IMPORTANT

PHIL: 3000 – Philosophical Ethics is taught by two different professors at the Fordham London Centre. This document contains the tentative syllabus for each course.
Philosophical Ethics (PHIL 3000)

Spring 2016  Lecturer: Dr Piers Benn

Overview

This course is largely an introduction to some central historical and contemporary ethical theories. These include Aristotle’s ethics, natural law ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, virtue ethics and feminist ethics. The differences between these approaches will be illustrated from time to time by reference to practical moral issues. For example, there are interesting questions about the scope of beneficence (should we give all our spare time and money to the very needy? Should our moral concerns extend to animals and human foetuses?), honesty and integrity (lying, deception, privacy and concealment), human rights and especially the alleged right to free speech, questions about the ethics of harming others, including killing them, and the relevance of feminist ethics to some of these questions. Of course, most of us do not consciously apply theories to our moral deliberations, but act intuitively and not always consistently. But underlying the course is the suggestion that moral deliberation is a rational process, and that there are better and worse ways to argue about morality.

Additionally, the course begins by asking some basic questions in moral theory – in particular, about moral relativism, egoism and altruism, and the relation between ethics and religious belief.

Learning objectives

- To gain knowledge and understanding of major historical ethical theories, and to make comparisons between them.
- To apply these theories to some practical issues.
- To gain a critical understanding of some general issues in moral theory and normative ethics, in particular relativism, egoism and the purported relation of moral norms and divine commands.
- To gain skill and confidence in critical thinking, the assessment of arguments for soundness, dealing with counter-arguments to one’s own positions and debating issues in class.
- To appreciate the relevance of reason and argument to the formation of moral views.
- To find the material interesting, and not worth pursuing only because you are being assessed on it!

Attendance

An attendance register will be taken at every class. This is so as to comply with the UK Border Agency requirements. You must attend every class, unless you are ill or have been granted compassionate leave. Absence should be notified to me in advance, unless in exceptional circumstances.

Punctuality for classes – both for the first sessions and the sessions after the morning break – is also expected. Lateness, unless genuinely unavoidable, is disrespectful – and all late arrivals are disruptive to the concentration of the lecturer and other students.
**Participation in class** is strongly encouraged. Part of the purpose of this course is to help you to express your views and arguments confidently, coherently and politely – while allowing others a chance to do the same. If you feel you are not being given an adequate chance to contribute, please let me know. However, I recognise that many good students are not naturally vocal, and class contribution will not form part of the assessment.

**ASSESSMENT**

You will be required to submit TWO pieces of coursework. Questions will be given out during the course, together with submission requirements.

First assessed coursework: an essay of approximately 1500 words.  
**Deadline: 9.00 am, Thursday 25th February. Weighting: 40% of overall grade.**

Second assessed coursework: an essay of approximately 2000 words.  
**Deadline: TBA. Weighting: 60% of overall grade.**

All submitted work will be assessed according to the following criteria:

1. **Knowledge and understanding**  
   You should display knowledge of the ethical issues involved and of the relevant arguments. The content should always be relevant to the matter under discussion.

2. **Quality of argument**  
   It is very important not only to show knowledge of what writers claim, but also to display an ability to **argue** for your own conclusion(s), anticipating and dealing with counter-arguments. This requires flexibility of thought and ability to weigh up claims in the light of opposing claims.

3. **Evidence of reading**  
   You should be able to draw on appropriate literature. You should integrate your sources into your work rather than merely regurgitate their content, and show understanding of their relevance to the points you are advancing.

4. **Independence of thought**  
   You should show that you have developed your own lines of thinking and show flexibility in dealing with the arguments and facts. You are not required to be genuinely original - i.e. produce arguments that no one has ever thought of before (!) - but you should do more than paraphrase existing literature, however faithfully.

5. **Clarity and structure**  
   You should write clearly, in good English, with well-chosen words and correct grammar, syntax and punctuation. The direction of the argument should be clearly structured and easily discernible. British and American spellings are equally acceptable, but try to be consistent!
Late submission and extensions

Work that is submitted late, without an agreed extension (or beyond an agreed extension) will be penalised as follows: one grade for work submitted up to five working days late, two grades for work submitted between six and up to ten working days late. (For example, up to five working days late, an A- will become a B+, a B+ will become a B. Work that is more than ten working days late will not receive a grade. A working day is any day when the Fordham office is open.

Extensions can be granted if there are valid grounds. These are normally limited to sustained illness, or compassionate grounds. If you think you will need an extension, you should contact me as soon as possible before the deadline.

PLAGIARISM

This means passing off someone else’s work as your own.

All plagiarism must be avoided. The work of others includes, among other things, the work of academic authors, material from the internet, material distributed in class and the work of fellow students. It is also important not to reproduce substantial work of your own, without due acknowledgement.

Clearly, I do not expect your work to be literally original – expressing ideas that no one has ever had before. You will need to refer to and draw on appropriate literature. What is important is that your work should be independent. The best safeguard against plagiarism is to acknowledge quotations and sources and make it clear when you are referring to, or expounding, someone else’s work.

The following is an extract from Fordham’s policy:

The Undergraduate Policy on Academic Integrity

A University, by its nature, strives to foster and recognize originality of thought, which can be recognized only when people produce work that is theirs alone and properly acknowledge information and ideas that are obtained from the work of others. It is therefore important that students must maintain the highest standards with regard to honesty, effort, and performance.

As a Jesuit, Catholic University, Fordham is committed to ensuring that all members of the academic community strive not only for excellence in scholarship but also for integrity of character. In the pursuit of knowledge and personal development, it is imperative that students present their own ideas and insights for evaluation, critique and eventual reformulation. As part of this process, each student must acknowledge the intellectual contribution of others.

For inclusive information on the University’s policy on cheating, plagiarism, falsification and unapproved collaboration among other things, please visit our website.

http://www.fordham.edu/academics/handbooks_publicati/undergraduate_facult/the_undergraduate_po_80570.asp.

Office hours I shall be available for consultation on Thursdays 12.00 – 13.00 except on days when the class does not meet.
READING MATERIAL

Suggested reading for each topic is given below. On occasion, I shall point out a particular book or article as essential reading. Some of the material is introductory and should be helpful. However, since there is a vast literature on every topic, you can read only a small proportion of it. You should get into the habit of finding things for yourselves and deciding whether or not they are useful.

SOME SCHOLARLY JOURNALS IN ETHICS

Ethics
Philosophy & Public Affairs
Journal of Applied Philosophy
Philosophical Review
Journal of Philosophy
Journal of Political Philosophy
Nous
Philosophy & Phenomenological Research
Utilitas
Mind
Philosophical Studies
Not all of these journals are devoted exclusively to ethics, but they all contain important articles in this field.

When researching for your essays, you may find helpful the following search engines (among others), available through the Digital Resources of the Senate House Libraries. At some point in the process you will be asked to enter your name (e.g. Jane/John Smith) and your ID number from the back of your library card.

JSTOR
Periodicals Index Online
Ingenta
Philosopher's Index
Academic Search Complete
ATLA

In addition, the following are often very helpful:
Google Scholar; Google Books; PhilPapers

Sometimes you may be able to find online access to the articles, through these search engines. Do not rely exclusively on internet access, however. More recent articles are often only accessible in the library.

**LIBRARY RESOURCES**

For this course, it will be helpful to use the Heythrop philosophy library. Philosophy books are in the main library and journals are housed in the Copleston Wing. See especially BJ – Ethics. Enthusiasts may also wish to use the London University Senate House Library (Malet Street WC1), though you will need to check registration procedures and fees.

**COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Some useful background books for the course include: (* indicates a useful introductory textbook)


Peter Singer, ed. *Ethics* (Oxford Readers series), OUP 1994. (A comprehensive collection of classic readings with brief introductions). **It may a good idea to buy this.**


The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessible online through the Heythrop College Library and Learning Resources, are also useful for learning how to the use key technical terms used in the course. (The Stanford Encyclopaedia also has the advantage of being directly accessible via the internet).
CLASS TIMETABLE

Week 1 14th January 2016

General introduction to the course.
Moral relativism: what is it, and should we accept it?


Week 2 21st January

Is altruism possible? If so, to what extent (if any) should we be altruistic?

Janet Radcliffe Richards, *Human Nature after Darwin*, Routledge 2000, Ch. 7 (‘Selfish Genes and Moral Animals’). This is quite detailed and closely argued, but rewards study.

Week 3 28th January

What, if anything, is the connection between morality and religion?

Simon Blackburn, Being Good, CUP 2001, relevant section.
Peter Singer, A Companion to Ethics, Part II, chs. 7, 8, 9.
Routledge and Stanford online encyclopaedias of philosophy, entries on divine command theories of ethics.

Week 4 4th February

**Aristotle and well-being (eudaimonia)**


Piers Benn, Ethics, Routledge 2000. Ch. 7.


Week 5 11th February

**Natural law ethics**


John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, OUP 1980 (see sections relevant to natural law ethics rather than jurisprudence).


Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online), entry on natural law ethics.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online) *ibid*.

Week 6 18th February

**Kant’s deontological ethics**


Piers Benn, *Ethics*, Ch. 4.

James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Ch. 9 and 10.
Week 7

25th February

**Mill’s utilitarianism: pleasure, happiness and the Principle of Utility**

Piers Benn, *Ethics*, ch 3 (‘Consequentialism’).
James Rachels, The Elements of Moral Philosophy, chs. 7 and 8.

Week 8

3rd March

**NO CLASS – MID-TERM BREAK**

Week 9

10th March

**Virtue Ethics**

Piers Benn, *Ethics*, ch. 7.
Routledge and Stanford encyclopaedias (online), relevant entries.

Week 10

17th March

**VISIT TO PARLIAMENT (tbc)**
Week 11  

24th March

NO CLASS – MAUNDY THURSDAY

Week 12  

31st March

Moral theory and its practical applications: charitable giving, abortion and animals

Peter Singer, ed. Ethics, Part II, Section B, extracts 77-86, pp. 306-361 (Less focused on Mill, but useful as a general overview of consequentialism and its critics).
Piers Benn, Ethics, ch 3 (‘Consequentialism’).
Robin Attfield, Ethics: An Overview, relevant chapters.
James Rachels, The Elements of Moral Philosophy, Ch. 6 and 7.
R. M. Hare, Moral Thinking, OUP 1981.
Roger Scruton, Animal Rights and Wrongs, Demos 1996.

Week 13  

7th April

Human rights: do they exist, and if so, can we know what they are?

Simon Blackburn, Being Good, A short introduction to ethics, CUP 2001 (relevant sections). See the appendix containing the UN Declaration of Human Rights.
Finnis, John, Natural Law and Natural Rights (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
What limits, if any, should be set to the right to free speech and expression?


Feminist approaches to ethics

Annette Baier, ‘What do Women Want in a Moral Theory?’, in James Sterba (ed.) *Ethics: the Big Questions* (Blackwell 1998), Part Four, Ch. 32 (pp. 325-31). See also other articles in that section.

Evaluation and overview of course.

Dr Piers Benn  pbenn1@fordham.edu
PHIL 3000 – Philosophical Ethics

Dr Chris Malone
(emalone9@fordham.edu)
Thursdays 12:30pm–3:30pm
Marie Eugenie Room, Fordham University London Centre

Course Description

What makes something right or wrong, and why should we care? Are ethical values universal, or do they differ by time and place? Do the ends justify the means, or are there some lines that we should never cross? This course will shed light on these questions and more by considering some of the major topics and debates within philosophical ethics, introducing students to the distinctive nature of normative claims, the multiple levels on which moral philosophical investigation can be pursued, and the possible motivations for acting on the basis of ethical concerns. The course will consider the ideas of some of the leading thinkers and theories of moral conduct, including Mill's utilitarianism, Kant's deontology and Aristotle's virtue ethics, as well as assessing some important frameworks and challenges to moral thinking provided by debates about human rights and cultural relativity. Along with reflection on the nature and incentive for normative inquiry, students will also be encouraged to apply this accumulated knowledge to a number of prominent ethical issues relevant to current affairs, considering what philosophical insight might reveal about the ethical acceptability of global poverty, abortion, euthanasia, war, terrorism and torture.

Course Objectives

1) To introduce students to ethical thinking, theory and debate. Centrally, to impart knowledge of the key claims and features of some of the major competing theories of ethical decision-making, while at the same time offering reasoned arguments for and against their plausibility. To mature students' awareness of some of the most pressing ethical issues in the world around them.

2) To help develop students' abilities to subject claims to critical philosophical evaluation, whilst constructing strong, reasoned and persuasive arguments of their own (both in discussion and in writing). This involves building the capacity to think logically, to distinguish between descriptive and normative assertions, and to employ thought experiments to help justify important points.

3) To encourage students to cultivate a deeper appreciation of their own ethical commitments and intuitions, to be comfortable in reflecting upon their personal views from a philosophical perspective, and to learn to express, scrutinise and apply such ideas in a systematic fashion, tying them into the theoretical frameworks discussed.

Teaching and Learning Methods

The course will be taught in weekly three-hour seminars (with several breaks during each). The seminars will be highly interactive: a mixture of material presented by the tutor, questioning and guided discussion amongst the class as a whole, student presentations, and opportunities for group-work. Lively discussion and debate are vital to philosophical inquiry, and facilitating this is the paramount aim of the seminars. The topics covered are intended to be challenging, and likely to provoke differing views and perspectives. As such, active participation from all students is a central requirement of this course and a key factor to it being a rewarding and enlightening experience. Students will be expected to do some preparatory reading as the basis for each class (see below).
Assessment

Students will be required to produce two essays (each of around 5 pages) during the semester, as well contributing fully to a group presentation (topics to be decided in advance with the tutor). In addition to these formal modes of assessment, students will also be graded on their general class participation throughout the course.

Grading Metric

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage of final grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 1 (due 10/15)</td>
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<td>Essay 2 (due 12/03)</td>
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<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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Schedule

Part I: Theorizing About Ethics

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>01/14</td>
<td>Introduction to Ethics</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>01/21</td>
<td>Consequentialism</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>01/28</td>
<td>Deontology</td>
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<td>Virtue Ethics</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>02/11</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>02/18</td>
<td>Field Trip (British Museum)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>02/25</td>
<td>Cultural Values and Moral Relativism</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>03/03</td>
<td>Mid-Semester Break</td>
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Part II: Contemporary Ethical Debates

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<td>Abortion</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>03/17</td>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>03/24</td>
<td>Field Trip (Imperial War Museum)</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>The Ethics of War</td>
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<td>Torture</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>04/21</td>
<td>Ethics and Global Poverty</td>
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Detailed Outline and Readings

Course readings are divided into ‘core’ and ‘further’ texts. The core readings are designed to give a broad overview of each week’s topic, as well as introducing the (often historical) sources in which they find their classic expression. Every student is expected to read the core literature in advance of each week’s class, as they are essential prerequisites for class discussion. In addition, there are a number of further readings which expand upon this basic understanding by presenting new critical avenues or problems to be considered; these will be especially useful if writing an essay on a topic. In some weeks the further texts will be divided up amongst the class as a homework task. In the seminar, students from each group will then be picked to summarise the argument put forward in their additional reading.
The readings listed below are widely available across University of London libraries or are available online through Fordham’s subscription to JSTOR. Students are not required to purchase a central course text, but if they wish to a significant proportion of the assigned articles and extracts are compiled in the following edited volume (also available in the Fordham London Centre Library):


Asterisked numbers in the schedule below refer to the chapters of this text, e.g. [*12].

The following are also useful resources that students may wish to reference throughout the course:


— The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [http://iep.utm.edu/](http://iep.utm.edu/)


**PART I: THEORIZING ABOUT ETHICS**

1) **Introduction to Ethics: Egoism vs. Altruism**

This introductory seminar will begin by considering the nature of ethical inquiry itself – what makes something a matter of morality, as opposed to one of law or etiquette? What is the difference between normative, applied and meta-ethical approaches? Furthermore, what does it mean for something to be an ethical dilemma, rather than simply a difficult choice or test of integrity? The second half of the seminar will move to the question of why we ought to be moral, using the classic discussion of Plato’s *Republic* as a starting point for debating the opposing merits of egoism versus altruism.

**CORE READING**

— Plato, *The Republic*, Book II 357a-368c [*1]*

— James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (2003), Chapters on ‘Psychological Egoism’ and ‘Ethical Egoism’

— Bernard Williams, *Morality* (1972), Chapter 1

2) **Consequentialism: The Ends Justify the Means**

The first of three seminars outlining the leading contemporary approaches to normative moral theory, this session will focus on one of the discipline’s most influential normative theories: consequentialism. Tracing its historical foundations in the work of Bentham and Mill, the seminar will focus on the idea that producing good outcomes is the overriding goal of moral decision-making. Discussion will specifically focus on the most prominent form of this account, *utilitarianism*, which argues that right action is that which impartially produces the most happiness overall. This theory will be analysed and important objections raised. How much intuitive appeal does its central notion have? Can it lead to implausible recommendations? Are there situations in which its demands might come into conflict with other moral concerns? And are human beings actually capable of living in the way the theory demands?
3) Deontology: Duty to the Moral Law

Having discussed the consequentialist approach in the preceding session, this seminar will go on to assess what is often considered its diametric competitor: deontology. Using the knowledge garnered from the previous week as a point of contrast, discussion will focus on deontology’s central emphasis on absolute rules of conduct, rules that cannot be overruled by the pressure of any consequences. The classic expression of deontological thought, the work of the philosopher Kant, will provide the theoretical touchstone for analysis of such an approach. How successful is the distinctive method of Kant – the Categorical Imperative – in providing an objective moral law based on reason alone? Is the notion that we should act for the sake of duty to this law a commendable or disturbing feature of his account? Finally, are there really no circumstances in which breaking a moral rule would be justified?

CORE READING

— Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Parts I and II [*29]
— J. David Velleman, ‘Reading Kant’s *Groundwork*’ [*30]

FURTHER READING


4) Virtue Ethics: Character and Living Well

The final seminar on normative moral theory will discuss the resurgence of the Aristotelian-inspired tradition of virtue ethics, contrasting its central focus on a person’s character with the dissimilar aims of the previous approaches. Drawing from Aristotle’s classic account, discussion will outline the key distinction between moral virtues and vices, consider their postulated role in leading a happy or ‘flourishing’ life, and
assess the theory’s central emphasis on the notions of contextual judgement and experiential learning. What does reflection on the virtuous or vicious motivations of an agent add to our ethical understanding? Is virtue ethics right to concentrate on life more broadly over difficult single cases? Is character as robust as the theory presumes? And how plausible is its account of how we develop and mature as ethical decision-makers?

**CORE READING**

— Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II [*37]*


**FURTHER READING**


— John Doris, ‘A Situationist Theory of Character’ [*44]*

### 5) Human Rights

Human rights claims – and indeed violations – are fast becoming the *lingua franca* for public ethical discourse, providing the backdrop for much contemporary political discourse and acting as the foundational values for important international agreements (e.g. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). But what are human rights, how do they differ from other kinds of entitlement, and how might we understand their force? Are they timeless values possessed in virtue of our humanity, or standards that come into play only within the context of particular political practices and institutions? Furthermore, why are human rights so important? Is it because they safeguard human dignity, autonomy or self-ownership? Perhaps because they allow people to best pursue their own happiness and flourishing? In this class we will explore and assess competing arguments for such rights’ distinctive authority.

**CORE READING**


**FURTHER READING**


6) Field Trip to the British Museum

This week’s usual class will be replaced by a visit to the British Museum in London, where – linking into our earlier discussions of Socrates and Plato, and last week Aristotle – we will firstly tour the museum’s extensive Ancient Greek collection. Students will be encouraged to explore the distinctive features of this historical period, reflecting in particular on how the culture, education and political organisation of Ancient Greek society may have influenced the great ethical philosophers that flourished within it. Overviews of the museum’s collections can be found here:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/cultures/europe/ancient_greece.aspx

http://www.ancientgreece.co.uk/

During the second half of the trip, students will be free to explore the museum’s other collections as they wish. Taking advantage of the museum’s world-class status as one of largest and most comprehensive records of human history and culture, this will provide a chance for the class to reflect more broadly on the tremendously varied ways of living that have existed throughout human civilisation. The museum’s collection of world cultures is overviewed here:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/cultures.aspx

This exploration will build important awareness of the multitudinous ethical variations that have persisted in different cultural circumstances, providing a broad base of knowledge on which to confront the topic of the next seminar.

7) Cultural Values and Moral Relativism

The final seminar of this section centres on the recalcitrant challenge of moral relativism, and its potential to undermine ethical dialogue and appraisal across different communities. Building on the findings of last week’s field trip, what follows philosophically from the apparently great variation in ethical outlooks across time and place? Is it significant if an Ancient Greek virtue is a modern-day vice? Does this demonstrate the complete lack of an objective foundation for morality? To what extent can we uphold our values as truly universal, as opposed to a culturally-confined set of principles? Is an attempt to impose these standards worldwide a case of ‘cultural imperialism’, ignorant of the equally-valid values of different cultures and nations? And how, ultimately, can we seek to engage with those who hold fundamentally different views about morality? The debate over moral relativism will better clarified by close analysis of its descriptive, meta-ethical and normative flashpoints, a consideration of shared human features and conditions, and from this, reflection on how far the relativist challenge might be contained.

CORE READING


FURTHER READING
8) Mid-Semester Break – No class this week.

PART II: CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL DEBATES

The second part of the course challenges students to apply their accumulated theoretical knowledge to a range of prominent contemporary ethical debates, demonstrating the real-world relevance of ethical investigation while further reinforcing their grasp of competing normative approaches.

9) Abortion

This section will begin by examining one of the most frequently-discussed issues in applied or ‘practical’ ethics, the moral status of abortion, considering the topic through a number of moral-theoretical lenses alongside relevant reflection upon its legal standing. Can the practice of terminating a pregnancy ever be morally justified, and if so in what circumstances? In tackling these intertwined questions we will evaluate a range of classic arguments encompassing broadly conservative, liberal and moderate standpoints, including considerations of the moral status and potential ‘personhood’ of a foetus, the rights and sovereignty of a woman over what happens in her body, and the wider social considerations that may be of ethical relevance.

CORE READING


FURTHER READING


10) Euthanasia

Continuing the exploration of topics in bioethics, this second class shifts focus from ethical issues concerning the start of life to ethical issues concerning the end of life. Is euthanasia or ‘mercy killing’ – at the forefront of media attention and public debate following a number of recent rulings – a morally defensible practice? Can it be ethically justified to quicken the onset of death in order to reduce a person’s
suffering? This session will explore a plethora of related questions that emerge from this ongoing discourse. How does euthanasia differ from suicide? Is there a morally significant difference between intending an outcome and merely foreseeing that it will occur? Does the acceptability of such a practice depend on an individual’s particular circumstances, or is it a decision that everybody has the right to make? Finally, might there be ethical considerations regarding society and the medical profession more widely that could impact upon euthanasia’s legal status?

CORE READING


FURTHER READING


11) Field Trip to the Imperial War Museum

This session will prepare students for the course’s forthcoming topics with a visit to the Imperial War Museum in London. Details of exhibits can be found here:

http://www.iwm.org.uk/

This trip will give students the opportunity to consider the changing nature of war and political violence in the contemporary age, and in particular the new ethical challenges presented by modern warfare technology and tactics. How does the advent of global terrorism, total war, area bombing, chemical and biological weapons, nuclear confrontation and drone warfare fit into the traditional ethical schemas of conflict? Does the reality of life on the front line, the civilian costs of conflict and the mass slaughter of Passchendaele and the Somme put paid to any philosophical argument that war can be anything short of a moral disaster? It is hoped that through exposure and reflection on the actuality of war, students will be better equipped to come to a more balanced and grounded conclusion as to its ultimate ethical nature.

12) The Ethics of War

Given the widespread death and destruction that inevitably result from it, war must be regarded as one of the most pressing arenas for ethical appraisal, but it is an arena in which traditional moral prohibitions appear either difficult to maintain philosophically, or else are subject to perennial and egregious violation. When, if ever, can armed conflict be morally justified? What are the ‘Just War’ criteria, how are they grounded and applied, and are we right to draw ethical distinctions between decisions to go to war and the actual conduct within them? Does intending a death and merely foreseeing that it will occur as a result of our actions represent a significant moral distinction, or is all killing in war equivalent to murder? Is pacifism a defensible position, or in times of war do the pressures of power and survival overrule all moral constraints? This seminar will engage with each of these important issues through considering some seminal contributions to the ethics of war, and by drawing upon the multiple moral perspectives considered in the first half of the course.
13) Terrorism

This seminar will tackle one of the most prominent – and indeed divisive – ethical issues of recent times, the moral status of terrorism. The first part of the seminar will analyse the phenomenon of terrorism itself. What is its nature and how should we define it? Does it count as warfare? What distinguishes a terrorist from a freedom fighter? The second part of the seminar, drawing upon the range of ethical perspectives reflected on during the course, will then consider perhaps the paramount question: can it ever be justified? Might terrorists legitimately deny the innocence of their victims? Can terrorism be a permissible means to securing valuable social goods or human rights? Might it be the only option in extreme circumstances? Following the seminar, students are encouraged to pay a visit to the 7/7 London Bombings Memorial, a brief walk from Fordham’s London Centre in adjacent Hyde Park. Here students can reflect upon the reality of terrorism outside of classroom discussions.

FURTHER READING


14) Torture

The penultimate seminar of the course will move to consider an issue that has become increasingly intertwined with terrorism and our response to it, that of torture. As with the former, our instinctive
reactions to the practice of torture seem to paint it as a particularly abhorrent wrong, a type of moral violation going beyond the mere infliction of suffering. Why is this? What features of torture are of particular normative significance? Its violation of an individual’s autonomy and rights? The apparent powerlessness of the victim? Or how treating individuals as mere means impacts upon the humanity of the perpetrator? The issue of torture also raises a classic dilemma for ethicists to consider — the so-called ‘ticking-bomb’ scenario. How strongly can we hold to our ethical principles in the face of extreme consequences? Can we really balance a prohibition against torture against a threat to millions of lives? In this session we will consider the merits of this potential justification.

CORE READING


FURTHER READING


15) Ethics and World Poverty

This final seminar focuses discussion on ethics and global poverty, a topic that is at the forefront of much international normative discourse, and which demands serious philosophical reflection. What do people in more developed countries owe to those who suffer from poverty, famine or oppression in other parts of the world? Do we hold responsibilities to help remedy their predicament, no different from those we hold to family, fellow nationals, or those in our immediate vicinity? Are national boundaries largely irrelevant, as ‘cosmopolitans’ argue? The seminar will consider some of the leading arguments for such a position before bringing in alternative, non-cosmopolitan arguments that seek to challenge its claims. Whilst seemingly enlightened, how intuitive do we actually find the idea of unbounded obligations to help others around the world? Do we instead have special obligations to our own political community and fellow nationals, because of the important role they play in our lives? Is the call to help those suffering in far-off places a call for charity, rather than duty? The seminar will evaluate which set of arguments is ultimately the stronger.

CORE READING


— Simon Caney, Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory (2006), Chapter 4

FURTHER READING
