, 4 | 40            | Students are expected to demonstrate clearly their understanding of core readings, critically reflect upon the authors arguments and constructively engage with them in light of one' s own social observations and/ or experiences. Test students' ability to explain, critically assess and apply different approaches to key moral problems and issues in political choice and action, and evaluate their relevance or abilities to construct rational and persuasive arguments to justify their own points of views. | No                  |
| 2 | Take-Home Test | 1, 2, 3, 4 | 30            | Test students' ability to explain, critically assess and apply different approaches to key moral problems and issues in public policy, and evaluate their relevance or abilities to construct rational and persuasive arguments to justify their own points of views.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | No                  |

|   |                     |            |    |                                                                                                                               |     |
|---|---------------------|------------|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3 | Class Participation | 1, 2, 3, 5 | 30 | Test students' ability to explain and evaluate different approaches to key moral problems and issues in ethics in government. | Yes |
|---|---------------------|------------|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|

**Continuous Assessment (%)**

100

**Examination (%)**

0

**Assessment Rubrics (AR)****Assessment Task**

## 1. Oral Exam

**Excellent (A+, A, A-)**

High standard of understanding, critical assessment of, self-discovery of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Excellent research, writing and communication skills and critical reasoning.

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

Fairly good understanding and critical assessment of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Good research, writing and communication skills.

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

Rudimentary understanding of ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

**Marginal (D)**

Rudimentary understanding of ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

**Failure (F)**

Complete failure to discover and understand ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Complete failure to develop an ability to identify key challenges. Inadequate research, writing and communication skills.

**Assessment Task**

## 2. Take-Home Test

**Excellent (A+, A, A-)**

High standard of understanding, critical assessment of, key concepts, theories, and self-discovery of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Excellent research, writing and communication skills and critical reasoning.

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

Fairly good understanding and critical assessment of key concepts, theories, and ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Good research, writing and communication skills.

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

Rudimentary understanding of key concepts, theories, and ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

**Marginal (D)**

Rudimentary understanding of key concepts, theories, and ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

**Failure (F)**

Complete failure to understand key concepts and theories; complete failure to understand and resolve ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Complete failure to develop an ability to identify key challenges. Inadequate research, writing and communication skills.

**Assessment Task**

**3. Class Participation**

**Excellent (A+, A, A-)**

High standard of understanding, critical assessment of, self-discovery of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Excellent research, writing and communication skills and critical reasoning.

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

Fairly good understanding and critical assessment of ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Good research, writing and communication skills.

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

Rudimentary understanding of ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

**Marginal (D)**

Rudimentary understanding of ethical dilemmas in public life and basic skills to discover their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Weak ability to discover and analyze key challenges. Basic research, writing and communication skills.

**Failure (F)**

Complete failure to discover and understand ethical dilemmas in public life and their democratic resolutions in various areas of public policy. Complete failure to develop an ability to identify key challenges. Inadequate research, writing and communication skills.

## Part III Other Information

**Keyword Syllabus**

Consequentialism; deontology; political responsibility; dirty hands; many hands; liberalism; egalitarianism; libertarianism; epistocracy; democracy; rule of law; freedom of speech.

## Reading List

### Compulsory Readings

| Title |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Niccolo Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> (University of Chicago Press, 1998)                                                                                                            |
| 2     | Han Feizi: <i>Basic Writings</i> , trans. Burton Watson (Columbia University Press, 2003)                                                                                             |
| 3     | <i>The Analects</i> , trans. D. C. Lau (Penguin, 1979)                                                                                                                                |
| 4     | Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “The Problem of Dirty Hands.”                                                                                                                    |
| 5     | Michael Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands,” <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i> 2:2 (1973), pp. 160-180. [E-JOURNAL]                                             |
| 6     | Susan Dovi, “Guilt and the Problem of Dirty Hands,” <i>Constellations</i> 12:1 (2005), pp. 128-146. [E-JOURNAL]                                                                       |
| 7     | Dennis F. Thomson, “Democratic Dirty Hands,” in <i>Political Ethics and Public Office</i> (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), Chapter 1. (Blackboard)                    |
| 8     | Dennis F. Thomson, “Moral Responsibility of Public Officials: The Problem of Many Hands,” <i>American Political Science Review</i> 74:4 (1980), pp. 905-914. [*E-JOURNAL]             |
| 9     | Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “Egalitarianism,” sections 1-5.                                                                                                                  |
| 10    | Robert Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, Utopia</i> , Basic Books, 1974, Chapter 7, section 1, pp. 149-164; 167-178.                                                                         |
| 11    | Michael Sandel (ed.), <i>Justice—A Reader</i> , Oxford University Press, 2007, Chapter VII & VIII, pp. 203-221.                                                                       |
| 12    | John Rawls, <i>Political Liberalism</i> , Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 212-254.                                                                                               |
| 13    | <i>Mencius</i> , trans. D. C. Lau (Penguin, 1970).                                                                                                                                    |
| 14    | Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “Democracy,” sections 1 and 2                                                                                                                    |
| 15    | John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> , Harvard University Press, 1971, pp. 74-5.                                                                                                    |
| 16    | Michael Rosen & Jonathan Wolff (eds), <i>Political Thought</i> , Oxford University Press, 1999, Chapters 34, pp. 91-94.                                                               |
| 17    | David Estlund, “Why Not an Epistocracy of the Educated?” <i>Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework</i> , Princeton University Press, 2007, Chapter 11, pp. 206-222.          |
| 18    | Robert B. Talisse, “Democracy,” <i>The Routledge Companion to Social and Political Philosophy</i> , Gerald Gaus and Fred D’ Agostino (eds.) Routledge, 2013, chapter 53, pp. 608-617. |
| 19    | Corey Brettschneider, <i>Democratic Rights—The Substance of Self-Government</i> , Princeton University Press, 2007, Chapter 1.                                                        |
| 20    | Andrei Marmor, “The Rule of Law and Its Limits,” <i>Law in the Age of Pluralism</i> , Oxford University Press, pp. 3-38.                                                              |
| 21    | Andrei Marmor, “Varieties of Vagueness in the Law” [SSRN]                                                                                                                             |
| 22    | Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Freedom of Speech sections 1-3                                                                                                                   |
| 23    | <i>Political Thought</i> , section 53 (Mill) and 55 (Devlin)                                                                                                                          |
| 24    | Stanley Fish, “There’ s No Such Thing as Free Speech, And It’ s A Good Thing, Too,” 1992.                                                                                             |
| 25    | Thomas Scanlon, “A Theory of Freedom of Expression,” <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i> , Vol. 1, No.2 (Winter, 1972), pp. 204-226. [E-JOURNAL]                                     |

### Additional Readings

| Title |     |
|-------|-----|
| 1     | Nil |