Ethics Review Essay Guidelines

The goal of the ethics review is for you to demonstrate your grasp of some of the ethical issues and challenges involved in scientific studies that we covered in the lecture content, and for you to demonstrate your ability to write clearly, precisely and concisely.

The maximum essay size is 500 words, excepting only bibliographic content (citations and bibliography). Your word count will be checked automatically and you will be penalized or failed if your essay is too long.

We understand that for many of you this will be the first philosophy essay you have written, and so we have endeavored to make the requirements for this essay and the marking criteria as clear as possible. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with these criteria and requirements and to submit an essay that meets the stated standards.

Due online: 48 hours after the end of your workshop session in Week 12.

Essay Topic

Your task is to write a philosophy essay about the most interesting or pressing ethical matters relating to your chosen article.

Your essay should answer one or more of the following questions about the scientific article you have chosen as the subject of your review assessment items:

Q1. Are there any specific ethical issues raised by this particular study? If so, briefly describe one or two of them and what you think is the right response to them. (For example the study might relate to chemical or biological weapons, abortion, genetic engineering, cloning or some other significant ethical issue, or the study might have been designed or conducted incompetently or unethically).

Q2. Are there human experimental subjects in the study? Was the experimentation upon them ethical? Can you tell whether they gave informed consent to their participation in the study and was such consent sufficient? Give reasons for your answer.

Q3. Were there animals used in the study? Can you tell whether they were treated humanely? If they suffered at all or died do you think the benefits of the study were sufficient to justify their use? Give reasons for your answer.

Q4. What incentives, if any, might the researcher(s) who conducted this particular study have had to falsify or manipulate their results? If the researcher(s) conducting this particular study had chosen to falsify, manipulate and/or misrepresent their data, explain briefly the methods of manipulating the experimental design and/or the data that might be used for this purpose and why you think it would be wrong to do so.

(Note that questions one to three are asking you to ethically assess the actual content of the article you have chosen. Question four is asking you to discuss possible reasons for the authors of your chosen article to falsify or manipulate their results, and the methods by which they could have done so).

The Qualities of a Philosophy Essay

Philosophy as an academic discipline has its own specialised requirements, so even if you think you are familiar with how to write an academic essay it is important that you take the time to read and understand what is asked of you in writing a philosophy essay.

1. A philosophy essay is a statement of your opinion. As such it is written in the first person. For example if you disagreed with the philosopher Bloggs then you might write “I think that Bloggs’ argument is faulty because…”

   This is because unlike science, which concerns itself with facts about the world, philosophy is a combination of facts and value judgements. Claims like “It is wrong to torture animals” are value judgements, and in a philosophy essay you are presenting and supporting your value judgements.

2. A philosophy essay must support its value judgements with logical arguments. This means you must clearly state the premises and conclusions of your argument.

   Premises are the assumptions you make and which you hope the reader will also make. Premises can be value judgements such as “I believe it is wrong to cause pain to an animal, unless there is a good reason to do so” and they can also be factual claims such as “watermelons are not a good experimental model for stress in humans”.

   Premises are best chosen so as to be accessible to the majority of your peers and readers. Private spiritual beliefs, or extreme positions on animals rights (pro or anti) are unlikely to be shared by readers or ethics committee members, and so an essay based on such premises is unlikely to persuade your readers to agree with you.
Your conclusions should also be clearly stated, and your conclusions should follow inescapably from your premises. For example, you might state as your premises “It is wrong to cause pain to an animal, unless there is a good reason to do so” and also “Cosmetics are not really important to human welfare, so cosmetics research cannot be a good reason to hurt an animal”. From this it would follow inescapably that it is wrong to cause pain to an animal for the purposes of cosmetics research.

3. A philosophy essay must be clear. The reader should not be left confused or in doubt either about the facts of the study which you are reviewing, or about the value judgements you are making about that study. Moreover, the reader should be clear about the way your premises fit together to form an argument and thus understand how they justify your conclusion.

4. A philosophy essay must be factually accurate. If you are in doubt about any important matters of fact that relate to your review, such as how dangerous a given dose of caffeine is, or whether animal test subjects would have been killed after the experiment was concluded, it is up to you to find out the answers if possible. If this is not possible for relevant parts of particular study then you need to state this clearly and make it clear when you are making an assumption about factual matters.

5. A philosophy essay must be properly referenced. This means that any claims of fact that are not trivially obvious must be backed up with a citation to a scholarly source showing the source of your claim. For example you would not need to provide a scholarly source for the claim “The Moon revolves around the Earth”, because it is commonplace, but you would need to provide a scholarly source for the claim “Down’s Syndrome is caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21”.

Furthermore, any arguments, ideas, or expressions of those ideas that are not your own work must be clearly labelled as such and a citation provided to the original source. Quotations must be placed within quotation marks. If you quote or paraphrase anybody else’s work then you must give due credit to the original source and provide a citation so that your reader can go to the original source if they wish. Failure to do so is plagiarism, which is a serious academic offence, and can result in an automatic failing mark or more serious consequences. A paraphrasing which involves only changing a few words should be put in quotation marks with the changed words placed in square brackets [ ]. Your essay should not involve substantial paraphrasing – a few sentences at most. You should familiarize yourself, for this course and all other courses, with the university’s statement on academic integrity and plagiarism:
http://www.uq.edu.au/myadvisor/academic-integrity-and-plagiarism

For this assignment you do not have to cite your chosen article when you refer to it, however, and you do not have to reference ideas and arguments from the course content. However, you should not just copy substantial parts of the course content.

6. A philosophy essay should have correct spelling, grammar and punctuation and be written in reasonably formal language. Slang, emoticons and so forth will be marked down. Some allowance is made for grammatical errors in the case of students for whom English is not their first language.

Structuring Your Essay

It is up to you how you structure your essay but it is strongly recommended that you use the following structure unless you are sure some other structure suits your essay better.

1. Firstly state and explain the relevant facts about the study.

   It is not necessary to state all of the details of the study. You should briefly outline what the researchers did and what they concluded, focusing on any morally important aspects of the study. For example, if the study involved humans or animals you should make sure you state how many humans or animals were involved, what risks or suffering they underwent, what approval was obtained beforehand, what happened to them afterwards and so on.

2. Secondly state your thesis. Your thesis is the ethical conclusion you have reached about the study. You might conclude that a study was ethically sound, or you might conclude it was ethically unsupportable and should not have been conducted, or you might conclude something in between.

3. Thirdly clearly state the premises (facts and value judgements) which you base your argument upon, and show how accepting your thesis follows from accepting your premises.

Criteria and Marking

Review the Criteria and Standards for Ethics Review at the end of this document which shows the marking criteria.

Referencing and Bibliography

In philosophy there is no one specific format for references which we require you to use; we only insist that you make it clear where any fact, idea or quotation you reference came from. If the idea or quote came from an article or book (not a website) it is essential you put in the exact page number.

If you have no preferred style of citation, we suggest the Harvard style of citation where you insert the author’s name, the publication date and the exact page referred to into the sentence in parentheses, like this: “The Lesser Twisted Whatnot mates
The UQ Library has more detailed information on referencing styles at: [http://www.library.uq.edu.au/infoskill/styles2.html](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/infoskill/styles2.html)

### The Essay Writing Process

Your first task, which is probably best done somewhere you have access to the internet or to a university library, should be to read your chosen article carefully and make a note of any important questions you will need to answer before you can form a well-supported ethical analysis of the article. Do you know what all the technical terms used mean? Are there any factual questions you need to find the answer to, perhaps relating to the risks of a given chemical or procedure? You are well advised to make sure you have all the facts straight in your mind before beginning to write your essay.

If your ethical analysis hinges on particularly obscure or hard-to-find-out matters of fact you may even find it necessary to contact scientists working in the relevant area before you can fix a well-informed opinion about the ethics of your chosen article.

Once you are ready to begin writing, you will save time and produce a better essay if you make an outline of your essay first, possibly in point form, laying out each part of the question(s) you plan to answer, how you plan to answer them, and what your overall thesis is going to be. It is much less painful to change or discard parts of your essay that don't work at the planning stage, than it is to cut them out later after you have already written them in full.

Now you have an essay outline in point form, and a clear idea of what your ethical judgement will be, you can expand each section into a finished passage in whichever order seems best to you, and then polish the finished draft so as to best use the available word count and express your argument as clearly as possible. Redrafting – going back to your essay after a few days and trying to rewrite your argument more simply and directly – is always a fruitful exercise. In fact, the single most straightforward way to improve your essay is to read it over as you were reading it for the first time as a critical reader and then edit all those parts that are unclear or that could be expressed more succinctly and logically.

### A Few Final Words

It is not necessary for you to begin your essay with a vague preamble such as "For centuries scientists have striven to understand the relationship between diet and health". You should just launch directly into your explanation of the facts about the study: what was done, who did it, when they did it, where and why.

Similarly you do not need to end your essay by attempting to tie your analysis to some bigger picture ("In the age-old investigation into the role of yolk all too often we lose sight of..."). You should simply state your conclusion about the ethics of your chosen article.

Remember that the markers will not have read your chosen article and will not be specialists in whatever field it covers, so you must make sure that you explain what took place for the reader, and you must do so in terms which an intelligent layperson can understand.

It is a very good idea to have a friend or relative read your finished essay before you submit it, because they will often find errors or ambiguities which you will have missed.

Many students find it hard to write an essay unless they are very interested in the essay's topic. If it turns out that your chosen article does not inspire you, and you realise this before you have invested too much of your time in writing your essay, you can always go back to the library and get a different article. Generally speaking articles in medicine or experiments using human subjects almost always turn out to be interesting topics for ethics reviews.

If your chosen article does not touch on any ethical issues itself (this often happens with purely observational studies with no experimental component) then your best option is to answer question Q4, and talk about what potential pressures the researchers might have been under to behave unethically and what methods they might have used to act unethically.

Lastly, it's perfectly normal for it to turn out that the research in your chosen article was handled entirely ethically, and so the conclusion of your ethical assessment might well be that the researchers did absolutely nothing ethically wrong. In that case your job is to explain the important potential ethical concerns and how your particular author(s) avoided them.

If you feel you need more advice on how to write a philosophy essay, the following links may be helpful (but the above should be enough): [http://www.uq.edu.au/~pdjlamon/essays.htm](http://www.uq.edu.au/~pdjlamon/essays.htm)
### Criteria and Standards for Ethics Review

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>8–10</th>
<th>5–7</th>
<th>3–4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Argument and Structure</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Addresses the important ethical issues with regard to the study in question in a clear and interesting way.</td>
<td>Satisfactorily addresses some ethical issues.</td>
<td>Fails to address important ethical issues in a clear way.</td>
<td>Fails to address any ethical issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation</strong></td>
<td>Clearly explains all relevant aspects of the study in a clear and interesting way.</td>
<td>Explains most of the relevant aspects of the study.</td>
<td>Significant omissions of relevant information.</td>
<td>Fails to explain the relevant aspects of the study.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity</strong></td>
<td>Careful and critical analysis, clear logical structure.</td>
<td>Includes some unpenetrating analysis, irrelevance or vagueness.</td>
<td>Significant irrelevance, vagueness, and/or significant defects of analysis.</td>
<td>Confusion; <em>non sequiturs</em>, incoherent argument.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction /Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>In general well-structured and supported introduction and conclusions.</td>
<td>Satisfactory introduction and closure; some significant issues not adequately supported.</td>
<td>Failure to support adequately central issue(s) or claims.</td>
<td>Serious failure to provide supporting argument for central issue(s) or claims.</td>
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<td><strong>Scope and Depth of Treatment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>High level of understanding of ethical issues.</td>
<td>Basic understanding of problem(s) and texts.</td>
<td>Significant misunderstandings.</td>
<td>Serious misunderstanding and failure to address issues.</td>
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<td><strong>Originality and Research</strong></td>
<td>Evidence of original thought in content, and/or of relevant research beyond the course material.</td>
<td>Secure grasp of course content.</td>
<td>Rudimentary grasp of basic texts; minimal analysis.</td>
<td>Consists mostly of significantly flawed paraphrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Errors or Omissions (Up to 2 full marks deducted for each box checked)</strong></td>
<td>Grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Exceeds word limit, or falls significantly short of word limit.</td>
<td>Errors or omissions in citations or bibliography (Different degrees of plagiarism could result in deductions up to 10).</td>
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The above criteria are approximately weighted evenly and your essay will be given a mark out of 10 overall.