Applied Ethics
Course Guide 2010/2011
Dr. Levy; david.levy@ed.ac.uk (Office Hour: Tuesday 4-5)

Course Overview
This course will consider the application of ethical theory to cases, imagined and real. This year, special emphasis will be given to the issue of humanity and its relations to rights, needs and genetic enhancement. The first part of the course will begin with topics that have received considerable philosophical debate, such as abortion and euthanasia. From these we will move toward contemporary issues, e.g. future challenges arising from the application of technology to medical science. Overall we will be concerned to understand the role that applied ethics can play in meeting these challenges. Similarly we will be seeking to understand the limits of applied ethics and philosophy, more generally, in these arenas, especially in contrast to the considerations that may apply in making social policies.

We will not be discussing the following topics which often feature in applied ethics courses: engineering, environmental, legal, medical, healthcare, information, political ethics or animal rights.

Requirements
There is no required text for this course. Each week there are one or two required readings indicated above the questions given below. You must read that article or chapter in preparation for discussion each week. The discussion in class is no substitute for reading this material as well. You should read some of the additional reading given. This is essential if you propose to discuss that topic in an essay, exam or short dissertation. I have tried to ensure that the vast majority of the reading is online through the library’s subscriptions.

There is a recent publication that might have functioned as textbook for this course and is thematically similar. It is Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President’s Council on Bioethics. The full text of the book is available free at http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/human_dignity/ where you can download it as a PDF document. In addition to the required reading, I will sometimes indicate a chapter from this text using the abbreviation HDB, e.g. HDB ch. 8.

Exam
This course will be assessed solely on the basis of an exam given in the April/May 2011 diet of examinations. Students who qualify (usually fourth year single honours philosophy students) may be obliged to submit a short dissertation (formerly called “long essay”) instead of sitting the exam. Short dissertations are usually submitted at the start of the second term, please check with the philosophy office for precise details. The title of your short dissertation must be approved in advance by submitting it to me in person or by email. After your title is approved you will complete a form confirming
this title and submit it to the departmental office. Generally, any question listed below for discussion in a seminar is a suitable short dissertation title.

Formative Essay
In addition, anyone can submit an essay of 2000 words to me for assessment and comment. This “formative essay” will not count toward determining your mark for this class or the class of degree you are ultimately awarded, unless special circumstances prevent you from completing the prescribed assessment above. However the essay is an excellent opportunity to improve your philosophical writing and try arguments you may ultimately use in the exam or short dissertation. I strongly urge you to submit this essay. If you submit the essay by the end of teaching week 9, I will return it to you in class in teaching week 11. If you submit the essay by the end of teaching week 11, I will return the essay to you via the philosophy office in week 1 of the second term. Essays must be submitted, with a cover sheet, in the manner prescribed by the philosophy office. Generally, any question listed below for discussion in a seminar is a suitable formative essay question.

MSc Assessment
MSc students are assessed by a single essay of 2500 words that must be submitted to the postgraduate office on Thursday 9th December at 4pm. Generally, any question listed below for discussion in a seminar is a suitable essay question.

Visiting Student Assessment
Visiting students studying for solely one semester will be assessed by two essays of 2000 words each in place of the exam. One essay must be submitted by 5 November at 4 PM and the other by 10 December at 4 PM. Essays must be submitted, with a cover sheet, in the manner prescribed by the philosophy office. Generally, any question listed below for discussion in a seminar is a suitable essay question.

Contacts
You may contact me by email at david.levy@ed.ac.uk. My office is in room 5.11 of the Dugald Stewart Building. I am available Tuesday of each week from 4 until 5 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.

Feedback
You will receive feedback on your work in this class in the following ways. First, you can see me during my office hour to talk about class material, your own contributions to class discussions or essays in progress. Second, I will mark your formative essay and provide comments on how you can improve your essay—in technique and content—in advance of the exam. Third, you will get some feedback on your exam essays if you are not a final year student. Fourth, you can email me with specific questions about your work in progress or our discussions during the seminars.
**Miscellaneous**
Regrettably, the behaviour of some obliges me to make the following requests.

Please do not text during class. It is disrespectful. Turn off the ringer of your phone and put the phone away.

Please do not use your laptop computers in class for anything besides making notes or related activity. If I notice that you are using your laptop for something potentially distracting to your neighbours such as Facebook or YouTube, I will ask you to close your laptop. Tweeting is not a related activity no matter how interesting the seminar material.

**Anthologies**
The following books may prove useful as sources of additional reading or insight. However, many of the topics we will cover are not covered in these books, so their utility is modest.


*Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*, eds. Christopher Heath Wellman and Andrew Cohen, Blackwell 2005

The following is not an anthology but it might prove stimulating in connection with themes in this course. It is also quite amusing.

Seminar Topics and Reading

1. Introduction
No required reading. We will discuss the content of the course and the place applied ethics has within ethics broadly construed.

What is applied ethics?
Is applied ethics just social policy?
Are applied ethics intrinsically personal?
To what extent is applied ethics solely the application of moral theory to facts and circumstance?
In applied ethics, what are ethical theories applied to?


We will also be discussing some concepts that will recur in our discussions:

Action under a description
Rights, positive and negative; liberty, positive and negative
Personal Identity
Welfare
Precautionary Principle

2. Abortion

What are the arguments against the permissibility abortion?
Ought the presumption to be in favour of or against abortion?
Is there a secular argument against abortion?
What role, if any, can the principle of double effect play in the permissibility or not of abortion?

HDB, ch. 13.


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### 3. Euthanasia and Dying

J. David Velleman, “Against the Right to Die”,

http://www2.sunysuffolk.edu/pecorip/scccweb/etexts/deathanddying_text/Active%20and%20Passive%20Euthanasia.pdf

Is there a moral case in favour of the permissibility of euthanasia?
What is the moral significance, if any, of the distinction between active and passive euthanasia?
What is the moral significance, if any, of the distinction between voluntary and involuntary euthanasia?
Does a person have sole responsibility in deciding the time of his or her death?
What difference, if any, ought we to recognise between suicide and voluntary euthanasia?
To what extent, if any, is a person worse off if voluntary euthanasia or suicide is permissible?

HDB, ch. 2.

http://bostonreview.net/BR22.3/Kamm.html


http://web.utk.edu/~jhardwig/RightTime.pdf
4. Child Selection and the Unborn


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? What moral differences, if any, might there be between a child whose traits have been selected and one whose traits have not?

HDB, ch. 1.


Heyd, David, “Male or Female, We Will Create Them: The Ethics of Sex Selection for Non-Medical Reasons.” *Ethical Perspectives* 2003 10/3-4: 204-214.

http://www.practicalethics.ox.ac.uk/Pubs/Savulescu/assigning_sex.pdf


Savulescu, Julian, “Procreative Beneficence: Why we Should Select the Best Children,” Bioethics 15/5-6:413-426.


5. Obligations to the Aged or Ill
“The Ethics of Caregiving: General Principles”, Chapter 3 in Taking Care: Ethical Caregiving in Our Aging Society, The President's Council on Bioethics 2005
http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/taking_care/chapter3.htm

Do family members have a greater obligation to help other family members when they are ill than non-family members?
What obligations, if any, do we have to the ill?
What obligations, if any, do we have to the aged?
What limits, if any, are there on the care we must give to the ill?

HDB, ch. 19.


Walter Glannon, “Do the sick have a right to cadaveric organs?”, Journal of Medical Ethics 2003 29:153-156.

6. Causing Harm and Doing Wrong


Can one knowingly cause harm without also wronging the person harmed?
Can one wrong another without harming him or her?
Can doing the right thing sometimes wrong another?
Can doing what is most rational also be wrong?
What importance, if any, should we attach to the difference between doing something and allowing it to happen?


7. Stem Cells

What moral status, if any, do stem cells have?
What arguments are there against permitting the harvesting of stem cells for use in medical care or research?
Is the relation between a stem cell and an embryo a matter of concern for morality?
Are the ethical challenges of cloning akin to the challenges of using stem cells?

HDB, ch. 6.


Carson Strong, “The Moral Status of Preembryos, Embryos, Fetuses, and Infants,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 1997 22, no. 5: 457-78. [Unfortunately, the library does not have this volume online.]


[Volume 38 of *Metaphilosophy* has a number of good articles. Unfortunately, the library does not appear to take *Metaphilosophy*].

http://www.bioethicsforum.org/australian-debate-on-stem-%20cells-and-cloning.asp%C2%A0

http://www.practicalethics.ox.ac.uk/Pubs/Savulescu/embryo_research.pdf


8. Germline Enhancement & Post-Humans and Risk


What prudential arguments, if any, are there against enhancing humans using genetic intervention?
What moral arguments, if any, are there against enhancing humans using genetic intervention?
Do genetic enhancements present moral challenges that other enhancements or prosthetics do not?

What reasons, if any, are there for thinking that post-humans pose a greater risk than present-humans?
Would post-humans pose a risk to human dignity? Whose dignity, post- or present humans?
What is the difference, if any, between the risk of doing wrong and the risk of causing harm? Is it a moral difference?

HDB ch. 7

Germline Enhancement


Leon Kass, “Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Human Improvement” http://bioethics.gov/background/kasspaper.html (This a subsequent version of “Ageless Bodies, Happy Souls”)


Post-Human Risk
Nick Bostrom, “Dignity and Enhancement”, HDB, ch. 8, including Rubin’s response.


9. Autonomy and Disability

To what extent, if any, are the cognitively disabled moral agents?
Can the cognitively disabled be autonomous? Can they have dignity?
Do we have the same obligations to the cognitively disabled as we do to the cognitively non-disabled?
What challenges must a just society overcome to ensure justice for the cognitively disabled?

HDB, chapter 19.

All of the supplemental readings for this topic may be taken from Metaphilosophy Volume 40 Issue 3-4 (July 2009); Special Issue: Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy. However I would not recommend the articles by Hacking, McGeer, Stubblefield or Kittay. This volume is available online through the University Library’s electronic journals service.

10. Needs (Scarce Resources)

http://www.unc.edu/~jfr/RI-TMCR1.htm

Do we need limits for life to be meaningful?
What do we need to live?
When are our needs morally salient for others, if at all?
What constrains, if anything, the truth of someone’s claim that they have a need?

HDB, ch. 14.


David Wiggins, “An Idea we Cannot do Without: What difference will it make (eg. to moral, political and environmental philosophy) to recognize and put to use a substantial conception of need?” Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements (2005), 80 : 25-50, reprinted in The Philosophy of Need, above.


11. Being Human
Daniel C. Dennett “How to Protect Human Dignity from Science”, HDB, ch. 3.

What do we mean when we speak of "being human"?
Is being human something that could be at risk?
Is being human dependent on the human body?
How, if at all, might humans be distinct in kind from other animals?
Is there a fact about what is best for a human being?


D. Levy, review of Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age