

## **MPhil (Applied Ethics): Social and Political Ethics**

### **Syllabus 2023**

Coursework will take place over two intensive week-long teaching sessions. Each teaching session will include 5-6 Units, for a total of 15 seminars per session. The final timetable and readings will be provided closer to the time. The topics to be covered are outlined below.

#### **Session 1 (23-27 January)**

##### **Unit 1: Foundations**

This introductory unit gives an overview of the important concepts, theories and methods in applied ethics. The aim is to consolidate and deepen your existing knowledge of ethics in preparation for exploring specific ethical problems. We also consider what is distinctive about social and political ethics and reflect on the role of the ethicist in responding to ethical problems in these domains.

- 1.1 The nature of applied ethics
- 1.2 Frameworks for ethical decision-making
- 1.3 Ethics, politics and society

##### **Unit 2: Democracy and disagreement**

Democratic societies often have to contend with deep political disagreements. Such disagreements are especially prevalent in societies with a history of racial and/or cultural conflict and inequality. In this unit, we consider the ethical foundations of democracy, the nature and sources of democratic disagreement, as well as ethical strategies for dealing with disagreement in a post-conflict society.

- 2.1 Democracy
- 2.2 The ethics of disagreement
- 2.3 The ethics of compromise

##### **Unit 3: Rights: for whom, and why?**

This unit examines the question of political membership and the rights and privileges attached to citizenship. We consider different possible forms of membership and participation, and ask to whom membership and its accompanying rights and privileges should be extended, and under what conditions. This question relates specifically to the inclusion of migrants and refugees, and also non-human others. Who should have the right to vote? Who and what should have the right to be represented?

- 3.1. Membership as guarantee for rights
- 3.2. Membership for refugees and migrants
- 3.3. Representation for non-human others

#### **Unit 4: Migrants, refugees and distant others**

This unit deals with our duties towards distant others, as well as towards migrants and refugees within our borders. We ask whether geographic distance matters for our ethical decision-making, and consider xenophobia as a particularly serious moral harm and explore strategies for combating xenophobia within the ambit of social and political ethics. Finally, we consider the broader question of the potential harms of displacement (internal and across borders) and homelessness and their impact on our freedom.

- 4.1 Migrants, refugees and xenophobia
- 4.2 The harms of displacement
- 4.3 Obligations to assist: near and far

#### **Unit 5: Race, racism and prejudice**

This unit interrogates some of the central conceptual and moral questions raised by race and racism. What does it mean to categorise someone as having a race? What are the standards for determining whether someone is racist? How should we establish culpability for racism? We also use these debates to interrogate the ethics of prejudice, and culpability for prejudice, more generally.

- 5.1 What do we see when we see race?
- 5.2 What is racism?
- 5.3 Race, generalisation and prejudice

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### **Session 2 (July/August)**

#### **Unit 6: Punishment, shame and forgiveness**

In this unit we consider the moral aftermath of wrongdoing, on both a personal and collective scale. What (if anything) do we owe to the people who have wronged us? Is it ever wrong to forgive someone? What is the legitimate frontier of the moral authority to punish? We consider these questions both with regards to offices of authority—and their moral entitlement to seek justice or retribution—and with regards to ourselves as individuals.

- 6.1 Resentment and forgiveness
- 6.2 Shame and punishment

#### **Unit 7: Sex, consent and prejudice**

In this section we take a frank look at contemporary sexual ethics and the sorts of unacknowledged complexities that persist beneath the surface. This includes exploring the limits of 'consent' as the sole maxim for sexual ethics; explorations of sex and power; and questions of prejudice in sexual attraction.

7.1 'Consenting adults'

7.2 Sex and prejudice

## **Unit 8: Ignorance, information and misinformation**

Nowadays we are saturated not only by information but also by misinformation. How should we understand the extent (and limits) of our moral and epistemic obligations in these circumstances? In this unit we consider broader questions related to our obligations to know in the information age. What is the relationship between knowledge and responsibility? When is ignorance an excuse and when is it culpable? What are the ethical dimensions of news consumption in an era of endless updates?

8.1 "Do Your Googles": Information abundance and duties of inquiry

8.2 Intellectual vices: falling for fake news and conspiracies

## **Unit 9: Ethics, technology & the internet**

As our lives increasingly take place online, a new range of urgent ethical questions have emerged regarding our digital rights and responsibilities. In this unit we explore a series of ethical questions focused on technology and the internet. We consider the use and abuse of personal data, including the data sets which power AI; we question whether any of us should have 'the right to be forgotten' online; as well as exploring other ethical dimensions of artificial intelligence and big data.

9.1 Data ethics

9.2 How to build moral AI?

9.3 Memory and forgetting in a digital age

## **Unit 10. Mine, yours and ours: property and ownership**

What makes something mine, yours, or ours? What gives individuals, communities or the state a right of ownership over assets or resources? On what grounds may we exclude others from what we have and may we be excluded from what belongs to others? This unit examines the nature of property rights and different kinds of property regimes, and applies these insights to the issue of land ownership in South Africa.

10.1 Common, collective and private property

10.2 The justification of property rights

10.3 Property rights and the land question in South Africa

## **Unit 11: Justice, equality and reparations**

We generally assume that justice has something to do with equality. But equality of what, and for whom, and why? In this unit, we try to make sense of the concept of equality, and ask how equality as a moral ideal is best served by the distribution of income, wealth, opportunities and other resources among members of a society. We also explore ethical questions about property ownership and reparations, including the issue of land restitution in South Africa.

11.1 Justice as fairness

11.2 Justice and capability

11.3 Justice and reparations

## Lecturer profiles

### Dr Judy-Ann Cilliers

Judy-Ann Cilliers is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Philosophy and an affiliate of PROSPER. Her research focuses on the ethics of refugees and xenophobia and related topics in political ethics. She is a contract lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, and is preparing a book on the topic: *Stories of Us and Them: Xenophobic Narratives, Identity, and Belonging*.

### Dr Tanya de Villiers-Botha

Tanya de Villiers-Botha is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at Stellenbosch University. She obtained her DPhil at Stellenbosch University in 2006. Her research interests include: philosophy of mind and cognitive science, philosophy of science, philosophy of evolutionary biology, metaethics, and ethics.

### Dr Anna Hartford

Anna Hartford is a Research Fellow in the Department of Philosophy at Stellenbosch University and a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Neuroscience Institute at the University of Cape Town. Her research interests include moral responsibility, applied and moral epistemology, culpability for belief and ignorance, applied ethics, philosophy of psychiatry, & neuroethics.

### Mr Phila Msimang

Phila Msimang is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and the Convenor of the Socratic Society at Stellenbosch University. His research focuses on the philosophy of science, the metaphysics of race, biosemiotics, and theories of minimal cognition. He is part of an inter-university research group that focuses on issues concerning race, the knowledge project, and society. His current areas of research are topics in the metaphysics of race and minimal cognition.

### Dr Ryan Nefdt

Ryan Nefdt is a senior lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town. His research lies at the intersection of the philosophy of language, science and theoretical linguistics, as well as African philosophy and political theory in the Global South.

### Prof Vasti Roodt

Vasti Roodt is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Head of the Unit for Social and Political Ethics in the Centre for Applied Ethics. Her research specialisation is moral and political philosophy, with specific focus on issues around the public/private distinction, moral contractualism, and the political thought of Friedrich Nietzsche and Hannah Arendt. Her current research focuses on how metaphor and analogy shape our reasoning about key political concepts, notably violence. This forms part of a broader research programme in conceptual ethics.