



Applied Philosophy

Stage 5 BOSTES approved elective

St. Leo's Catholic College

Ksenia Filatov



BOARD OF STUDIES
NEW SOUTH WALES

Journey

- Initiated by **Constantin Lomaca**
(then Director of Teaching and Learning at Leo's)
- Inspired by **Dominic Hearne's** (Waverley College) visit to Leo's in March 2014
- Principal's (**Tony Gleeson's**) approval to develop course
- Application to BOSTES & Endorsement (Constantin & Ksenia) - June 2014
- Course began at the start of 2016 with the first cohort of 18 year 9 students

Course outline - Year 9

Topic 1: Historical Foundations

Topic 2: Science



Taught by Constantin

Topic 3: Ethics

Topic 4: Art



Taught by Ksenia

Course outline - Year 10

Topic 1: Psychology

Topic 2: Critical Thinking

Topic 3: Literature

Topic 4: Future Problem Solving

Ethics overview

Content

Moral judgements

Teleological/deontological Ethics

Virtue Ethics

Kantian Ethics

Utilitarianism

Thought experiments

Some of the cases

Cannibalism for survival (student)

Stealing to survive (student)

Culling one species to protect another

“Finders-keepers” (student)

Trolley Problem

Migration/refugee crisis - Greece

Designer Babies

Assessment overview

- 5 journal entries
- Participation in small discussion circle
- Written assignment
- Oral examination

Introduction: what is Ethics?

What is a moral judgement?

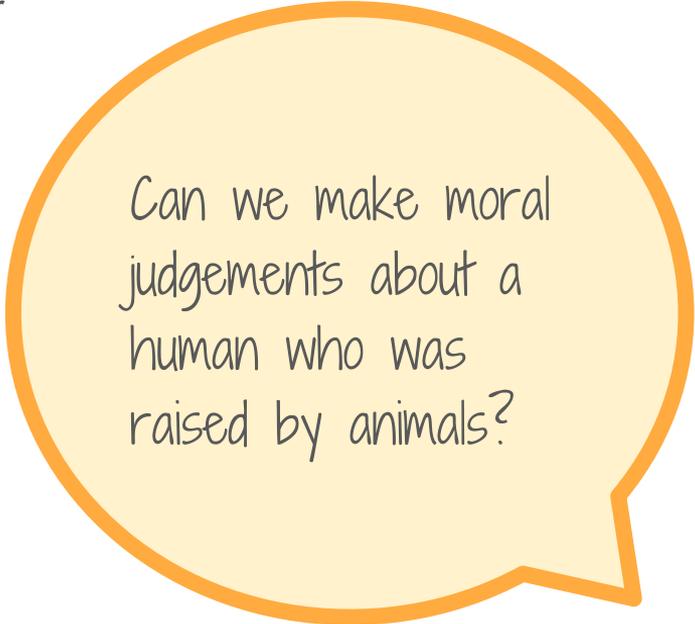
Cases: cannibalism for survival, stealing for survival.

Would we judge a wolf the same way we would judge a human for eating another human?

Student-generated criteria

A moral judgement is...

- made about behaviour which is intentional
- made about actions carried out by people (beings capable of having morals)
- made about actions which have positive or negative impacts on self or others



Can we make moral judgements about a human who was raised by animals?

Sorting out judgements

- Mao's Last Dancer is a good book
- What Chairman Mao did to Chinese culture was wrong
- Lisa is a good cat; she always comes when she is called
- He was a good person
- The weather was bad
- The level of punishment was right for the crime
- He made the right choice in the menu
- She made the right choice in her career
- He made the right choice in his vote for the proposed bill on asylum seekers
- She made the wrong decision for the future of the company

Categories:

Moral judgement

Non-moral judgement

“It depends”

It depends...

- The weather was bad
- He made the right choice in the menu
- She made the right choice in her career

Journal entry #1

In class you had to choose one "It depends" judgement from the list I gave you and come up with a scenario where it would classify as a moral judgement and a scenario where it would be a non-moral judgement.

For the first journal entry, describe the two scenarios and REFLECT on:

- what, in essence, is the difference between moral and non-moral judgements?

- what did this exercise make you understand about moral judgements?

It depends

'The weather is bad today'. In the context of naturally occurring weather this statement would be considered a non-moral judgement, based on the assumptions made in class, as it does not judge the actions of any being capable of morals. However, in order to classify the statement as a moral judgement, by fitting the predefined assumptions from the class, the context can be changed to be a statement which judges the weather in a world in which [the weather] is controlled by a being capable of morals, where the judgement would then refer to the actions of this being in the course of changing the weather to unfavourable conditions.

If we use another example, we can further extend the [class's] definition. You are in a hospital and you turn off the life support systems for a person, causing them to die as a result. A judgement saying it is the wrong choice is a moral one. If you turn off the life support systems when the person no longer needs them, it is simply a matter of common sense rather than morals. The difference between the two now is that one is a decision which has an impact on the other person. Perhaps we could say that a moral judgement has to be a judgement upon the actions of a being capable of morals where the outcome has the possibility of affecting another or themselves either positively or negatively.

This exercise has made me realise just what a complex issue moral judgements are. I realise that many judgements can be changed from moral to non-moral by simply changing the context. The difficulty, I find, is how to draw the line between an impact from a decision that is either great enough to be considered moral or not.

Wildlife officials weigh an ethical dilemma: Killing barred owls to benefit spotted owls

Eric Mortenson, The Oregonian By Eric Mortenson, The Oregonian

Follow on Twitter

on February 28, 2012 at 6:00 AM, updated February 28, 2012 at 9:23 AM



Federal wildlife officials in charge of protecting the **northern spotted owl** will release today a long-awaited environmental impact statement that lays out alternatives for killing **barred owls**, a larger, more aggressive and more adaptive species that has displaced spotted owls through much of their range in Oregon, Washington and north

The draft document lists a number of barred owl estimated cost of

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Officials acknowledge **benefit and** land in northern territories in ev

Also today, the wildlife is considered critical habitat agencies such as the Forest Service approving logging, road building or other actions. Some worry the designations will add another layer of review and the impact on

Should we interfere or let nature take its course?

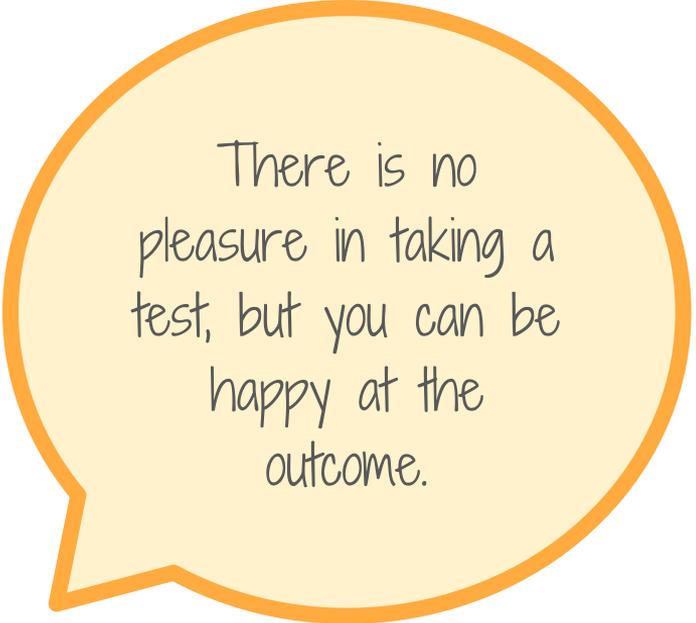
Why is one species more valuable than another?

Happiness vs. pleasure

Utilitarianism

Is happiness the same thing as pleasure?

Cases: eating, working/charity work,
watching a sports game



There is no
pleasure in taking a
test, but you can be
happy at the
outcome.

Ideas from the class

Pleasure: short-term/instantaneous, related
to actions

Happiness: long-term, related to outcomes

Journal entry #2

Imagine that due to advances in neuroscience, scientists have been able to invent a machine that could give us whatever desirable or pleasurable experiences we could want. They call it the "experience machine". Psychologists have figured out a way to stimulate a person's brain to induce pleasurable experiences that the subject could not distinguish from those he would have apart from the machine. Would you opt to be plugged into the "experience machine" for good?

1. Play with this thought experiment through discussion, you are encouraged to pose questions too. Relate your discussion to some of the ideas about pleasure/happiness proposed by your peers in class. Summarise what you learnt.
2. Decide whether you would choose to be plugged in or not and justify your answer.

Students' responses:

- A life in the real world has an impact on others, while one in the machine does not. People in the machine would depart the world without accomplishing anything, and waste all of the potential that they possessed.
- The great thing about an unplugged life is that we are allowed, if we choose, to wander aimlessly throughout life making our own decisions. Being imprisoned by a predetermined program would mean having no real choices after plugging in. And to me there is a great deal of satisfaction in carving your own path in life and learning from mistakes.
- For me, I would not be plugged in as it would be too risky. I like living life normally not in a machine. Pleasure might also be different for some people, like getting through a hard challenge you would feel pleasure after that. But in the machine you would only have pleasurable experiences and not the bad parts of life you have to get through. Also you get no sense of achievement.

Students' responses:

Firstly, pleasure will not bring me authentic and genuine love I receive from my parents. I may receive pleasure from some affection but I would not acquire happiness out of artificial love because it wouldn't feel right if my mum was lenient and gentle all the time. I would prefer her lecturing me into how to better myself which is, with certainty, not pleasurable but obligatory. Secondly, I do not deserve it. I would want to live my life and explore the world as an independent, competent, normal person, capable of finding my own happiness and not being dependent on a machine to occupy me.

Students' responses:

I want to live my life and overcome challenges to better myself as a person, experience good and bad and benefit the world. It would be thoughtless and greedy to be plugged into a machine acknowledging that we are not at peace. This is ultimately a facile way out of difficulties. I take pleasure from eating rainbow cupcakes and riding a flying unicorn with inexhaustible quantities of cash pouring on me, but knowing that some parts of world are in poverty, corruption and prejudice, I would not be happy. Lastly, I may not take pleasure from learning, but life is also about learning new concepts and ideas. I'd rather be open-minded and attentive about my surroundings than an obstinate, greedy person plugged into a machine.

Kantian Ethics

Scenario 1: Tom's friend finds a \$20 note and Tom promises not to tell anyone. Later, the principal announces that someone has lost \$20 and desperately needs it. Tom suggests to his friend to give it back, but his friend refuses and reminds Tom of his promise. What should Tom do?

- Identify the 2 moral principles in conflict
- Can you will for "finders-keepers" to be a universal law?

Scenario 2: Finding an expensive pair of glasses on the bus.

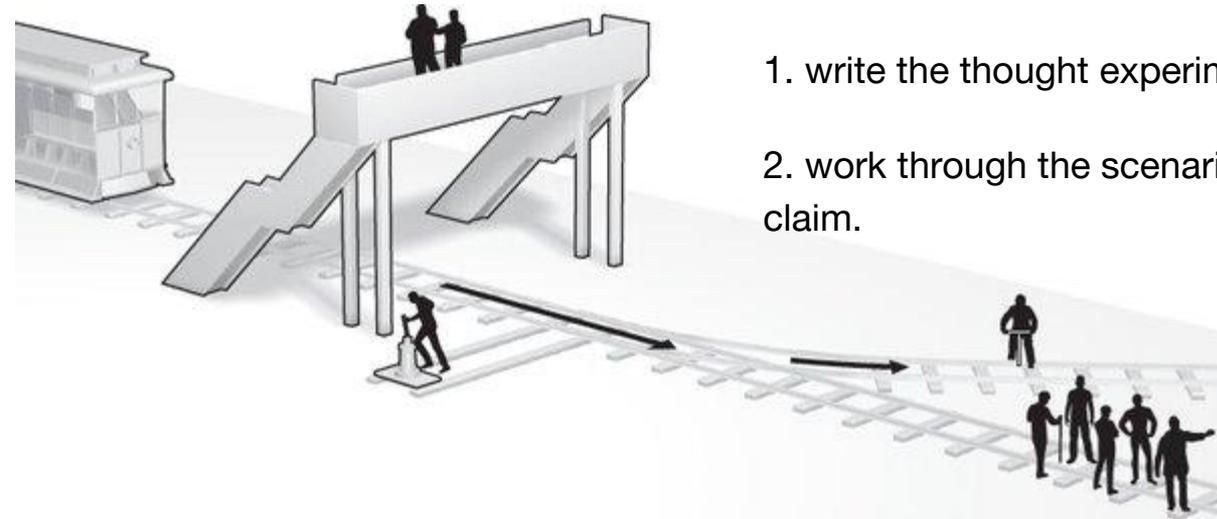
Thought experiments

Journal entry #3

For this journal entry, you need to come up with your own thought experiment to test or challenge the following claim:

Claim: The right thing to do is always to bring the greatest pleasure to the greatest number of people affected by what you do.

1. write the thought experiment scenario
2. work through the scenario and explain how it challenges the claim.



Students' responses:

Imagine that a powerful king is after a newborn and will kill it should he catch it. He has also proclaimed that anyone caught helping to hide it will be executed. You can hide the baby by staying in the houses and farms of strangers as you run away, however this will result in the execution of those who help/shelter you. Should you try and protect the baby or sacrifice it so no one else will get hurt?



Leon Cogniet (1824) *Le Massacre des Innocents*

Students' responses:



Imagine that in one year the earth is going to explode and you are the only person who is able to stop it. There are two boxes placed in front of you with a button under each of them. Under one of the boxes the button will stop the earth from exploding and save everyone's life, but under the other box the button will explode the earth the moment you press it. You don't know which button does what and you only have five minutes to decide what to do and you will not have another chance to press it. You can either leave the buttons and die in a year or try to stop that from happening by pressing one of the buttons. What would you do?

Migrants locked in stadium on Kos for nearly 24 h

Up to 2,500 mostly Syrian and Afghan refugees held in stadium on Greek island after explosion to maintain order



Patrick Kingsley
and Jon Henley

Thursday 12

Last modified
2015 03.3

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Up to 2,500 refugees in Kos were locked in a stadium for nearly 24 hours, after riot police tried to contain crowds of recent migrant arrivals rounded up from makeshift camps around the island. On Wednesday afternoon, after being locked inside for about 18 hours, the mostly Syrian and Afghan refugees were fainting at a rate of four each hour, aid workers said.

About 1,000 of the refugees were trapped inside a playground within the stadium complex, without access to water or shade. A further 1,500 were housed in a separate section of the stadium, with some protection from the sun.

Constance Theisen, a team leader for Médecins sans Frontières, which was providing medical care at the stadium, told the Guardian: "We have unconscious people coming out of the stadium, some brought by their friends and family, every 15 minutes."

Is detention of refugees in poor conditions acceptable?

Is it fair for Greece to have to deal with this?

Whose responsibility is it to help refugees?

NEWS

'Designer babies' debate should start, scientists say

James Gallagher
Health editor, BBC News website

January 2015 | Health



Rapid progress in genetics is making "designer babies" more likely and society needs to be prepared, leading scientists have told the BBC.

Dr Tony Perry, a pioneer in cloning, has announced precise DNA editing at the moment of conception in mice.

Is it right to make changes to human DNA?

Is creating a perfect child unfair?

What are the dangers of doing this?

ONE NATION UNDER CCTV: THE FUTURE OF AUTOMATED SURVEILLANCE

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Arts + Culture Business + Economy Education **Environment + Energy** Health

Whose job is it to clear up all floating in the oceans?

April 7, 2014 3.16pm AEST



Australian inequality rising as top 20% increase wealth and income - report

Top earners are now pulling in five times as much as those at the bottom and the wealthiest have 70 times the assets of the poorest, the Australian Council of Social Service says, as it calls for a stronger social safety net



The New York Times | <http://nyti.ms/1NnJq7w>

EUROPE

Migrant Influx Prompts Macedonia, Britain and France to Increase Security

By ALISON SMALE and STEPHEN CASTLE AUG. 20, 2015

BERLIN — Europe's migration crisis took on new dimensions Thursday as at least three countries announced added security measures to address the biggest movement of refugees and migrants seen here since the aftermath of World War II.

The sheer numbers of migrants are now clogging critical choke points across Europe. In July alone, 107,500 migrants entered the 28-nation European Union, according to Frontex, the bloc's border management agency. That was more than three times the number in the same month last

Part 2: A written assignment based on discussions (800-1200 words)

Select any of the four articles (even if you did not base your small discussion circle on this article) as the basis for your written assignment. Clearly outline the ethical issues/dilemmas raised by the article. Pose 3-4 ethical questions, ranging from specific to more general. Systematically discuss the questions, with reference to different perspectives and (at least 2) ethical frameworks. Evaluate the different perspectives/frameworks and come to a conclusion. When evaluating, consider which ethical framework(s) are/is *most appropriate* for thinking about the issue and why. Explain which perspective / alternative *better aligns with your ethical understanding* and why. Ensure your final conclusion is clearly and logically justified.

Journal entry #5 (full marks guaranteed)

Reflect on your learning in this term.

1. What has been the most interesting topic/framework/discussion this term and why?
2. What do you think about the different ethical frameworks, which one(s) appeal(s) to you and why?
3. What will you take away from this topic / what new perspectives have you gained / what skills have you developed? Be honest.

Student reflections on Ethics topic



This term on Ethics has been extremely interesting for me as I have been able to look at ideas of what is good and just plus how we should live our lives, rather than just having morally acceptable ideas of how to live your life handed to you expecting you to follow them without question. I would have to say that the most interesting have definitely been the discussions around the exchanging of one person in order to save many others and people's views on the idea of sacrifice. I think the main reason I have enjoyed this is because it is not often in life you get to discuss whether you would push a man in the way of a train or not without people thinking you're crazy.



Recently, I read a collection of newspaper articles on various issues such as migration, marriage equality, and domestic violence against women. I found myself speaking up, having an opinion and more importantly, having a much more informed opinion which could be related back to ethics, and perspectives, frameworks and discussions easily, and displayed my learnings from this term. My arguments are stronger and though this topic has been very challenging, it has been very useful and equipped me with skills that I didn't know I needed, but now seem vital.



I really enjoyed the Ethics topic, although it was difficult at first to understand. It became much easier once we got into depth with each perspective. Learning these new perspectives will help me reason out difficult decisions in the future and make moral judgements about them. The skills I've developed from this topic is learning how to make rational and better decisions through the use of these ethical frameworks. It will help me out in my life in the future, such as deciding courses for a career and what I can do to help out those around me.



I think that I have gained new ways of thinking about things and making decisions. I've started to think more about what I'm saying and what I'm doing, with Kant's ideas of never using people as a means to an end constantly playing in the back of my mind, or wondering what kind of person it would make me if I said this or did that. I have been able to notice things about what other people are saying and how they're acting, as well as myself, and it's been interesting to be able to put a label, of sorts, on how the people around me think and being able to suggest different ways of thinking and seeing how they react. I've quite liked this topic, and I've enjoyed hearing other people's thoughts on topics and having my mind changed, especially on ideas and opinions that I would have previously been very stubborn about.

Oral Examination

On the day of the exam, you will be put into groups of 3. You will be called up in groups, each person will pick a question out of a “hat” and you will take turns to respond to the questions orally. There will be follow up questions to help you.

Oral Examination

1. What are Virtue Ethics? What are the limitations of Virtue Ethics? Explain and provide 1 example of how this framework can be used to make a decision in real life.
2. Explain the difference between Teleontological Ethics and Deontological ethics. Refer to the origins of both terms and provide an example of how these two frameworks can be applied to the same moral real life dilemma.
3. What is a thought experiment in Ethics? What is its purpose and what are the qualities of a good thought experiment. Discuss with reference to any two thought experiments (could be made up by others or by you).
4. Explain the meaning of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"? Explain how this can be applied to guide one's action, giving a specific example. What are the limitations of this rule?
5. Explain the meaning of the phrase "the ends justify the means" using an example (can be hypothetical or historical or in daily life). What ethical framework does it relate to and in what ways is it unethical?

Written Examination

On the day of the exam, you will be given 30 min to respond to the following TWO questions.

1. Using an example from the period of Enlightenment (such as an event or figure), explain how philosophers and their ideas influenced the course of history.
2. Discuss how can we use philosophical thinking (such as questioning, reasoning, looking for evidence, etc) to help us make the best decisions for ourselves and for our society?

Parents' feedback

- ★ It is the only subject he talks at length about at home.
- ★ It has stimulated a number of philosophical discussions at home as well as paving the way to talk about the relevance of deeper, critical thinking through to university study and life in general.
- ★ As a family, we have had some very interesting dinner conversation at times, especially around assignment questions.
- ★ It has led to interesting discussion and debate at home.
- ★ It has been a favourite subject. I would think it has also impacted on the way they approach other subjects.
- ★ It is wonderful for students to have structured tuition in thinking, reasoning and the history of philosophy.
- ★ I think it has been excellent in terms of developing students' critical thinking.

Student feedback on the course as a whole



A highlight was having discussions in class. I really liked the fact that we were all given a simple dilemma at the beginning of the lesson and by the end of the lesson we would have so many different ideas and views of the whole thing. I was fun when we attempted to answer a question but to answer it we had to create more questions. This course has allowed me to broaden my mind about different views and perspectives and become more open about a topic. This course also helped me improve more of my analysing skills and to be more patient when it came to making decisions.



This course has helped me develop my ability to reason and argue logically.

This course has kind of given me the ability to write about stuff in more detail and in greater depth.

I've become a more perceptive and open-minded person, capable of analysing situations more rationally.

This course has taught me to question and create ideas. Group discussions have been a highlight because they are a way of refining questions and their answers. Another highlight was group work on tasks. When ideas were presented to the group they could be challenged and refined.

The Applied Philosophy course has been very eye-opening and made me aware of all the things about life I've overlooked and dismissed. Unlike other subjects, it has left me realising I know less than I estimated, instead of knowing more.

