
Report Comments

The Faculty Individual Module Report contains the results gathered during the last week of the AY2018/19 Semester 2.

Students were invited to share their feedback on the teaching and the course material, ultimately to help improve the overall quality of education at our institution.

Response Rate for YHU2241: Why Be Moral?

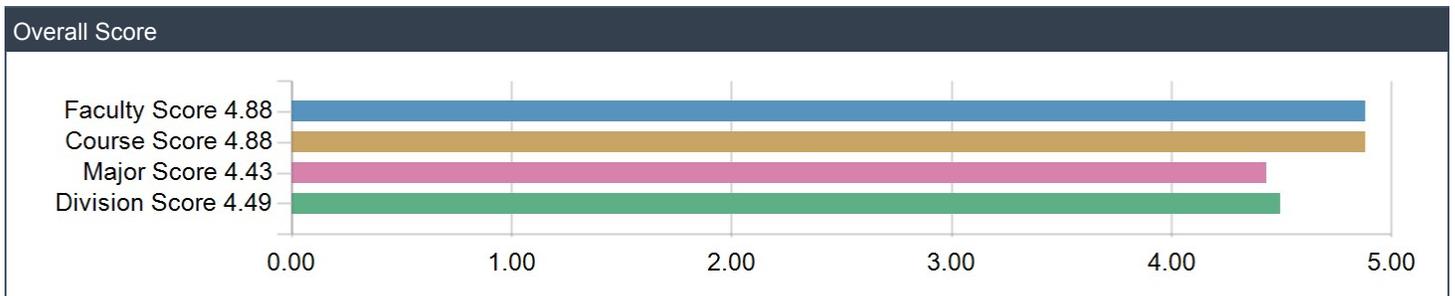
Raters	Students
Responded	17
Invited	18
Response Ratio	94.44%

AY2018/19 S2 - Professor Neil Mehta's Mean Score for YHU2241: Why Be Moral?

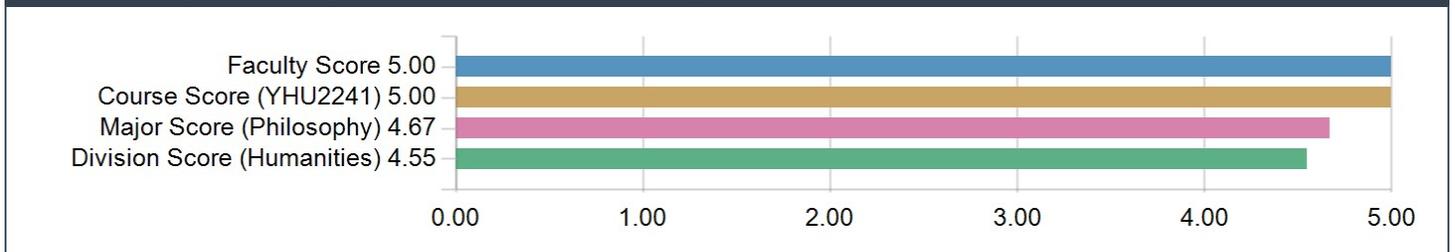
C1: Express your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Standard Deviation	Mean
The seminar professor helped me understand course concepts.	17	0	0	0	0	0.00	5.00
The seminar professor challenged me to actively engage the material.	16	0	1	0	0	0.49	4.88
I am motivated to explore beyond the material I encountered in seminar.	10	7	0	0	0	0.51	4.59
I found it easy to obtain prompt feedback from the seminar professor.	17	0	0	0	0	0.00	5.00
The seminar professor's response to my work were valuable.	16	1	0	0	0	0.24	4.94

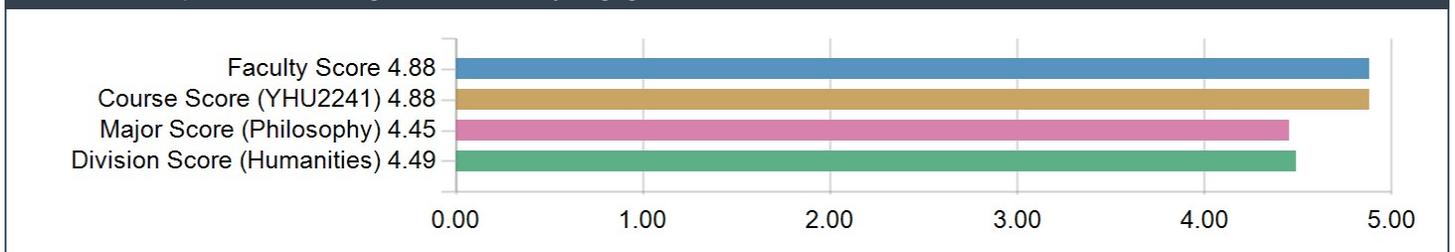
Faculty Mean Score for YHU2241: Why Be Moral? vs all YHU2241 (if more than one group) vs Philosophy vs Humanities



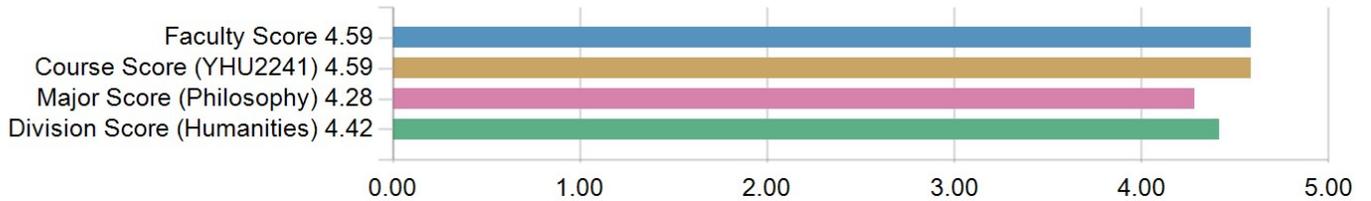
1. The seminar professor helped me understand course concepts.



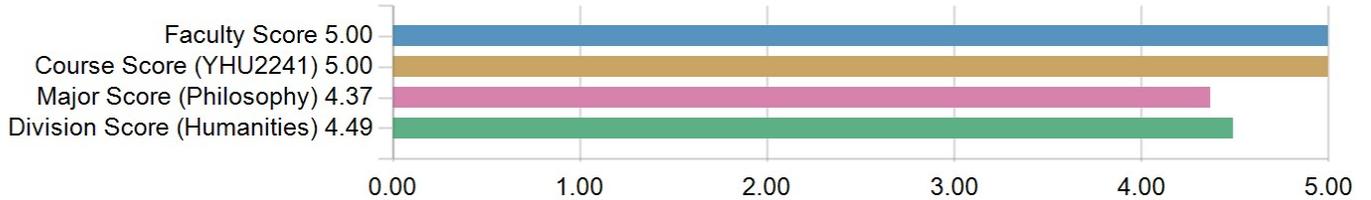
2. The seminar professor challenged me to actively engage the material.



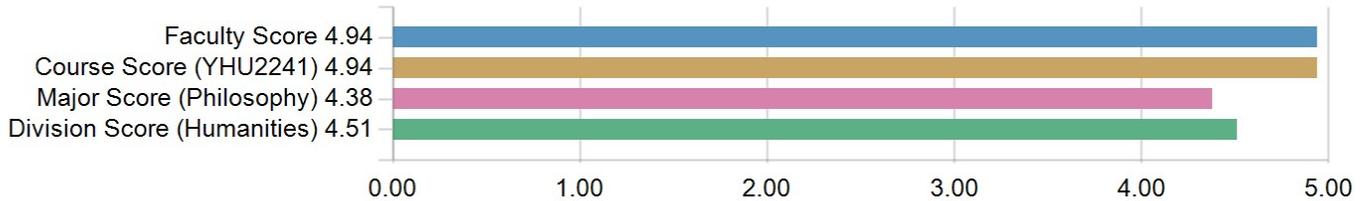
3. I am motivated to explore beyond the material I encountered in seminar.



4. I found it easy to obtain prompt feedback from the seminar professor.

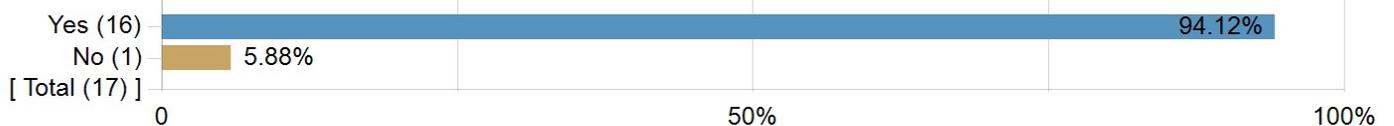


5. The seminar professor's response to my work were valuable.



C2: Did you interact with professor outside of class?

1. C2: Did you interact with professor outside of class?



Options	Score	Count	Percentage
Yes	1	16	94.12%
No	2	1	5.88%

C3: Indicate your level of agreement to the following statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Standard Deviation	Mean
I received constructive assistance.	16	0	0	0	0	0.00	5.00

Student effort in the class

B1: Describe your effort in this course compared to others you have taken at Yale-NUS. It is breakdown by course if faculty taught more than one course.

Name	Much more effort	More effort	Average effort	Less effort	Much less effort	Standard Deviation	Mean
YHU2241: Why Be Moral?	3	13	1	0	0	0.49	4.12

B2: Please select the exact number of hours you spent on this course in a typical week, not including scheduled seminar or lecture time.

Name	1hr	2hr	3hr	4hr	5hr	6hr	7hr	8hr	9hr	10hr
YHU2241: Why Be Moral?	0	0	0	2	2	7	2	0	1	1

Name	11hr	12hr	13hr	14hr	15hr	16hr	17hr	18hr	19hr	20hr	Mean
YHU2241: Why Be Moral?	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7.06

Course Overall

A1: What helped you learn in the course overall? (for example, lecture, seminar discussions, seminar professor, readings, assignments, and connections to other courses). Briefly explain why you found them helpful.

Comments
The seminar discussions were helpful. The readings were also helpful, especially the readings in the first half of the semester. Prof Mehta was very selective about which sections of the reading to do, which helped focus our learning.
The handouts were extremely useful. I was happy to know that I had written advice about writing, speaking, listening that I could return to at any time during the semester. The reading workload was manageable, which didn't stress me out and I could read with full attention. Prof Mehta's structured classes also helped me understand the material well.
Seminar professor, readings, seminar discussions, homework and warm up assignments.
I found them helpful because they engage me more critically on the topic at hand.
Most notably, the seminar professor, Neil Mehta, was by far the most helpful because he not only teaches us about the topic but also provides us with a skill set to work through the topic on our own. Without Neil's teachings, discussions will not run as smoothly and our own learning before and after class will not go as well. So, the seminar professor is the reason why all the elements of the course are so helpful since the seminar professor created, managed and guided these other elements in such a way that helped me learn in the course.
I found the structured lecturing style extremely helpful as it helped clarify the text through a systematic manner of guided examination by the students. The skills explained at the beginning of the assignments, then applied to the following assignments helped reinforce the material in the readings, and the logistical skill learned in warm ups.
I find seminar discussions very helpful because they help me understand what the philosopher is actually trying to say and by comparing different philosophers, I have attained a better picture of the question that we are studying.
The answer keys to homework assignments were very helpful. And seeing Neil map out the arguments himself was quite useful. His contributions and summaries were always a great way to learn because he is very concise, so seeing his responses and being able to compare it with ours is a great strategy.
Warm-ups and Homework, skills that could be applied outside classroom, well-facilitated class discussions that really pushed us to listen to each other and respond thoughtfully.
Seminar professor, readings, homeworks, warmups. Professor is extremely clear and precise with his words – he dumbs down super complex theories so that I can understand. Homeworks and warmups give me a chance to critically interact with readings and thoughts and ideas.
Neil is very clear in articulating, and explaining the various concepts in the readings. Neil is also super encouraging and makes participating much less intimidating. It also helps that we do not have new readings every seminar and are able to deep-dive into

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the readings for that week.

Readings, the seminars, and the assignments, specifically the homeworks. I thought what was done particularly well in this seminar was the connection between the different components of the course. For example, the homework was orchestrated so that it enhanced my understanding, and the following seminar was designed in a way that it engaged with the homework and questions that went beyond it, but that were still connected to the reading for the week.

Neil Mehta is, without exaggeration, the best professor I have ever had. If he doesn't have tenure already, YNC better snap him up ASAP. His care towards developing not only our comprehension but our writing, speaking, and thinking abilities, utter mastery of the material, PRODUCTIVE homework assignments that truly helped us learn, facilitation of in-depth discussions of readings, and most of all, his dedication to ensuring that as a result of this class we became better people, really made for a wonderful experience. Every day was a challenge and every seminar was a struggle to articulate my thoughts – but it made our successes and eureka moments exponentially more fulfilling

Neil is the best professor and seminar facilitator I have had in my entire life. I will describe why I think he is so successful in three categories: effort, pedagogical reflection, genuineness. Starting with effort, I am always in awe at how intentional Neil is in every single thing he does. For example, he comes with a stopwatch and very clear structure of how the class will run. We are provided handouts and pre-class assignments to help us prepare exactly what we will be learning. (he even provides a word count range for each of our exercises). All this meticulous planning requires a great amount of effort that many professors do not undertake. Indeed, it is possible to teach an instructive, enjoyable seminar without these things; however, Neil's effort has significantly enhanced my philosophical capabilities and love of learning. Second, regarding pedagogical reflection, Neil is extremely responsive to feedback and regularly reflects upon what aspects of his teaching are successful and what aspects can be improved. I am also grateful with how explicitly he shares what he will be experimenting. Lastly, Neil genuinely cares about my progress. He expresses genuine pride at our success and provides constructive criticism because he genuinely wants us to achieve more. He believes he can. In fact, Neil has expressed that he decided not to have children because he could derive the same joys and lessons of parenting from his teaching. Indeed, I do feel that Neil treats us and loves us as if we were his children.

I thought that all the following components – the seminar discussion, seminar professor, readings, assignments – were very helpful for the course. The seminar discussions were well structured and guided, clarifying and building on the readings that we were assigned.

The way seminar discussions were structured and guided was helpful in keeping class discussions relevant. Additionally, the homeworks were also useful in preparing students for class discussions and getting a better understanding of course materials.

Everything in this course, from the handouts, to the discussions, to lunches with peers and Prof. Mehta, have been equally helpful and valuable. I cannot separate the individual components, because they all complement each other and build a wonderful, thought-provoking course that is relevant inside and outside the classroom. Personally, I appreciated that the readings were not too long, because the ideas are already challenging. The excerpts were carefully selected to provide enough insight without being overwhelming. The homeworks and warm ups did not give room for guessing or careless reading, which is an incentive that some of us need. The seminars were extremely, and I mean it, extremely helpful for developing good discussion skills. And all of this is transferrable. The contents of this class help me in other courses that are seemingly unrelated. For example, to think about animal testing involved in Molecular Cell Biology, or evaluate the relevance of individual action in Environmental Studies. Prof. Mehta is very helpful in seminars, in office hours, and in informal settings such as the dining hall.

The seminar professor was very helpful since class discussions were well-facilitated and student discussions were constructively guided. Additionally, the homework and warm-ups prior to class were helpful in letting me know which part of my readings to focus on and to get a thorough understanding of my readings before class.

The readings were really well chosen in that they all connected perfectly with one another and gave a great, holistic picture of The central question of the course. The weekly homework assignments were incredibly helpful in keeping students up to speed in terms of the knowledge required in the course, and they were a great way to test our understanding of the material. Lastly, the seminars were incredibly clearly structured and always managed to give me a better understanding and appreciation of the course material.

A2: How could this course change in the future to improve student learning?

Comments
<p>I think some historical context about the philosophical traditions we are engaged in would not only be helpful but also very valuable for us in developing an appreciation for philosophy in general, the figures in it, its developments, etc. Philosophical ideas do not just appear in a vacuum of reason, there is always some background or motivation. Kant, for example, was oriented towards the debate between the rationalists and the empiricists which preceded him, one of the empiricists being Hume. Just simply highlighting this connection between Hume and Kant would add something to the course. Prof Mehta is very strict about time and classes are very structured, though, so I'm not sure if remarks of this sort would make it in.</p>
<p>Another possible improvement would be to consider changing the way we approach texts depending on what the text is, and what tradition it belongs to. I think advocating a "one-size fits all" way of understanding philosophical texts is unhelpful, if not detrimental to our learning. For example, it would be helpful to adopt a more meta-view and ask why interpersonal evidence is the standard which we take to be the highest, which we aim for. Is it necessarily the case that that which is most obviously and easily understood by most people is plausible? What is the difference between plausibility and truth? The difference between logical consistency and truth? These questions for me were raised especially when we read Wang Yangming, who borders on spirituality and mysticism. It seems a bit absurd to apply interpersonal evidence to more spiritual or mystical topics i.e. what is the interpersonal evidence that the universe is a unified being? The only one who knows that is actually the sage, the enlightened person, which we all are not. I appreciate the analytical rigor but fear that we are missing out on the spirit and greater significances of the texts, especially those outside of the Western canon but Western texts as well. Not sure if this is true — but I have heard from past students of Jay Garfield when he was here at Yale–NUS that he was not a fan of the lecture Prof Mehta gave on the Milindaphana (for PPT) because it was totally decontextualized and analytical and as a result rather "non-Buddhist." My comments here reflect that same worry, that philosophy is not just premises and conclusions invented out of nowhere, which can all be treated the same, but always tied to human life, a tradition, etc. and diverse and therefore require different approaches to understanding. The ideal, in my opinion, is to strike a balance between analytical rigor and fuller, broader appreciation for how it fits into the debates of the time, what it offers, the broader project the philosopher is aiming to do, etc.</p>
<p>The thing is Prof Mehta has put in a lot of effort in developing a very particular teaching style and designing a very structured class, so I don't think much on the bigger-picture level can change.</p>
<p>It might be helpful to provide the students an overview of the way in which skills will be developed over the semester. I found myself getting restless early on in the semester when we didn't have as many open class discussions. I felt I couldn't fully express my views in class; but when we started discussing material in depth later during the semester, my worries were placated.</p>
<p>This was already done halfway through the course but I think the practice of allowing some time for open discussions of ideas is helpful for students to think through the topic more independently.</p>
<p>Nothing comes to mind after some time of deliberation. The only possible comment would be the rigidity of an extremely well planned class loses the liveliness of looser, unguided conversations. I'm not sure if that would be more conducive for student learning though. Overall, fantastic course.</p>
<p>I don't think free discussion works in this class, so I prefer the traditional way of professors pointing at students to answer questions.</p>
<p>It felt quite rigorous, especially with two homework assignments. It might be better to have either 3 assignments per fortnight, or to reduce it in other ways. The readings were difficult enough to begin with. Also, the marking scheme for the assignments was a bit unclear.</p>
<p>Also, I found the speaking exercises were not always that helpful (the one's where we had to respond to each other). Sometimes people would avoid the main topic of argument.</p>
<p>Have some time for more open discussions later in the semester once we have learned the basics of listening and responding. Or even small group discussions</p>
<p>Change the title to: Is there a universal reason to be moral? — which would accurately describe the course!</p>
<p>I'm honestly not sure.</p>
<p>Maybe a smaller size of the seminar, i.e. less students per class could be helpful. Sometimes, during one seminar, each student just got to speak once. And, whilst this is not to say that for the rest of the class that student did not learn anything, I still think it would be more engaging if there were fewer students who would then have the chance to speak more often.</p>
<p>Honestly, I wouldn't change anything about this course. This is as good as it gets.</p>
<p>I really loved this class. One area of improvement is the course evaluation. I did not receive very useful feedback because we did not have to submit this feedback to Neil. Perhaps submitting a completed peer evaluation form would enforce the quality of feedback provided.</p>
<p>Since some of the readings that we were assigned were very dense, it would have perhaps been more helpful if in the seminar prior to the reading of a new thinker, the professor could give us more explanations on certain key terms and contextual information about the thinker. For example: what is the philosophical concept that the thinker is responding to; what those philosophical</p>

Comments

concepts are referring to (e.g. "realism" or some other difficult philosophical concepts that are not immediately intuitive for students who are new to meta-ethics to grasp). I think that this would allow the student to focus better in their readings and be able to draw a bigger picture of all the arguments within the topic.

In the latter part of the course, there was more room for students to volunteer their contributions rather than being called upon. This is a good addition as it allows students who have useful things to say to stimulate more discussions.

I liked the approach that Prof. took after the mid-semester evaluations: let students speak if they want to, but still limiting the number of times and calling people if they haven't spoken, thus maintaining an organized and productive discussion. I think we could do with less of the "name one thing the student did right and one thing that she did wrong" prompt, though.

Refresh certain concepts prior to doing comparative discussions.

The course is, very honestly, perfect the way it is. The professor constantly and independently collects feedback from students to improve his course, which results in an almost perfect class.

A3: Briefly describe how your seminar professor taught the seminar, including any distinctive features or activities.

Comments
Very structured seminars, discussion-oriented, every student must speak, has an organized way of making sure that happens.
Every seminar was preceded by either a warm up or homework. We did the reading first, finished the homework next, and discussed material in the class last. Prof Mehta led every seminar discussion; every student was required to speak atleast once every class.
Neil Mehta taught the seminar with great care and effort. He first guides the class on understanding the reading assigned and then makes the class think about potential objections to what was said in the reading. Lastly, we will have an open discussion about the ideas we have explored in class.
What is really great about Neil's teaching is the way in which he guides the above activity. He allows us to think independently but only after he has taught us the necessary skills to do so. He further gives helpful feedback on how we can do better each time and gives us alot of opportunities to practice the skills we learnt. He emphasizes both the teaching and the practicing of the skills. Furthermore, he also taught us to be aware of our own mistakes by making us evaluate our peers' responses in class.
The professor led the course in a strict, tightly guided manner, yet allowed the student to regularly participate through inputs like objections or their interpretation of the argument.
The seminar is well structured and we follow the agenda that my professor wrote at the beginning of every class
It was taught exceptionally well!
Weekly warm-ups and assignments, facilitated class discussions where everyone gets a chance to speak, and where we usually move from interpreting the text to raising objections or questions about the views presented.
He has an agenda written on the board, asks question after question, and arrows at students to answer them. Gives us a hacky sack to keep track of who has spoken and who has not. Gives us plenty of follow-up and pre-discussion questions to complete before/after class, to better digest and internalize the information we are gaining from classes. Thanks Neil for the eye-opening class (:
I think using the hackey sacks and making sure everyone gets a chance to speak is helpful. I think the homework and warmups are helpful in making sure we think about things that we will be looking at in class.
Each week, we would discuss the assigned readings, diagramming arguments, evaluating these arguments, considering our own replies, as well as replies on behalf of other authors that we had read.
Seminar was highly discussion-based, with each student being called upon to contribute a thought at least once per seminar. The no-tech policy, coupled with random selection, helped ensure that everyone was focusing and completely tuned in at all times.
The homeworks/warmups were a great way to get everyone to think critically about the material – which was often incredibly dense – prior to class so that the discussion would flow more freely. On this note, I really appreciated that Neil didn't merely throw readings at us but took the time to select the chapters and passages that mattered most so that we had the time to read and reread them carefully rather than simply power through an onslaught
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. calling on people instead of waiting for volunteers2. warm-up and homework exercises before classes3. writing key ideas on the board4. assessing our contributions through verbal critiques5. friday lunches after class (!!)
The professor led a well-structured seminar, actively guiding the interpretation and contributions of each student. Rather than talking past each other, the professor encouraged students to build on top of each other's ideas, developing skills of attentive listening.
Prof. Mehta keeps the class organised by having an agenda that he sticks to throughout each seminar session. All students are called upon to speak at least once. Before every seminar session, assignments (often requiring students to identify and explain key arguments of thinkers) are given to prepare students for class discussions.
It is my favorite class in my college life so far. I mentioned most of what I liked in question A1. I liked the discussions the most. We use time in class very efficiently. Prof. Mehta explains concepts with ordinary words and moderates the discussion if it's not being productive. I love his teaching and I love this class.
Neil structured the class very well and it is apparent that he has put a lot of thought into the design of this course. Students were given time to think and subsequently called on and we learnt how to phrase our contributions in a meaningful manner. There were weekly homework and warm-ups.
The instructor started by drawing out the central argument under investigation on the board, and then started from the beginning to explain the logical thought that went into arriving at that argument. The instructor always drew on student contributions to help answer essential questions of the argument, and he made sure that everyone spoke at least once during every seminar, which is an amazing feature of the professor.

D1: Please use this space to elaborate on your previous responses or to address other issues such as classroom atmosphere; most or least helpful course materials, readings, or topics; or any other specific suggestions or concerns about the course.

Comments
I liked when Prof Mehta distinguished between the way we speak and think in this class and the way we speak and think in real life. I think more emphasis on this would have been valuable — for instance, that, perhaps, not every single philosophical text contains arguments which can be put into premise–conclusion form and supported with interpersonal evidence, and that sometimes, there are better ways to access a text. Every approach has its advantages and disadvantages, and it's up to us to think of all of the tools we have, and adopt the approach we think is best. Prof Mehta kind of made it seem like his extremely analytical approach which takes interpersonal evidence as its highest standard is the best and only way to do philosophy, which is simply not true. Worth considering is that multiple students have taken multiple courses with him. Why is that? Some might say that's a sign of his good teaching, others might worry that these students will have no other way of doing philosophy and just end up borrowing how Prof Mehta does philosophy.
I wish the classroom atmosphere was a little less tense sometimes. I get why Prof Mehta would want to structure conversations so rigidly (so as to provide every student an opportunity to speak), but I could not fully clarify a lot of things during the course of the discussion because there was not space for me to speak up. Sometimes, because I didn't understand one part of the class discussion, I found it harder to follow through and then I saw myself giving up on the conversation completely. It might be useful to allow students to send in their clarification questions before class to Prof Mehta or the entire class. That way we can answer each other's questions and be more engaged in class.
Classroom atmosphere can abit tense for me at times and for some people who are not used to the focus required for class. While this is uncomfortable initially or at times, I think the rewards you gain from this justifies this discomfort. Although, perhaps, a little more could be done to address this especially for the uninitiated.
The Friday lunches were some of the more constructive and less guided conversations that combined the fluidity and liveliness of daily interactions with the more educational aspect of in–lecture courses.
I find the readings interesting and seminars engaging, so I do not really have suggestions for class atmosphere or course materials However, I do want to suggest that the title of this course is different than what we really learnt throughout the four months. I walked into this course expecting I will learn how different philosophers argue that we should be moral, but throughout the course, I feel more and more they are debating whether moral truths are objective.
N/A
I feel like there is always not enough time to cover all the important issues. Perhaps there could be a way for us to be guided through interpreting the text before seminar, perhaps through handouts, so that we can delve into more discussions of our responses to the arguments. Otherwise perhaps we should just focus on analysing and discussing fewer arguments by each thinker
Class atmosphere quiet most of the time. Everyone is serious (& afraid of being called on) hahahahaa
N/A
I thought it was particularly impressive how the professor incorporated feedback that was given after the first half of the semester to adapt the course. Especially the incorporation of semi–structured discussions in class was something that I personally enjoyed very much, and something that I think greatly added to the course and my own understanding. Thank you!
I also loved how Neil took the time to meet with our class for lunch and invite us to things that weren't related to philosophy – it underscores how much he genuinely cares about his students as people and enjoys teaching. Furthermore, his "intermissions" in which he would share life advice or recommendations were incredibly impactful (especially the advice on overcoming challenges or stagnation) and are now written on my wall
thank you for everything!!
I thought that the classroom atmosphere was great, as everyone was challenged by the topics. In terms of the readings, the amount was generally manageable except for the section on Kant, as we were trying finish his entire Groundworks within the course of 3 weeks despite. I struggled a lot because of the expressions and language for Kant and thought that the timeframe on the reading was a bit short for me to digest his ideas. Perhaps it would have been helpful if the reading on Kant was more focused to specific sections of a chapter.
While the course is generally excellent, the way in which seminar is conducted may be intimidating for shy students/students who, for various reasons, are afraid of speaking up. Perhaps more can be done for students who face such difficulties.
Offer this course every semester!
Class atmosphere was slightly stressful due to the pressure of knowing that one has to speak up. But this was also helpful in getting me to think on my feet and to be actively engaged and speak up more.
The classroom atmosphere was incredibly engaging and motivating. I think a lot of professors can learn from Prof. Mehta's teaching style.

