



PRACTICAL ETHICS

Dr Mackenzie Graham

Length: 8 weeks

Structure:

- 1st Week: four lectures
- 2nd Week - 8th Week: seven tutorial sessions
- Four academic writing sessions (two compulsory, two optional)

Format: Seven one-hour tutorials occurring online on a weekly basis. Timings will be communicated separately.

Assessment: One 2000-word essay to be submitted **3 days** before the final tutorial.

Assessment Plan: Select your assessed essay title and provide a brief plan for it during tutorial 3.

Essay title options:

- *Tutorial topics 1-7 have suggested essay questions; students wishing to write on alternative questions are invited to discuss them with Dr Graham.*

Course Description:

Practical ethics is the study of ethics ‘in the real world.’ In this way, it is more than just the application of principles of normative ethics. The real world is messy and complex; sometimes applying our moral principles to difficult cases will expose a flaw in these principles. It is at this point that we are faced with a decision: do we revise our intuitions about the ‘right answer’ in these cases, or do we go back and revise our moral theory?

In this series of tutorials, we will examine several contemporary problems in practical ethics. These problems will act as a ‘test’ of our moral intuitions. For some issues, you may already have strong intuitions; for others, maybe you have not given them much thought. The purpose of these tutorials will be to examine our intuitions about these cases; on what grounds do we hold the moral intuitions



we do? Then, we will see if these intuitions hold up to critical scrutiny, by considering various arguments that

have been proffered in these debates. These are all live debates; there is no 'right answer', but only better or worse arguments (i.e., more or less convincing / plausible).

Each session will engage with a different practical debate, although several broader moral issues will be emphasized throughout, including questions of moral status, the value of life, autonomy vs. beneficence, and our moral obligations to others.

Tutorial 1

Title: Euthanasia/Assisted Dying

Brief description:

Aim: To consider the moral permissibility of euthanasia and assisted dying. This will include the moral relevance of the distinction between killing and letting die, and the role of conscientious objection to performing euthanasia.

Suggested reading:

- Emanuel E. Euthanasia: Not that Beneficial.
- Vareilus J. Medical expertise, existential suffering, and ending life.
- Rachels J. Active and passive euthanasia.

Question/essay topic: *Is euthanasia ethically permissible?*

Tutorial 2

Title: 'Genethics'

Brief description:

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Aim: To examine ethical issues arising from recent advances in our understanding and manipulation of the human genome.

Suggested reading:

- Sandel M. 2004. The case against perfection. *The Atlantic Monthly*, April: 51-61.
- Resnik DB, Vorhaus DB. 2006. Genetic modification and genetic determinism. *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*, 1:9.
- Savulescu J. (2001) 'Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children', *Bioethics*, 15, 413-26.

Question/essay topic: *Should parents be permitted to genetically enhance their children?*

Tutorial 3

Title: Organ Sales

Brief description:

Aim: To examine the moral permissibility of the sale and purchase of human organs, by considering objections of commodification and exploitation against the moral urgency of saving lives.

Suggested reading:

- Radcliffe-Richards J. (1996) Nephraious Goings On: Kidney Sales and Moral Arguments. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 21, 375-416
- Erin, C. A. and Harris, J. (2003) 'An Ethical Market in Human Organs', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 29, 137-138.
- Savulescu, J. (2003) 'Is the Sale of Body Parts Wrong?', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 29, 138-139.
- Rippon S. (2014) 'Imposing options on people in poverty: the harm of a live donor organ market.' *Journal of Medical Ethics* 40, 145-150

Question/essay topic: *Would a regulated market for organs face convincing objections?*

- This session will include a short discussion of the essay topic and plan with some guidance from the Tutor.

Tutorial 4

Title: Animal Ethics

Brief description:

Aim: To examine the moral status and ethical treatment of non-human animals, and our obligations with respect to them.

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Suggested reading:

- Norcross A. 2004. Puppies, pigs, and people. Eating meat and marginal cases. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 18, 229-245.
- George KP. 1994. Should feminists be vegetarians? *Signs*, 19(2): 405-434.
- Davis SL. 2002. The least harm principle may require that humans consume a diet containing large herbivores, not a vegan diet. *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics*, 16: 387-394.

Question/essay topic: *Are we morally obligated to be vegetarians?*

Tutorial 5

Title: Ethics of Vaccination

Brief description:

Aim: To examine the ethical issues surrounding the distribution and use of vaccines in the developed and the developing world. Do people have right to choose whether they (or their children) will be vaccinated, and how should this be balanced against the risks to others? Should different standards of efficacy apply to different regions, within and between countries?

Suggested reading:

- Ulmer JB, Liu MA. 2002. Ethical issues for vaccines and immunization. *Nature Reviews Immunology*, 201-207.
- Guibilini A, Savulescu J. 2019. Vaccination, risks, and freedom: the seatbelt analogy. *Public Health Ethics*, 12(3): 237-249.
- Omer SB, Betsch C, Leask J. 2019. Mandate vaccination with care. *Nature*, 571: 469-473.

Question/essay topic: *Should vaccination be mandatory?*

Tutorial 6

Title: Abortion and the moral status of embryos and foetus

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Brief description:

Aim: To examine the ethics of abortion, including arguments in favour and against the moral permissibility of abortion.

Suggested reading:

- Thomson JJ. A defence of abortion.
- Marquis D. Why abortion is immoral.
- Purdy L. Are pregnant women foetal containers?

Question/essay topic: *Is abortion ever morally permissible?*

- Essay submission 3 days before the final tutorial.

Tutorial 7

Title: Radical Life Extension

Brief description:

Aim: To consider the social and ethical implications of radically extending the average human lifespan.

Suggested reading:

- Gems D. (2003) Is more life always better? *Hastings Center Report*, 33(4): 31-39.
- Williams B. (1972). The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the tedium of immortality.
- Davis JK. (2016). Four ways life extension will change our relationship with death. *Bioethics*, 30(3): 165-172.

Question/essay topic: *Would a much longer life make us happier?*

- Discussion of the essay and feedback.