

# Practical Ethics

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You should write **8 essays** in total. Please email me your essays by **2pm on the day before our meeting**. Your essay should be about **1,000 to 1,500 words** in length. Don't tackle everything in a single essay and be selective about your readings. The reading lists below are quite extensive, so that you can follow up on the issues you find interesting. Pick one interesting aspect of the topic, pick an argument/view that you like or dislike, and try to come up with interesting arguments. Try to have a clear structure and write in a simple and concise manner.

Useful resources:

<https://philpapers.org>

<https://plato.stanford.edu>

Podcasts:

<http://www.philosophybites.com>

Advice on writing philosophy essays:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

<http://oyc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/philosophy-paper.pdf>

## Week 1

### The Moral Demands of Affluence

Essay topic:

1. What, if anything, can be said in favour of the view that proximity matters when it comes to our duties to help others?

*Key reading*

- Peter Singer (1972) Famine, affluence, and morality. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, 229-243.
- Frances M. Kamm (2000) Does distance matter morally to the duty to rescue? *Law and Philosophy* 19, 655-681.

*Further reading*

- Peter Unger (1996) Living high and letting die: our illusion of innocence (OUP) – pp. 3-13, 24-61.
- Richard W. Miller (2004) Beneficence, duty, and distance. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 32, 357-383.

## Week 2

### Effective Altruism and Deciding Whom to Help

Essay topic (pick one):

1. Is there a duty to give to charity? If so, what does it require?

**OR**

2. Is it wrong to perform an act that is much worse than another, if it is no costlier to you to perform the better act? What implications does your answer have for our obligations to give to charity?

### *Key reading*

- William MacAskill (2015) *Doing good better* (Guardian/Faber & Faber) – Chs. 2-3.
- Jeff McMahan (2017) *Doing good and doing the best*. In Woodruff, ed. *Philanthropy and philosophy* (OUP) (Forthcoming. Available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20210413013026/http://jeffersonmcmahan.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Doing-Good-Doing-the-Best.pdf>)

### *Further reading*

- Theron Pummer (2016) *Whether and where to give*. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 44, 77-95.
- Iason Gabriel (2016) *Effective altruism and its critics*. *The Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33.
- Elizabeth Ashford (2017) *Severe poverty as an unjust emergency*. In Woodruff, ed. *Philanthropy and philosophy* (OUP) (Forthcoming. Available via WebLearn at Humanities > Faculty of Philosophy > Undergraduate Courses > Learning Resources > Reading Lists > Practical Ethics > Ashford Severe Poverty.pdf.)

## **Week 3**

### **Collective Action and Cumulative Impact**

Essay topic:

1. Could there be instances of wrongdoing where no particular individual has done anything wrong? What does your answer suggest about how we should think about the climate change?

### *Key reading*

- Shelly Kagan (2011) *Do I make a difference?* *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 39, 104-141.
- Julia Nefsky (2011) *Consequentialism and the problem of collective harm: a reply to Kagan*. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 39, 364-395.

- Julia Nefsky (2017) How you can help, without making a difference. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*. Vol. 174, No. 11

*Further reading*

- Frank Jackson (1987) Group morality. In Smart, Pettit, Sylvan, and Norman, eds. *Metaphysics and morality: essays in honour of J. J. C. Smart*, 42-53 (Blackwell).
- Margaret Gilbert (2013) *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World* (OUP), Chs. 1, 3 and 10.
- Philip Pettit (2007) Responsibility Incorporated. *Ethics* 117, 171-201.
- Derek Parfit (1984) *Reasons and persons* (OUP) – Ch. 3.

## **Week 4**

### **The Non-Identity Problem**

Essay topic:

1. Can an act be wrong even if it doesn't harm anyone? What does your answer imply about what we owe to future generations?

**OR**

2. From a practical point of view, how serious is the non-identity problem?

*Key reading*

- Derek Parfit (1984) *Reasons and persons* (OUP) - Ch. 16.
- Jeff McMahan (2013) Causing people to exist and saving people's lives. *Journal of Ethics* 17, 5-35.

### *Further reading*

- Melinda Roberts (2015) The non-identity problem. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nonidentity-problem/>
- Melinda Roberts. (2007) The non-identity fallacy: harm, probability and another look at Parfit's depletion example. *Utilitas* 19, 267-311.
- James Woodward (1986) The non-identity problem. *Ethics* 86, 804-31.
- Elizabeth Harman (2004) Can we harm and benefit in creating? *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, 89-113.

## **Week 5**

### **Human Enhancement**

Essay topic:

1. 'The fact that there isn't a very clear line to be drawn between biomedical enhancement and other forms of more ordinary enhancement does not mean that biomedical enhancement is not morally objectionable.' Do you agree?

### *Key reading*

- Frances M. Kamm (2009) What is and is not wrong with enhancement? In Bostrom and Savulescu, eds. *Human enhancement* (OUP), pp. 91-130.
- Nick Bostrom and Rebecca Roache (2008) Ethical issues in human enhancement. In Ryberg, Peterson, and Wolf, eds., *New waves in applied ethics* (Palgrave MacMillan), pp. 120-152.

### *Further reading*

- Julian Savulescu (2001) Procreative beneficence: why we should select the best children. *Bioethics* 15, 413-26.
- Alberto Giubilini and Sagar Sanyal (2015) The ethics of human enhancement. *Philosophy Compass* 10, 233-243.

- Michael Sandel (2004) The case against perfection: what's wrong with designer children, bionic athletes, and genetic engineering. In Bostrom and Savulescu, eds. Human enhancement (OUP), pp. 71-90.
- Leon R. Kass (2003) Ageless bodies, happy souls: biotechnology and the pursuit of perfection. The New Atlantis <http://www.thenewatlantis.com/doclib/tna01-kass.pdf>
- Robert Sparrow (2011) A not-so-new eugenics. Hastings Center Report 41: 32-42.

## Week 6

### Abortion

Essay topic:

1. 'The question of whether abortion is morally permissible or not ultimately boils down to the question of whether the foetus is a person or not.' Is this correct?

*Key reading*

- Michael Tooley (1972) Abortion and infanticide. Philosophy & Public Affairs 2, 37-65.
- Judith Jarvis Thomson (1971) A defense of abortion. Philosophy & Public Affairs 1, 47-66.

*Further reading*

- Don Marquis (1989) Why abortion is immoral. Journal of Philosophy 86, 183-202.
- Dan Moller (2011) Abortion and Moral Risk. Philosophy 86, 425-443.

## Week 7

### Death

Essay topic:

1. When all is equal, is the death of a person A less bad than the death of a person B if B is younger than A? Why? Why not?

**OR**

2. Most people, when nearing the end of life, wish that they could live longer by postponing death, though they are largely indifferent to the possibility that they could have lived longer by having come into existence earlier. Both Lucretius and Hume thought that our indifference to the possibility of an earlier beginning to our existence shows that we should be equally indifferent to the possibility of a later death. Were they right?

**OR**

3. When is death bad for the one who dies?

*Key reading*

- Nagel, T. (1970). Death. *Noûs*, 4(1), 73-80.
- Ben Bradley (2004). When Is Death Bad for the One Who Dies? *Noûs*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 1-28.

*Further reading*

- Steven Luper (2014) Death. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/death/>
- Thomas Nagel (1979) Death. In his *Mortal Questions* (CUP), 1-10.
- Shelly Kagan (2012) *Death* (Yale UP).
- Jeff McMahan (2002) *The ethics of killing: problems at the margins of life* – Ch. 2.
- Ben Bradley (2009) *Well-Being and death* (OUP).
- John Broome (2013) *The badness of death and the goodness of life*. In Bradley, Feldman, and Johansson, eds., *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of death* (OUP), 218-233.

## Week 8

### The Moral Status of Non-Human Animals

Essay topic:

1. What, if anything, is wrong with speciesism?

**OR**

2. If we were to coexist with a new generation of genetically enhanced human beings whose psychological capacities would exceed our own by almost as much as ours exceed those of chimpanzees, would they have a higher moral status than we have or would we be their moral equals? Does your answer have any implications for our moral relation to other animals?

*Key reading*

- Peter Singer (1975) *Animal liberation* (Pimlico) – Ch. 1
- Shelly Kagan (2016) What's wrong with speciesism? *Journal of Applied philosophy* 33, 1-21.

*Further reading*

- Tom Regan (1980) *Animal rights, human wrongs*. *Environmental Ethics* 2, 99-120.
- Christine Korsgaard (2015) *A Kantian Case for Animal Rights*. In Tatjana Višak and Robert Garner, eds., *The Ethics of Killing Animals* (OUP), 154-77.
- Jeff McMahan (2008) *Eating animals the nice way*. *Daedalus* 137, 1-11.