

HPSC2006 Ethics and Science

Course Syllabus

2013-14 session | Dr Phyllis Illari | phyllis.illari@ucl.ac.uk

An exploration of ethical challenges arising in recent scientific activity. Some challenges will focus on the results of research. Others will concern the process of research itself and science and society's efforts at self-regulation. This is a practical, issues-based course. Emphasis also will be on current events and fundamental principles. No prerequisites.

Course Information

Basic course information

Course website:	[insert if applicable]
Moodle Web site:	HPSC2006
Assessment:	1 essay (3,000 words, 50%), 1 exam (3 hours, 50%)
Timetable:	www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/hpsc
Prerequisites:	No pre-requisites
Required texts:	Mackie: Ethics - inventing right and wrong. Other readings on Moodle.
Course tutor(s):	Phyllis Illari
Contact:	phyllis.illari@ucl.ac.uk t: Phyllis Illari 020 7679 2486
Web:	www.ucl.ac.uk/silva/sts/staff/[insert where applicable]
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, Room 1.2
Office hours:	Monday 12-1 Friday 1.30-2.30

Schedule

UCL Week	Topic	Date	Activity
21	Introduction: ethics and consequences in science	13 th Jan lecture 17 th Jan seminar	Reading and searching for case studies.
22	Consequentialism: what about ethical rules?	20 th Jan lecture 25 th Jan seminar	Reading and searching for case studies.
23	Deontology: are some acts wrong whatever the consequences?	27 th Jan lecture 31 st Jan seminar	Reading before class.
24	Deontology: how far can rules help us?	3 rd Feb lecture 7 th Feb seminar	Reading before class.
25	Virtue ethics: what should the virtuous agent do?	10 th Feb lecture 14 th Feb seminar	Reading before class. Think about essay.
26	Reading Week	No classes	
27	Virtue ethics: what is integrity?	24 th Feb lecture 28 th Feb seminar	Reading before class. Reading about essay.
28	Conservation ethics: is ethics only about people?	3 rd March lecture 7 th March seminar	Reading before class. Planning for essay.
29	Conservation ethics: are we collectively responsible?	10 th March lecture 14 th March seminar	Reading before class. Writing essay.
30	Information ethics: can you really steal information?	17 th March lecture 21 st March seminar	Reading before class.
31	Information ethics: science, ethics and change	24 th March lecture 28 th March seminar	Reading before class.

Assessments

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
1	Essay	11.59 pm Monday 17 th March	3,000
2	Exam	Summer Term	3 hours

Assignments

Essays must be submitted via Moodle. Essay topics to be distributed on Moodle. In order to be deemed 'complete' on this module students must attempt both the 3,000 word essay and the summer examination.

Criteria for assessment

The departmental marking guidelines for individual items of assessment can be found in the STS Student Handbook.

Aims & objectives

Aims:

- Build knowledge of three basic foundational theories in ethics, and two newer theories.
- Encourage reflection on ethical issues in science.
- Increase skills to apply ethical theories to issues arising in science.
- Increase skills of analytical essay writing and verbal discussion.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to explain and evaluate five key philosophical ethical theories.
- Students will be able systematically to explore and discuss ethical issues arising in the sciences.
- Students will be able to express and defend ethical views.
- Students will be able to write philosophically cohesive essays, where ethical theories are explained, applications explored, and arguments for them critically evaluated.

Reading list

We will extensively use **Mackie: Ethics – inventing right and wrong** (1990, Penguin). There are many copies available in the library, and it can be bought on kindle for £4.68.

There are some marvelous resources available through UCL's online services for you to browse for interesting cases and discussions. Make sure you have a look at:

- Ford and Dudzinski (eds): *Complex Ethics Consultations – Cases that Haunt Us*, CUP, 2008
<http://ebooks.cambridge.org/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9780511663437>
- The journal *Science and Engineering Ethics*
<http://link.springer.com/journal/volumesAndIssues/11948>
- *The Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*
<http://link.springer.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/journal/volumesAndIssues/11673>
- And let the class know about anything good you find!

Week 1 Introduction: ethics and consequences in science

Required Reading:

David B. Resnik: *Playing Politics with Science – Balancing Scientific Independence and Government Oversight*, Chapter 2

- <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195375893.001.0001/acprof-9780195375893-chapter-2>

Required Seminar Reading:

Browse recent issues of *New Scientist*:

- <http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis/search/homesubmitForm.do>

Have a look at the Journal *Science and Engineering Ethics*

- <http://link.springer.com/journal/volumesAndIssues/11948>

Think about what ethical issues in science you would like to discuss on this course, and come to the seminar with at least one idea of a case you have found to suggest to the class.

(If the links here or on Moodle don't work, you can access the ejournals directly by logging in to MetaLib.)

Questions for discussion:

What are the interesting ethical issues in science?

Is there anything distinctive about ethical issues in science?

Should we leave science alone?

What are moral theories?

Is ethics objective or subjective? Does it matter?

What are the consequences of our actions?

How do we know what the consequences of our actions will be?

Is there anything special about the consequences or potential consequences of science?

Week 2 Consequentialism: what about ethical rules?

Required Reading:

Mackie: Chapter 6 Utilitarianism

Case study reading

Additional Readings:

Mackie Chapter 1: The subjectivity of values

Wendy Donner: 'Mill's Utilitarianism' in Skorupski (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, CUP.

Questions for discussion:

Should we follow ethical rules?

Can a consequentialist explain ethical rules?

What is 'rule-utilitarianism'? Does it work?

Can we formulate ethical rules for science?

Week 3 Deontology: are some acts wrong *whatever* the consequences?

Required Reading:

Mackie Chapter 7: Consequentialism and deontology

Case study reading

Additional Reading:

Timothy Chappell: 'Intuition, system, and the "paradox" of deontology' in Lost and Wuerth (eds) *Perfecting Virtue*, CUP, 271-88.

Questions for discussion:

What is a duty?

What is a right?
Do we have a duty not to violate the rights of others?
Do scientists have any special duties? Or rights?
Are there any moral absolutes?
Do human rights exist whatever society says?

Week 4 Deontology: how far can rules help us?

Required Reading:

Mackie Chapter 4: Universalization
Case study reading

Additional Reading:

Michael Slote: 'The problem we all have with deontology', in Lost and Wuerth (eds) *Perfecting Virtue*, CUP, pp260-70.

Questions for discussion:

Is ethics universal?
Is it ever permitted to prioritise a loved one over a stranger?
Is it required to prioritise a loved one over a stranger?
Is it ever required *not* to prioritise a loved one over a stranger?
Can rules conflict?
How do you decide what rule to apply?
What are ethics boards in science? Why do they exist?

Week 5 Virtue ethics: what about integrity?

Required Reading:

Mackie Chapter 8: Elements of a practical morality
Case study reading

Additional Reading:

Daniel Russell: 'Virtue ethics, happiness, and the good life' in Russell (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, CUP
Phillipa Foot: 'Virtues and Vices' in her *Virtues and Vices: Essays in moral philosophy*, OUP, 2002

Questions for discussion:

'It's against the rules, but if I don't do it there will be terrible consequences. Help! What should I do?'
Is acting ethically a skill?
If ethics requires skill, does that mean the less skilled are ethically less good?

Week 6 Virtue ethics: what should the virtuous agent do?

Required Reading:

Rosalind Hursthouse: 'Normative Virtue Ethics' in Crisp (ed) *How should one live?* OUP, 1998.

Case study reading

Additional Reading:

Justin Oakley: 'Virtue ethics and bioethics' in Russell (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, CUP

Gopal Sreenivasan: 'The situationist critique of virtue ethics' in Russell (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, CUP

Questions for discussion:

'It's not my fault, I followed the rules!' Is this a good defense?

What is integrity?

Do scientists need any special virtues?

Is there such a thing as intellectual virtue? Is it different from ordinary virtue?

Do scientists need any special intellectual virtues?

Week 7 Conservation ethics: is ethics only about people?

Required Reading:

Brennan and Lo: 'Environmental ethics', in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/>. At least sections 1-3, and as much of the rest as you can manage.

Case study reading

Additional Reading:

Questions for discussion:

What is intrinsic value?

What is instrumental value?

Do only people have intrinsic value?

Are things other than people valuable? Just animals? Plants too? Why?

Is it morally acceptable to experiment on animals?

Why?

Week 8 Conservation ethics: are we collectively responsible?

Required Reading:

Zwolinski and Schmidtz: 'Environmental virtue ethics' in Russell (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, CUP

Case study reading

Additional Reading:

Mackie Chapter 9: Determinism, responsibility, and choice

Mackie Chapter 3 Obligations and reasons

Questions for discussion:

'I didn't cause climate change, it was everybody else!' Can this ever be true?

Is it just as bad to *let something happen* as to do it?
Are we responsible for what other people do?
Are we responsible for what institutions we are part of do? For what our university does? For what our country does?
Are we collectively responsible for science?
What is a social contract?
Are we collectively involved in a social contract?

Week 9 Information ethics: can you really steal information?

Required Reading:

The PI Research Network: *The Philosophy of Information: An Introduction*, Chapter 4, 'Ethics'.
Case study reading

Additional Readings:

Alison Adam: 'Ethics for things' in *Ethics and Information Technology* (2008) 10:149–154
Floridi: 'Information ethics' in Floridi (ed) *The Cambridge Handbook of Computer and Information Ethics*, CUP,
The PI Research Network: *The Philosophy of Information: An Introduction*, Chapter 5, 'Society'.

Questions for discussion:

Do we need to re-think ethics when the world changes?
Is the unauthorized copying of a digital object really theft?
Does someone looking at photos of you without permission violate your privacy? Does that violate one of your human rights?
Why? Does it harm you?

Week 10 Information ethics: science, ethics and change

Required Reading:

Floridi: 'The ethics of the information society in a globalized world' in Floridi (ed) *The Cambridge Handbook of Computer and Information Ethics*, CUP, p271-83
Case study reading

Additional Readings:

Louise Bezuidenhout: 'Data Sharing and Dual-Use Issues' in *Science and Engineering Ethics* (2013) 19:83–92
The PI Research Network: *The Philosophy of Information: An Introduction*, Chapter 15, 'Personal identity'.

Questions for discussion:

How does science change the world?
How does science change how we see ourselves?
Is change good or bad?
Does change impact on different people in different ways?

How does science create particularly urgent ethical debates?

Course expectations

Students are expected to attend lectures, read the required reading in advance of seminars, attend seminars and participate in class activities, particularly discussions. Students should be active in pursuing the questions for discussion, searching the internet for information on unfamiliar ideas, and on interesting ethical cases in science for discussion in class. Once during the course, each student will prepare and give a 5-minute presentation on required reading, and produce a 1-page handout on the material presented to give to the class.

Important policy information

Details of college and departmental policies relating to modules and assessments can be found in the STS Student Handbook www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/handbook

All students taking modules in the STS department are expected to read these policies.
