Course aims and objectives

Applied ethics addresses the moral permissibility of specific actions and practices. In this class, we will focus on bioethics—a specific subdiscipline of applied ethics. We will explore how new and emerging developments in technology and medicine challenge our ideas of what it is to be human, to live well, and to fulfill our potential. In particular, we will consider the ethical ramifications of using biotechnology to enhance three dimensions of our lives: cognitive, moral and emotional.

We will cover questions such as the following: Is it wrong to use “smart drugs” to improve cognitive performance? What is the relationship between enhancement and authenticity? Are we obligated to pursue the development of moral enhancement? And how should we approach the use of biotechnology that aims to influence our interpersonal relationships? We will critically evaluate some of the most prominent philosophical responses to these questions in applied ethics, and you will be encouraged to develop your own thoughts about the arguments and positions discussed in the seminars.

Intended learning outcomes

- Continued development of core philosophical skills (such as identifying, explaining and evaluating arguments).
- Knowledge of some of the main contemporary positions in bioethics, along with some of the main reasons for accepting or rejecting these positions.
- Ability to write essays that display critical assessment along with understanding of the relevant literature in bioethics.

Seminar times and locations

Seminars will take place from 11:10-13:00 on Fridays in room G0.1 in High School Yards Teaching Centre. The exception to this is in week 3, when we will meet at from 09:00-10:50 in room LG.08 (David Hume Tower) on Thursday the 31st of January. The timetable is also available here.
Seminar format

The course content will be delivered by a weekly two hour seminar, which will run for eleven weeks. In the first half of each seminar, I will present key arguments and questions related to the week’s assigned reading. In the second half, we will discuss the material as a group. You are expected to read the 1-2 relevant core text(s) in advance of the seminars, and to come to class ready to discuss ideas and questions related to the reading. To help you prepare for this, I will distribute a selection of questions about the reading prior to each class.

In addition to attending the seminar, I am also regularly available to answer questions about the course and the readings, either via email (emma.gordon@ed.ac.uk) or in person. If you would like to arrange a meeting, just let me know and we can schedule a time that suits us both.

You are also responsible for checking your University email regularly (at least once per week) so that you do not miss any important announcements.

Seminar schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>January 18th</td>
<td>An Introduction to Bioethics and Enhancement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>January 25th</td>
<td>The Ethics of Cognitive Enhancement 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>January 31st</td>
<td>The Ethics of Cognitive Enhancement 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>February 8th</td>
<td>The Epistemology of Cognitive Enhancement</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>February 15th</td>
<td>Moral Enhancement 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexible Learning Week (18th-22nd February). No class.</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>March 1st</td>
<td>Moral Enhancement 2</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>March 8th</td>
<td>Moral Enhancement 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>March 15th</td>
<td>Enhancement and Authenticity</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>March 22nd</td>
<td>Emotional Enhancement 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>March 29th</td>
<td>Emotional Enhancement 2</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>April 5th</td>
<td>Emotional Enhancement 3</td>
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Reading for seminars

All of the reading material for this course is available online. I have set 1-2 pieces of core reading per week, along with several pieces of further recommended reading that you can engage with at your discretion. In addition, you are encouraged to use your research skills to find other relevant books and papers (especially in relation to your chosen essay topics).

Week 1: An Introduction to Bioethics and Enhancement

  - Instructions for access: On the left hand side of the page, click the option to sign in to an additional subscriber account, then select ‘The University of Edinburgh’ from the list of institutions.


Weeks 2 and 3: The Ethics of Cognitive Enhancement


- Core Reading: Maslen, H., Faulmuller, N. and Savulescu, J. (2014). “Pharmacological cognitive enhancement—how neuroscientific research could advance ethical debate.” Frontiers and Systems Neuroscience 8(107).


Week 4: The Epistemology of Cognitive Enhancement


Week 5: Moral Enhancement 1


Week 6: Moral Enhancement 2

- **Core Reading:** [Ciurria, M. (2017). “Is There a Duty to Use Moral Neurointerventions?” *Topoi*](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11228-017-9315-9).
- **Further Reading:** [DeGrazia, D. (2014). “Moral enhancement, freedom, and what we (should) value in moral behaviour.” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 40(6): 361-368](https://doi.org/10.1136/jme.2014.067345).

Week 7: Moral Enhancement 3

- **Core Reading:** [de Melo-Martín, I. (2018). “The Trouble With Moral Enhancement”, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 83: 19-33](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355067017000672).
Week 8: Enhancement and Authenticity

Week 9: Emotional Enhancement 1

Week 10: Emotional Enhancement 2

Week 11: Emotional Enhancement 3

**Assessment**

You will be assessed on the basis of a midterm essay of 1,500 words (40% of your overall grade) and a final essay of 2,500 words (60% of your overall grade), both of which should be submitted via Learn. The essay topics must not overlap—please see me if you have any questions or concerns about this.

The midterm essay is due by **12pm on Thursday the 28th of February**. Please choose one of the following four topics:

1. Explain and critically evaluate one of the strongest arguments for cognitive enhancement.
2. Explain and critically evaluate one of the the strongest arguments against cognitive enhancement.
3. Do enhancements cheapen the value of achievement?
4. Persson and Savulescu argue that cognitive enhancement should be accompanied by an extensive moral enhancement of humankind. Is their argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

The final essay is due by **12pm on Thursday the 25th of April**. You are free to choose your own essay question for the final essay, but you can ask me to suggest topics if you feel this would be helpful. The topic of the essay must be appropriately related to the content of the course.

Senior honours students who are not writing a research dissertation may opt to write a single long essay (approximately 5,000 words) instead of the two coursework essays, as part of their dissertation by coursework. These long essays are due by **12pm on Tuesday the 23rd of April**. Titles and topics should be agreed with me in advance, and titles should be submitted to the Teaching Office by 12pm on Monday the 25th of February.

**Feedback**

Although it is not a requirement of the course that you discuss your essays with me before submission, I strongly encourage students to take advantage of the opportunity to do so. You may find it especially helpful to send me a one-page essay plan for feedback. However, in order to ensure that we have enough time to properly discuss your thoughts and questions, please aim to contact me no later than one week before the submission deadline.