APPLIED ETHICS

Instructor: Prof. Simon Rippon <RipponS@ceu.edu>
No of Credits: 2 CEU credits (4 ECTS credits)
Semester: Fall, 2023-24
Course Status: BA elective
Prerequisites: None (but Critical Reasoning and Ethics courses will be useful)
Course e-learning site: https://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=16664
Meeting time and location: Thursdays 10:40-12:50 (10 min break at ~11:40), QS A-419
Simon Rippon’s Office Hours: Usual hours Tuesdays 10-12 and Thursdays 2-4. Please visit http://simonrippon.youcanbook.me to check availability and reserve a slot. Office QS-D410.

Course Description

The aim of this course is to examine and discuss a selection of contemporary issues in applied ethics from a philosophical perspective. Classes will be seminar style and will include an introduction to the topic by the instructor and interactive discussion of the assigned reading, with most of the class devoted to questions, discussion and debate. From time to time the class will be divided into smaller groups for debates or other exercises.

Learning outcomes

At the completion of their work for this course students will be able to:

- identify and critically evaluate arguments for different positions on controversial issues in applied ethics
- recognize the distinction between merely holding an ethical opinion and being able to give reasons and arguments for an ethical opinion
- argue effectively for a chosen view

Requirements

For all students, the basic expectations are:

(i) Regular, punctual attendance of all classes. Missing more than one week’s classes without a doctor’s note or other evidence of a justified reason for absence may result in a failing grade and/or the loss of tuition waiver or financial aid.
(ii) Carefully completing the assigned readings before class.
(iii) Active participation in discussions and group exercises.
(iv) Timely submission of assignments. Request for extension of assignment deadlines in cases of justified late submission must be sought in advance of the due date with the course instructor. There will be a late penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade (A to A-) for assignments received up to 48 hours late, then 2/3 of a letter grade (A to B+) up to 96 hours, and so on.
There will be the following main assignments:

1) A midterm reaction paper giving a concise summary of an argument from one of the required readings, and critically engaging with it (400-500 words).

2) A multiple choice/short-answer closed-book, in class final exam designed to test and consolidate knowledge and understanding of course materials.

3) A final paper on one question from a selection provided at the end of the course (1200 words). Deadline: Friday, December 22, 2023.

Assessment and Grading Criteria

The grade components are:
25% Reaction paper
25% Final exam
50% Final paper

Preparation for classes and quality of participation in discussions and other in-class activities will also be taken into consideration, and the instructor reserves the right to increase or reduce the final grade for the class by 1/3 grade accordingly (e.g. B to B+ or vice versa).

All course requirements must be completed in order to earn a grade for the class.

Grading criteria for reaction papers

A  An exceptional answer of appropriate length, nearly flawless in style and organization and demonstrating a very clear understanding of the argument in the text analyzed. The answer will accurately identify and concisely present the central argument(s) of the text, differentiating the argument(s) identified in the text from extraneous or tangential material, as well as from your own views. The main assumptions and steps in the reasoning of the text will be accurately identified and explained. (Standard form may be used to present the main argument(s) where this may enhance clarity.) You will propose and briefly assess one or two well-targeted objections to (some point in) the argument of the text. The writing will be clear academic English without grammatical, spelling or other errors. Technical concepts or vocabulary will be accurately used and explained. Independent research is not necessary, but all sources will be properly cited in a recognized academic style.

A-  An excellent answer, with few flaws. Includes a clear and accurate presentation of the central argument(s) of the text and an assessment of one or two well-targeted objections.

B+  A very good answer, demonstrating a good understanding of the central argument of the text, even if it contains some small errors. The writing is well-focused and the main assumptions and steps in the reasoning of the text are identified, explained, and assessed with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Significant grammatical, spelling or other stylistic errors are avoided.
B A good answer in parts, demonstrating understanding of the text, though perhaps with some errors, or deviation into minor or irrelevant material.

B- An answer which contains some correct material as well as misunderstanding or failure to clearly explain parts of the argument.

C+ An answer which contains a lot of confusion or lack of clarity, but nevertheless shows some attempt to answer the question.

F An inadequate answer which reveals no serious attempt to engage with the topic, and no real knowledge of the subject.

Grading criteria for final papers
A An exceptional answer of appropriate length, nearly flawless in style and organization and demonstrating a very clear understanding of ethical issues and arguments in relation to the question answered. The answer presents a clear thesis makes a systematic and persuasive philosophical argument for it, while avoiding rhetoric. One or two well-targeted objections to (some point in) the argument are anticipated and replied to. Excellent knowledge and understanding of relevant readings and other materials from the course, as well as technical concepts and vocabulary, is demonstrated. The answer is presented in clear academic English without grammatical, spelling or other errors. Independent research is not necessary, but all sources are properly cited.

A- An excellent answer, with few flaws. A clear thesis is presented and supported with a good argument, avoiding rhetoric. One or two well-targeted objections are anticipated and responded to. Very good knowledge and understanding of relevant readings and other materials from the course, as well as technical concepts and vocabulary, is demonstrated. The writing is well-focused and grammatical, spelling or other stylistic errors, if present, are minor and few.

B+ A very good answer, even if it contains some small errors. A clear thesis and argument is presented, and any obvious objection(s) is/are anticipated. The answer shows a good level of knowledge and understanding of relevant readings and other materials from the course, as well as technical concepts and vocabulary. The writing is well-focused and significant grammatical, spelling or other stylistic errors are avoided.

B A good answer in parts, demonstrating understanding of relevant issues, though perhaps with some errors or gaps, deviation into minor or irrelevant material, or failures of clarity.

B- An answer which contains some correct material as well as significant misunderstanding, gaps or failures of clarity.

C+ An answer which contains a lot of confusion or lack of clarity, but nevertheless shows some attempt to answer the question.

F An inadequate answer which reveals no serious attempts to engage with the topic, and no real knowledge of the subject.
Week by week breakdown

Week 1
What is Applied Ethics?
What is applied ethics? What, if anything, qualifies moral philosophers to make ethical claims? How do we argue in applied ethics, and how might an understanding of ethical theories help us?

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

Week 2
Vaccination obligations and mandates: A case in favour
What is a mandate? Can the public good, the good of the individual, individual ethical obligations, or some combination of these justify imposing vaccine mandates?

Required reading:

Week 3
Vaccination obligations and mandates: A case against
Can we permissibly reject vaccines? What special ethical concerns do vaccine mandates raise (as opposed to e.g. mask mandates or lockdowns)?

Required reading:
- JS Mill, On Liberty (1859) Chapters 1 and 4. I recommend the edition edited by Jonathan F. Bennett (titled just Liberty) available online as pdf and also as audiobook at: https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/mill
Week 4
Selling human organs: A case in favour
Transplant organs are in inadequate supply. Thousands of people die each year on waiting lists, for want of an organ. Specifically in the case of kidneys, living donation is feasible: most of us are born with two functional kidneys but can live a normal, healthy life with only one. However, most of us are not altruistic enough to donate a kidney to a stranger. Meanwhile, selling and buying of human organs is widely prohibited. Why not permit it?

Required reading:

Week 5
Selling human organs: A case against

Required reading:

Week 6
The ethics of climate change and the problem of individual responsibility
The overwhelming evidence tells us that climate change is a serious problem. But do we have any individual moral responsibility to reduce our emissions? If so, how do we explain this?

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
  https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/ony019.

Week 7
The non-identity problem
Many of our decisions will affect people who do not yet exist. Surprisingly many of our decisions make a difference to which people will come to exist. This generates a theoretical puzzle in ethics: the non-identity problem. What is the non-identity problem, and why does it matter?

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
• Fiona Woollard, ‘Have We Solved the Non-Identity Problem?’ *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 15, no. 5 (1 November 2012): 677–90. 
  https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-012-9359-2

**Week 8**
The ethics of climate change: Public and private justice
Do we have duties of justice to respond to climate change? Are they primarily duties to generations of people who do not yet exist? Do we have individual duties, or just a public duty to respond as a society?

• John Broome, *Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World.* (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & co., 2012), Ch. 4 “Justice and Fairness” and Ch.5 “Private morality” (pp.49-96).

**Week 9**
Human enhancement: A case in favour
What is human enhancement? Is it morally permissible? Is there even a moral obligation to biologically enhance human beings?

Required reading:

**Week 10**
Human enhancement: A case against
Would it be wrong to enhance our children, or ourselves? What kind of motivation does Sandel think the impulse to enhance springs from, and why is he critical of it?

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
  A recorded talk version of this is available at:

**Week 11**
The ethics of climate change: A radical approach
Could human engineering be part of an ethical response to climate change?

Required reading:
**Week 12**
Are we all experts now? Or were we before? Reflecting on the idea of expertise in applied ethics; course wrap up

Required reading:
  [https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12553](https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12553).