



OXFORD ADVANCED PRE-SESSIONAL COURSE FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Applied Ethics

Course Content

Moral philosophy is an engaging discipline that affects us all. Every time we open a newspaper or visit a news website we are confronted with moral dilemmas that are difficult to answer. Many of these issues have concerned us since ancient times (a number of civilizations are believed to have carried out abortions, Plato objected to the Sophists' use of free speech) but the debates change as cultures evolve and technology advances.

Ethics is divided into two disciplines: theoretical and practical, or applied, ethics. To appreciate fully the concerns in applied ethics it is necessary to have a good working knowledge of the main branches of theoretical ethics and this is what the first two weeks of the course focus on. Beginning with theories rooted in purpose and consequence and moving on to those that come from duty and motivation, students will develop a keen appreciation of the main theories.

The bulk of the course examines some of the most important areas of applied ethics that concern us today. We start by looking at whether preventing or terminating life medically is ever acceptable before moving on to look at different moral approaches to theories of punishment. After this, the course moves on to address the subject of war and peace before looking at the issue of liberalism and harm in relation to free speech and action. Finally, we will look at how intensive farming and industrialization have affected environmental concerns before ending by looking at whether morality itself is factual or a matter of opinion.

Students will be studying contemporary ethical theories and students will be expected to critically examine these theories and the guidance they give in dealing with moral problems.

Weekly Outline

- 1: Morality and purpose: utilitarianism and virtue ethics
- 2: Morality and duty: Kant and religious ethics
- 3: Medical ethics: abortion and euthanasia
- 4: Crime and punishment: retributivism, deterrence and rehabilitation



OXFORD ADVANCED PRE-SESSIONAL COURSE FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Applied Ethics

- 5: War and peace
- 6: Freedom of speech and freedom of action
- 7: Environmental ethics and animal rights
- 8: Meta-ethics: are 'good' and 'bad' meaningful terms?

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students will be expected to:

- Have a knowledge and understanding of the attempts made by ethical theorists to address the problems faced in applied ethics.
- Have learnt how to offer arguments for and against the main positions introduced and have learnt skills in the analysis and critical assessment of arguments.
- Have gained confidence in expressing ideas in class discussion.

Background Reading

- La Follette, H. ed., Ethics in Practice
- Kant, Immanuel., Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.
- Glover, J., Causing Death and Saving Lives
- Mill, J.S., Utilitarianism
- Bowie, A. Ethical Studies
- Singer, Peter., Rethinking life and death
- Vardy, P. and Grosch, P., The Puzzle of Ethics