Applied Ethics

Course Guide 2021/22

Seminars, semester 2, Tuesdays 11.10 to 13.00, Room S1, 7 George Square
50-minute tutorials as scheduled by group assignment

Dr. David Levy, david.levy@ed.ac.uk
Office Hour: Tuesday 4.00-5.00, DSB 5.10 or by appointment

Course Secretary: Ann-Marie Cowe, philinfo@ed.ac.uk

Introduction

Applied ethics typically concerns the close consideration of cases, actual or possible, and their moral aspects through the application of ethical theories to understand both. In this course we will divide our time between applying ethical theories to specific topics using cases and carefully probing what the possibilities and limits of applying ethics may be. The class will emphasise discussion with the larger objective of demonstrating the application of ethical thinking to realistic scenarios.

Topics we will approach include ethics in the political realm (law and government); ethics in the non-political realm (war); ethics in the professional or social realm (medicine); and ethics in the personal realm (having children). The larger questions we will address include: For whom are the results of applied ethics useful? What is applied to what, by whom, and how? Are moral problems practical problems with solutions? Caveat emptor: We will not focus on animal ethics, social justice or issues of gender.

Assessment

Exam
This course will be assessed solely on the basis of a two-hour exam given in the April/May 2022 diet of examinations.

Formative assessment
In addition, everyone should submit two exam answers from the questions given in the additional reading below. These can be e-mailed to me at any point during the term. This “formative exam” will not count toward determining your mark for this class or the class of degree you are awarded. There is no penalty for non-submission. However the formative exam is your best opportunity to improve your philosophical writing and try arguments you may ultimately use in the exam. If you submit your essays by the end of teaching week 9, I will return them to you in class in teaching week 11. If you submit the essay later, I will return the essay to you when I can. All formative work will receive feedback, comments, and an indicative mark.

Contacts
You may contact me by email at david.levy@ed.ac.uk. My office is in room 5.10 of the Dugald Stewart Building. I am available Tuesday of each week from 4.05 until 5.05 to discuss more or less any philosophical topic, related to this course or not. To ensure that I can see you, I ask that you send me an email confirming that you intend to visit and advising me of the topic for discussion. Unfortunately, I am not often available at other times, though you can seek a special arrangement to meet if it proves necessary.
If you have questions about the exam timetables and other logistical matters please contact the course secretary, Ann-Marie Cowe.

Lecture Recording
I will not record seminars using the central University of Edinburgh recording system. You may record our seminars for your own revision. Please do not put any recordings online or share them with anyone outside the course. Any student should feel able to ask questions and discuss points in our classroom without concern for whether these will be shared or broadcast. If you are unable to attend class, please contact me and I will endeavour to record the class for you. If you want to review a class you attended, please contact me as I might have a recording to share with you.

Weekly readings
There is one reading a week from each week that you must read prior to attending class. All readings are available electronically through the library. All of these readings are ESSENTIAL readings.

Week 1 Introduction to Applied Ethics. No reading.

Week 2 Mary Warnock, Making Babies, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 1-54. (The pages are small and the reading is fast, do not be intimidated by 50 pages.)

Week 3 Jonathan Glover, Choosing Children, OUP, 2006, chapter 1, "Disability and Genetic Choice."


Week 6 Tony Coady, Messy Morality, OUP, 2008, chapter 5, "Politics and Lying."

Week 7 Frances Kamm, Ethics for Enemies, OUP, 2011, chapter 1, "Torture: During and After Action." [This is 50 pages so start early—all Kamm’s chapters are on the long side.]

Week 8 Frances Kamm, Ethics for Enemies, OUP, 2011, chapter 2, "Terrorism and Intending Evil."


Week 10 Jeff McMahan, Killing in War, OUP, 2009, chapter 1, "The Morality of Participation in an Unjust War."

Additional reading and questions to consider

Below you will find some additional reading organised by week as well as some questions for reflection which are similar in format to those that will appear on the exam. Some readings are recommended for further thinking. These are mostly indicative and many more readings can and should be sought.

**Week 1**
What is applied ethics? To what is it in contrast?
Is applied ethics just social policy?
Are applied ethics personal or institutional?
To what extent is applied ethics solely the application of moral theory to particular states of affairs?
In applied ethics, to what are ethical theories applied?

**RECOMMENDED**


**FURTHER**

**Week 2**
Does someone have a right to have children?
What would be the limits on such a right?
From whom can the right to have children be claimed?
Should medical assistance to have children be available to everyone?
Are all methods of assisted reproduction legitimate?

**RECOMMENDED**
Maclean, Mavis, “Parenthood should not be regarded as a right.” Archives of Disease in Childhood, 90:8, 2005, 782-3. http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/adc.2004.064493


**Week 3 and Week 4**
What moral arguments, if any, are there against choosing the sex of unborn children?
What is the moral status, if any, of those yet to be conceived?
What limits, if any, are there on an obligation to seek to conceive the best children possible?
Are genetic interventions in children always an expression of values?
What moral differences, if any, might there be between a child whose traits have been selected and one whose traits have not?


Week 5 and Week 6
Is politics distinct from morality and, if so, in what ways?
Might the best thing to do also be morally wrong?
Is it ever right for a politician to lie to the public? Are there “noble lies:”?
To what extent, if any, is it possible for politicians to keep their hands “clean”?
Are we right to ask politicians to do evil on our behalf?


**Week 7 and Week 8**

When, if at all, is torture morally justified?

Should torture be made legally permissible under some circumstances?

What, if anything, is morally wrong with torture?

Can doing evil be justified by the ends to be realised by doing so?

Which circumstances, if any, justify suspending morality for some period?


**Week 9 and Week 10**

When, if ever, is war morally justified?

Who is morally responsible for killing in war?

If a war is not just, then must it be unjust?

How, if at all, does morality apply during wartime?

“War is the continuation of politics by other means.” Was von Clausewitz right?

**RECOMMENDED** Walzer, Michael. Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations. New York: Basic Books. 1977. [Very readable, just start reading. There are three later editions, the most recent in 2006.]


Week 11

What use, if any, are theories of applied ethics?
Is there a tension between the generality of theories and the particularity of actual contexts of moral decision-making?
To what extent can the “data” of ethics be identified in advance?
Are disagreements with respect to applied ethical judgments moral differences or disagreements about facts?
Who needs applied ethics and in what ways do they need it?