

Applied Ethics and Bioethics

Wk - 1

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Overview: Today's Journey

1. Why Study Ethics?

- The gap between good intentions and right action

2. The Trolley Problem

- A thought experiment in moral decision-making

3. What is Applied Ethics?

- Definition, scope, and sub-disciplines

4. Ethics in Everyday Life

- Four thought experiments

5. The Architecture of Ethics

- Meta-ethics, normative ethics, applied ethics

6. Foundational Theories

- Consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics

7. Methodological Approaches

- Principlism and casuistry

8. Course Roadmap

- What lies ahead

The Starting Point: Why Study Ethics?

- **You Already Think You're Good**

- ❖ You don't steal. You don't lie—much. You recycle.
- ❖ You feel bad when you see suffering.
- ❖ By the standards of the world, you are decent.

- **The Uncomfortable Question**

- ❖ When was the last time you did something, you **knew was wrong**, and did it anyway? Not a mistake.
- ❖ Something you recognised, in the moment, as wrong—and chose to do.

- **The Unsettling Truth**

- ❖ You had reasons. Good reasons, even. Pressure. Exhaustion. Self-preservation.
- ❖ In that moment, the wrong thing felt **reasonable**.

The Starting Point: Why Study Ethics?, Cont.

- **The Core Problem**

- ❖ Ethics exists not because you lack character, but because:

- having good intentions is not the same as knowing how to act when intentions collide.

- **The Real Question**

- ❖ How do we navigate the space between?

- ❖ What we intend and what we actually do?

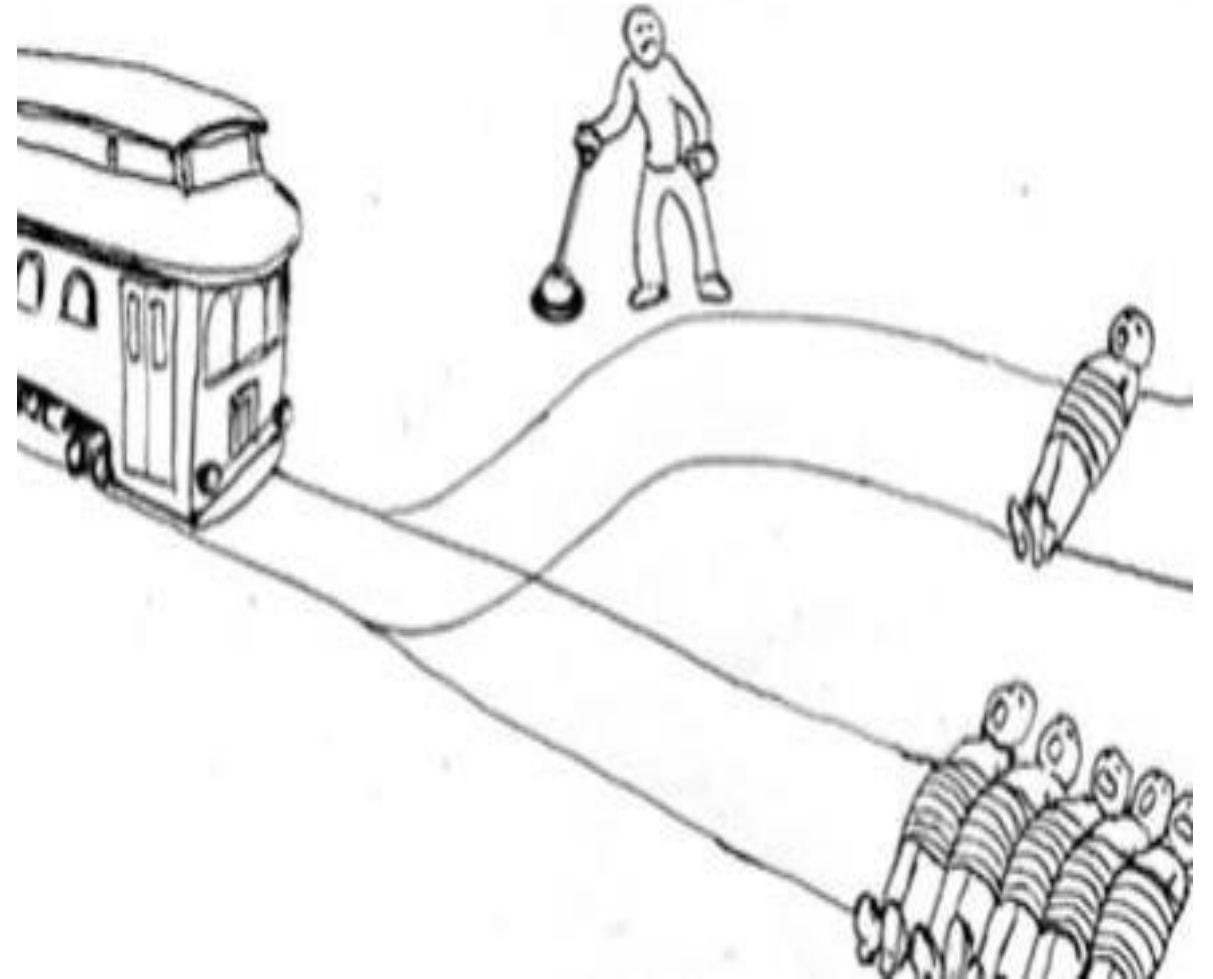
Thought Experiment: The Trolley Problem

- **The Classic Scenario:**

- ❖ A runaway trolley is heading toward **five people** tied to the track.
- ❖ You stand beside a lever that will divert the trolley onto a sidetrack where **one person** is tied.

- **The Question:**

- ❖ If you are in control of the lever, would you pull it?



Thought Experiment: The Trolley Problem, Cont.

- **Utilitarian Analysis:**

- ❖ Classical utilitarianism (Bentham, Mill) holds that the morally correct action maximises overall happiness or well-being.

- ❖ **Consequences alone determine rightness.**

- **The Utilitarian Conclusion:**

- ❖ Pulling the lever produces the better outcome—four fewer deaths.

- ❖ **You ought to pull the lever.**

- **The Calculation:**

Action	Outcome	Net Utility
Do nothing	Five die, one lives	-5 lives
Pull lever	One dies, five live	-1 life

Testing Our Intuitions: The Footbridge Variation

- **The Scenario:**

- ❖ You stand on a footbridge overlooking the tracks.
- ❖ Beside you is a **large man**.
- ❖ The only way to stop the trolley from killing the five is **to push this man off the bridge** onto the tracks.
- ❖ His body will block the trolley, **killing him but saving the five**.

- **The Question:**

- ❖ Would you push the man?

- **The Same Calculus:**

- ❖ **Do nothing:** Five die, one lives $\rightarrow$ -5 lives.

Testing Our Intuitions: The Footbridge Variation, Cont.

❖ **Push the man:** One dies, five live $\rightarrow$ -1 life.

➤ By the same arithmetic, you ought to push the man.

• The Problem

❖ Most people say pulling the lever is **permissible** but pushing the man is **wrong**.

❖ Why would the same arithmetic yield different moral verdicts?

• Two Explanations:

❖ The Doctrine of Double Effect:

➤ It is permissible to cause harm as a **foreseen side effect** of promoting a good end, but impermissible to **intend harm as a means** to that end.

➤ In the lever case, the death is a side effect. In the footbridge case, the death is the means.

Testing Our Intuitions: The Footbridge Variation, Cont.

❖ The Means Principle:

- One may not use an **innocent person as a means** to save others.
- The man on the bridge is being used as an instrument; the person on the side-track is merely collateral damage.

Definition & Scope :What is Applied Ethics?

- **Formal Definition:**

- ❖ Applied ethics is the branch of practical application of moral considerations actions and problems.

- **Key Characteristics:**

- 1. Practical Focus**

- ❖ Unlike theoretical ethics, applied ethics addresses **concrete moral dilemmas** rather than abstract theorising.

- 2. Real-World Application**

- ❖ Analyses moral issues in **private and public life, professions, health, technology, law, and leadership.**

- 3. Interdisciplinary**

- ❖ Draws upon philosophy, medicine, law, business, technology, and more.

Definition & Scope :What is Applied Ethics?, Cont.

- **Major Sub-Disciplines:**

- 1. Bioethics**

- ❖ Moral issues in medicine and life sciences: abortion, reproductive ethics, end-of-life decisions, euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide.

- 2. Business Ethics**

- ❖ Corporate responsibility, whistleblowing, fair trade, stakeholder theory, ethical leadership.

- 3. Environmental Ethics**

- ❖ Ecological responsibilities, pollution, climate change, intergenerational justice, moral status of non-human entities.

Definition & Scope :What is Applied Ethics?, Cont.

4. AI & Technology Ethics

- ❖ Algorithmic fairness, privacy, human-machine relationships, transparency, accountability in automated decision-making.
- **Global & Cross-Cultural Ethics:**
- Engagement with non-Western traditions (Confucian ethics, Buddhist ethics, etc.), cross-cultural dialogue on global challenges, diverse perspectives on "good death," ecological ethics, and leadership.

Practical Application : Ethics in Everyday Life

- Four thought experiments that reveal applied ethics is not just about dramatic life-and-death choices.

1. Applied Ethics in Your Backpack:

- You find a lost USB drive in the library. It contains what looks like a fellow student's entire term paper, plus personal photos.

- **Questions:**

- ❖ Do you look at it?

- ❖ Do you return it?

- ❖ Do you report it to the IT office?

Privacy

Honesty

Academic Integrity

Practical Application : Ethics in Everyday Life, Cont.

2. Medicine and Consent:

- A 92-year-old patient with advanced dementia refuses a simple, low-risk surgery that would relieve chronic pain.
- **The family begs the doctor:** "She doesn't know what she's refusing."

Autonomy

Paternalism

Capacity

3. Business and Data Ethics:

- A social media app notices a user showing early signs of depression based on posts, search terms, and time spent online.
- **The company can:** Show more uplifting content and targeted ads for mental health services.

Privacy

Manipulation

Corporate Responsibility

Practical Application : Ethics in Everyday Life, Cont.

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Practical Application : Ethics in Everyday Life, Cont.

4. Algorithmic Bias in Hiring:

- A company uses an AI tool to screen résumés.
- The tool was trained on past successful hires, who were mostly male.
- **The result:** The tool now systematically filters out female candidates.

Justice

Fairness

Responsibility

- **Key Insight:**

Applied ethics is about **reasoning through hard cases** rather than finding a single "right" answer.

The Architecture : Three Branches of Ethics

1. Meta-Ethics : Examines the nature of ethical properties and language.

- **Questions like:**

- ❖ What do moral terms mean?
- ❖ Are moral claims objectively true?
- ❖ Where does morality come from?
- "What is the nature of the Good?"

2. Normative Ethics : Establishes standards for right and wrong behaviour.

- **Develops foundational theories:**

- ❖ What makes actions right or wrong?
- ❖ What kind of person should I be?
- ❖ What is the good life?

The Architecture : Three Branches of Ethics, Cont.

➤ "What should I do? What kind of person should I be?"

3. Applied Ethics: Draws on both foundations to solve practical problems.

- Applies theoretical frameworks to real-world dilemmas in medicine, business, technology, environment, and more.
- "What should I do in this specific situation?"
- **The Relationship:**
 - Applied ethics draws upon both meta-ethics and **normative ethics, but normative ethics especially guides applied ethical decision-making.**
 - The foundational theories provide the frameworks we use to analyse specific cases.

Meta-Ethics → Foundation Normative Ethics → Framework Applied Ethics → Practice

Foundational Theory-I :Consequentialism

- **Core Principle:**

- ❖ The morally correct action is the one that **maximises overall happiness or well-being**.

- **Key Tenets**

- 1. Consequences Determine Rightness:**

- ❖ The outcomes of an action—not the action itself or the actor's intentions—determine whether it is morally right or wrong.

- 2. Maximise Utility:**

- ❖ We should maximise utility (wellbeing, pleasure, happiness) and minimise pain, suffering, and harm.

- 3. Everyone Counts Equally:**

- ❖ Each person's happiness or suffering counts the same—no one's interests are privileged over another's.

Foundational Theory-I :Consequentialism, Cont.

- **Key Thinkers:**

- 1. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) :**

- ❖ Founder of utilitarianism.
- ❖ Developed the "felicific calculus" to measure pleasure and pain quantitatively.

- 2. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) :**

- ❖ Distinguished between higher and lower pleasures.
- ❖ Argued that intellectual and moral pleasures are superior to physical ones.

- 3. Peter Singer (b. 1946) :**

- ❖ Contemporary utilitarian philosopher.
- ❖ Known for his work on animal rights, global poverty, and effective altruism..

Foundational Theory-I :Consequentialism, Cont.

- **Connection to Trolley Problem :**

- ❖ The trolley problem is the classic example of consequentialist reasoning.
- ❖ The utilitarian pulls the lever (and would push the man) because the outcome—saving more lives—is what matters morally.

- **Famous Quote:**

- ❖ "The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation." — Jeremy Bentham

Foundational Theory-II : Deontology & Virtue Ethics

1. Deontological Ethics: Acts have inherent rightness or wrongness regardless of consequences.

- **Key Concepts**

- ❖ **Duty-based:** Moral actions are those done from duty, not inclination or expected outcomes.

- ❖ **Categorical Imperative (Kant):** Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

- ❖ **Respect for Persons:** Never treat humanity merely as a means, but always as an end.

- **Key Thinker: Immanuel Kant**

- German philosopher (1724-1804) who argued that moral laws are universal and rational, binding on all rational beings.

Foundational Theory-II : Deontology & Virtue Ethics, Cont.

- **Deontological response to trolley problem:**

- ❖ Pushing the man violates the duty to respect persons as ends in themselves.
- ❖ Pulling the lever may be permissible if the death is unintended.

2. Virtue Ethics: Right action is what a virtuous agent would choose in the circumstances.

- **Key Concepts:**

- ❖ **Focus on Character:** Instead of asking "What should I do?" ask "What kind of person should I be?"
- ❖ **Virtues:** Cultivate character traits like courage, wisdom, justice, temperance, compassion.
- ❖ **The Golden Mean:** Virtue lies between excess and deficiency (e.g., courage between recklessness and cowardice).

Foundational Theory-II : Deontology & Virtue Ethics, Cont.

- **Aristotle:** Greek philosopher (384-322 BCE).
 - ❖ Emphasised eudaimonia (flourishing) through virtuous living.
- **Confucius:** Chinese philosopher (551-479 BCE).
 - ❖ Focused on ren (benevolence), li (ritual propriety), and junzi (exemplary person).
- **Virtue ethics response:**
 - ❖ What would a compassionate, wise, and courageous person do?
 - ❖ The answer may depend on the specific context and the virtues at stake.

Practical Framework : Methodological Approaches

Principlism : The Four-Principles Framework.

- Developed by **Tom Beauchamp and James Childress**, this is the most influential approach in bioethics.

1. Autonomy:

- Respect for the patient's right to self-determination.
- People should be allowed to make their own decisions about their lives and bodies.

2. Non-maleficence:

- The obligation not to inflict harm intentionally.
- Often summarised as "first, do no harm" (primum non nocere).

3. Beneficence:

Practical Framework : Methodological Approaches, Cont.

- The obligation to act in the patient's best interest, to promote their welfare and well-being

4. Justice

- Fairness in the distribution of benefits, risks, and costs. Treating people equitably and without discrimination.

Casualty : Case-Based Reasoning.

- Revived by **Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin** in *The Abuse of Casualty* (1988).
- **Core Approach:**
 - ❖ **Start with Cases, Not Theory:** Begin with the facts of particular cases rather than abstract principles.
 - ❖ **Analogical Reasoning:** Compare the current case to paradigm cases where the moral verdict is clear.

Practical Framework : Methodological Approaches, Cont.

- ❖ **Context-Sensitive:** Recognise that moral decisions depend on the specific circumstances, not just general rules.
- **The Method:**
 - ❖ Identify the relevant facts of the case.
 - ❖ Compare to similar cases (paradigms).
 - ❖ Determine which features are morally relevant.
 - ❖ Apply practical wisdom (phronesis) to reach a judgment.
- **Strengths**
 - ❖ Case-focused reasoning can **bridge ideological divides** by grounding ethical analysis in concrete situations rather than abstract theories that people may disagree about.

What Lies Ahead : Course Roadmap

- **WK 2 : Bioethics: Life, Death, and Choice.**

- ☐ Abortion and reproductive ethics.
- ☐ End-of-life decisions.
- ☐ Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.
- ☐ Defining death.

- **WK 3 : AI and Digital Ethics.**

- ☐ Algorithms and discrimination.
- ☐ Privacy in the digital age.
- ☐ Human-machine relationships.
- ☐ Transparency and accountability in AI.

What Lies Ahead : Course Roadmap, Cont.

- **WK 4 : Business Ethics and CSR.**

- ☐ Corporate social responsibility.
- ☐ Whistleblowing.
- ☐ Stakeholder theory.
- ☐ Ethical leadership in organisations.

- **WK 5 :Environmental Ethics.**

- ☐ Climate change and individual responsibility.
- ☐ Intergenerational justice.
- ☐ Ecological responsibilities.
- ☐ Moral status of non-human entities.

What Lies Ahead : Course Roadmap, Cont.

- **WK 6 : The Future of Applied Ethics.**

- ❑ Emerging ethical issues.
- ❑ Cross-cultural dialogue.
- ❑ The expanding scope of the field.
- ❑ Preparing for tomorrow's challenges.

- **Learning Outcomes :**

- ❑ **Analyse** complex ethical dilemmas using multiple frameworks.
- ❑ **Evaluate** arguments from different ethical perspectives.
- ❑ **Apply** ethical reasoning to real-world cases.
- ❑ **Develop** your own reasoned positions on contested issues.
- ❑ **Engage** respectfully with diverse viewpoints.

What Lies Ahead : Course Roadmap, Cont.

- **Assessment**

- ❑ **Assignments:** Case analysis essays, ethical argument papers

- ❑ **Exam:** Comprehensive assessment of theories and applications

- ❑ **Participation:** Class discussion and thought experiment exercises

- **Each week builds on the foundational concepts introduced today.**

The Journey Ahead

- Applied ethics is not about finding a single "right" answer.
- It's about **reasoning through hard cases** with **clarity, consistency, and compassion**.
- The tools you develop here will serve you in **every domain of life**—from personal decisions to professional responsibilities, from local communities to global challenges.

Thank you



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