HPSC0017

Science and Ethics

Course Syllabus

2022-23 session | Dr Phyllis Illari, Dr Rory Jubber |phyllis.illari@ucl.ac.uk, rory.jubber@ucl.ac.uk

Course Information

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.

Basic course information

Course website:	
Moodle Web site:	https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=38837
Assessment:	0% Essay plan (1,000 words) 100% Research project (Level 5 2,500 words, Level 6 3,000 words)
Timetable:	none
Prerequisites:	none
Required texts:	Torbjorn Tannsjo: *Understanding Ethics* (3rd Edn.). Other readings available via Moodle.
Course tutor(s):	Phyllis Illari, Rory Jubber
Contact:	phyllis.illari@ucl.ac.uk	t: 020 7679 2486
Web:	
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, Room 1.2

Schedule

UCL Week	Topic	Date	Activity
20	Introduction: ethics and consequences in science		Reading and searching for case studies.
21	Consequentialism: what about ethical rules?		Reading and searching for case studies.
22	Deontology: are some acts wrong whatever the consequences?		Reading before class.

23	Deontology: how far can rules help us?		Reading before class. Think about essay plan.
24	Virtue ethics: what should the virtuous agent do?		Reading before class. Write essay plan.
25	**Reading Week**		**no classes**
26	Virtue ethics: what is integrity?		Reading before class. Reading about essay.
27	Critiques: Environmental ethics		Reading before class. Planning for essay.
28	Critiques: Feminist ethics		Reading before class. Writing essay.
29	Critiques: African ethics		Reading before class.
30	Critiques: Information ethics		Reading before class.

Assessments[1]

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
Plan	Essay plan	17th February	1,000?
Essay	Essay	5.00pm 3rd April	2,500 (Level 5) 3,000 (Level 6)

Assignments

Coursework must be submitted via Moodle. Coursework topics to be distributed on Moodle.

Specific Criteria for Assessment for this Module:

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

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.

Guidance on how to interpret the departmental marking criteria for this course will be shared later.

[1] For further information regarding assessments (including word counts, late submissions and possible penalties) please refer to the STS appropriate programme page i.e B.Sc or M.Sc., or the equivalent for your department.

Aims & objectives

Aims:
- Build knowledge of three basic foundational theories in ethics, and four more critical newer theories.
- Encourage reflection on ethical issues in science and technology.
- Increase skills to apply ethical theories to issues arising in science.
- Increase skills of analytical essay writing and verbal discussion.
- Increase skills in finding and evaluating sources.

Objectives:

By the end of this module:
- Students will be able to explain and evaluate at least four 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 have improved their ability to find and critically evaluate the reliability of sources.
- Students will demonstrate these by writing a philosophically cohesive essay, assessing in depth an ethical theory (theory-led) or an ethical dispute in science and technology (case-led) and presenting their own argument for their view. Styles of essay will be discussed in class, but both will require application of ethical theory or theories to ethical case or cases.

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 UCL explore, popular media, and the internet for information on unfamiliar ideas, and for interesting ethical cases in science for discussion in class.

Reading list

Best General Introductions:

We will extensively use **Tannsjo: Understanding Ethics (3rd Edition)** (2013, Edinburgh University Press). The library has copies, and also ebook access using your login.

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!

Lecture Readings:

Week 1 Introduction: ethics and consequences in science

Required Reading:
Briggle and Mitcham: Ethics and Science, Chapter 1 'Introduction and Overview'

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 the reading list don't work, you can access the ejournals directly by logging in to UCL Explore.)

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:
Tannsjo: Chapter 2 'Utilitarianism'
Case study reading
Additional Readings:
Wendy Donner: 'Mill's Utilitarianism' in Skorupski (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, CUP.
John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism*. This is completely free on Project Gutenberg:
https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/11224

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:
Tannsjo: Chapter 4 'Deontological Ethics'

Case study reading

Additional Reading:
Timothy Chappell: 'Intuition, system, and the "paradox" of deontology' in Lost and Wuerth (eds) *Perfecting Virtue*, CUP, 271-88. (Note that this is the previous name of Sophie Grace Chappell, but she says herself to use it to refer to her previous publications under that name.)
Foot, Philippa, 1972, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *The Philosophical Review*, 81(3): 305–316.

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 4 Deontology: rules and rights

Required Reading:
Tannsjo: Chapter 5 'Moral Rights'
Case study reading

Additional Reading:
Michael Slote: 'The problem we all have with deontology', in Lost and Wuerth (eds) *Perfecting Virtue*, CUP, pp260-70.
Rawls, John (1958) 'Justice as Fairness'. *Philosophical Review*, 67/2, 164–194
Rawls, John (1980) 'Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory'. *Journal of Philosophy*, 77, 515–572, Repr. in Rawls 1999: 303–58

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 5 Virtue ethics: what about integrity?

Required Reading:
Tannsjo: Chapter 6 'Virtue Ethics'
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?
- What is integrity?

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?
- 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 Critique 1: Environmental ethics

Required Reading:
Tannsjo: Chapter 8 'Environmental Ethics'
Case study reading

Additional Reading:
Arne Naess (1973) The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary , *Inquiry*, 16:1-4, 95-100, DOI: 10.1080/00201747308601682
Zwolinski and Schmidtz: 'Environmental virtue ethics' in Russell (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, CUP

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?
- 'I didn't cause climate change, it was everybody else!' Can this ever be true?
- Are we responsible for what institutions we are part of do? For what our university or our country does?

Week 8 Critique 2: Feminist ethics

Required Reading:
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: Care Work: Dreaming disability justice, Chapter 1, 'Care Webs: Experiments in creating collective access', Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, [2018]
Case study reading

Additional Reading:
Tannsjo Chapter 7 'Feminist ethics'

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: *Care Work: Dreaming disability justice*, Preface, which gives a very personal account of their own journey in doing this work. Vancouver : Arsenal Pulp Press, [2018]

Adrienne Maree Brown: *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, 2017, Introduction and chapters 1-3.

Questions for discussion:
- What should we *care for*?
- How should we care for our communities?
- How are these questions different from thinking about rights and consequences?
- Why is it so important for vulnerable people to be part of a community, or a 'care web'?
- Does care ethics make ethics personal, rather than abstract? In what sense?
- In what ways is human life – and ethics – 'complex'?

Week 9 Critique 3: African ethics

Required Reading:
Thaddeus Metz (2021) A relational moral theory: African ethics in and beyond the continent, OUP, CH 7 105-144
Case study reading

Additional Readings:

Thaddeus Metz (2021) A relational moral theory: African ethics in and beyond the continent, OUP, CH 1 43-61
Ifeanyi Menkiti (2004) 'On the Normative Conception of a Person', in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Wiredu, Kwasi (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 324–31.
Musa Dube (2009) 'I Am Because We Are: Giving Primacy to African Indigenous Values in HIV&AIDS Prevention', in *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, Murove, Munyaradzi Felix (ed.), Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, pp. 188–217.

Questions for discussion:
- Is ethics focused on the individual or the community?
- What does it mean to act communally?
- What is a harmonious way of relating to others?
- Why place an ethical premium on friendliness?
- What is the importance of identity with others?
- What is it to have solidarity with others?

Week 10 Critique 4: Information ethics

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

Additional Readings:
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
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'. 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:

- How should we think about the non-living? Can non-living things be 'ethical patients'?
- Do we need to re-think ethics when technologies change?
- 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?
- How does science change the world? How does it impact differently on different people?