

**PHIL3833  
Applied Ethics**

**Course Outline**

**Time : Thur 3.30-5.15 pm**

**Location : LSK 302**

**Tutorial time : Thur 5.25-6.15 pm**

**Course overview (as shown on CUSIS)**

Are practices like assisted dying, or same-sex marriage, ethically permissible, and how should society regulate them? Do we have an obligation to devote some of our resources to help those living in severe poverty, and if so, how demanding is that obligation? Should I still reduce my level of greenhouse gas emissions if I can expect that my own contribution will have very little impact on global warming? This course will offer an introduction to applied ethics, the branch of ethics that considers what we ought to do about various practical problems of the kind just described. After a brief review of the general field of ethics, with a particular focus on *normative* ethics and the main ethical theories of consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics (as well as some of the challenges to normative ethics and the alternatives that have been proposed), we will discuss how we can use those theories (and ethical reasoning more generally) to address major ethical issues at the centre of contemporary human life.

Advisory to Majors: to be taken in year 2 or above.

**Learning outcomes (as shown on CUSIS)**

1. Gain familiarity with the major issues and prominent positions in contemporary applied ethics.
2. Understand the key concepts used in philosophical discussions of those issues.
3. Critically discuss and evaluate the main arguments and positions on the issues discussed in the course.
4. Demonstrate the ability to clearly articulate one's own arguments and views on applied issues, both in oral discussion and in writing.

**Topics**

1. The nature of applied ethics and its relation to ethical theory
2. Abortion
3. Euthanasia and assisted suicide
4. The moral status of animals
5. Same-sex marriage
6. Poverty reduction
7. Environmental ethics

**Learning activities**

One lecture (2 hours) and one tutorial (one hour) per week

One book chapter or article to read each week

Assignments : one paper and one take-home exam

**Assessment scheme**

<i>Task nature</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Participation in tutorials	One oral presentation, and active participation in discussion in other tutorials	30%
Paper	Write a paper (2500-3000 words long, in English) on a topic covered in the course	35%
Take-home exam	To be completed within a week	35%

#### **Remarks on Assessment Scheme (if any)**

For papers submitted late, a penalty of 5% of the final grade will be applied for each day that has elapsed since the deadline for submission.

Participation in tutorials is mandatory: after one unexcused absence, 2% will be subtracted from the final grade per additional unexcused absence.

#### **Recommended learning resources**

Our basic textbook for this course will be LaFollette, Hugh (ed.). *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013 (henceforth abbreviated “*Ethics in Practice*”). The full book is available online via the CUHK library catalogue (LibrarySearch).

Other useful resources that can be consulted on this topic include:

Cohen, Andrew I. & Wellman, Christopher Heath (eds.). *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*, 2nd edition, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Frey, R. G. (ed.). *A Companion to Applied Ethics*, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Lippert-Rasmussen, Kasper, Brownlee, Kimberlee, & Coady, David (eds.). *A Companion to Applied Philosophy*, Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

Singer, Peter. *Practical Ethics*, 3rd edition, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2011.

#### Reading list :

Arthur, John. “Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code”. In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 563-70.

Corvino, John. “Missing Staircases and the Marriage Debate: Is Same-Sex Marriage Bad for Children?”. In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 233-38.

Gallagher, Maggie. “What Is Marriage For? Children Need Mothers and Fathers”. In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 239-44.

Hooker, Brad. “Rule-Utilitarianism and Euthanasia”. In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 76-84.

Hourdequin, Marion. “Climate, Collective Action and Individual Ethical Obligations”. *Environmental Values* 19 (2010), pp. 443-64.

Johnson, Baylor L. “Ethical Obligations in a Tragedy of the Commons”. *Environmental Values* 12:3 (2003), pp. 271-87.

Kagan, Shelly. “What’s Wrong with Speciesism”? *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33:1 (2016), pp. 1-21.

Kuper, Andrew. “More Than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the ‘Singer Solution’”. *Ethics and International Affairs* 16:2 (2002), pp. 107-20.

LaFollette, Hugh. “Theorizing about Ethics”. In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 3-10.

Marquis, Don. “An Argument that Abortion is Wrong”. In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 141-50.

Singer, Peter. "All Animals are Equal". In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 172-80.

Singer, Peter. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality". In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 554-62.

Singer, Peter. "Why Speciesism is Wrong: A Response to Kagan". *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33:1 (2016), pp. 31-35.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "A Defense of Abortion". In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 124-31.

Velleman, David. "Against the Right to Die". In *Ethics in Practice*, pp. 92-100.

### Course schedule

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Required reading</i>	<i>Tutorials</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1	Introduction: ethical theories and applied ethics	LaFollette, "Theorizing about Ethics"	None	
2	Abortion	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"	None	
3	Abortion	Marquis, "An Argument that Abortion is Wrong"		
4	Euthanasia and assisted suicide	Hooker, "Rule-Utilitarianism and Euthanasia"		
5	Euthanasia and assisted suicide	Velleman, "Against the Right to Die"		
6	<b>No class</b>	None	None	Lunar New Year
7	The moral status of animals	Singer, "All Animals are Equal"		
8	The moral status of animals	Kagan, "What's Wrong with Speciesism?"*		Topics for paper
9	Same-sex marriage	Gallagher, "What Is Marriage For?"		
10	Same-sex marriage	Corvino, "Missing Staircases and the Marriage Debate"		<b>Paper due</b>
11	Poverty reduction	Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"		
12	<b>No class</b>	None	None	Reading week
13	Poverty reduction	Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code"**		
14	Environmental ethics	Johnson, "Ethical Obligations in a Tragedy of the Commons"		
15	Environmental ethics	Hourdequin, "Climate, Collective Action and Individual Ethical Obligations"		
16	<b>Take-home exam</b>		None	

\* Optional additional reading: Singer, "Why Speciesism is Wrong: A Response to Kagan"

\*\* Optional additional reading: Kuper, "More Than Charity"

### Details of course website

The materials for this course, including readings, lecture slides (PowerPoint), and assignments, will all be

posted on Blackboard as the term unfolds.

#### Contact details for teacher(s) or TA(s)

<b>Teacher</b>	
Name:	Alexandre Erler
Office location:	Room 416, Fung King Hey Building
Office hours :	Mon 2-4 pm, or by appointment
Telephone:	3943 7139
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<b>TA</b>	
Name:	Gao Feiyan
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#### Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed **declaration** that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.