



# Ethics Matters

## Teacher Notes



# Consequences

This episode focusses on the concept of consequences as a means by which we can make ethical judgements. It considers the extent to which conscience guides our ethical decision-making, and the 'gut-feel' consequentialism of doing the most good for the many. Through thought experiments (the trolley problem) it critiques simple consequentialism and explores the implications of a strictly consequentialist ethical view.

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Personal and Social Capability

VCE Legal Studies Unit 2

HSC Legal Studies

HSC Society and Culture

## Questions and discussion points

How reliable is our conscience as a means of making good ethical decisions?

Is it always ethically justified that we should kill one person to save five? How would your decision change if it was killing a friend (or family member) to save five strangers?

If a good act is one which causes the most good for the most people, would I sometimes be ethically obliged to act against my own self-interests (ie: to wrong myself to benefit others)?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Explore the extent of ethical obligation and the implications for thinking about consequences and duties in decision-making and action (VCECD017)

Discuss the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and actions (VCECD018)

9 & 10

Discuss issues raised by thinking about consequences and duties, in approaches to decision-making and action, and arguments for and against these approaches (VCECD022)

Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups (VCECD023)

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# My Rights

This episode focusses on non-consequentialist ethics through an exploration of the concepts of rights (duties) and obligations. It considers whether strict consequentialism will lead us to an ethical framework which is too abstract from the individual ethical agents (people) involved, and the role of motivations as a factor in our ethical judgements. It also critiques the concept of human rights, questioning how far these rights extend and how we can differentiate between a fundamental right and an interest.

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Personal and Social Capability

VCE Global Politics

VCE Legal Studies (Unit 2&3)

HSC Legal Studies

HSC Society and Culture

## Questions and discussion points

Is an act which means well, but causes harm, just as ethically wrong as an act which causes harm deliberately?

Should we make ethical judgements in the same way we would make a scientific or mathematical judgement, as an objective calculation?

Are there any fundamental human rights, and if there are, how do we distinguish these rights from other human interests? Where do we draw the line?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Explore the contested meaning of concepts including freedom, justice, and rights and responsibilities, and the extent they are and should be valued by different individuals and groups (VCECU014)

Explore the extent of ethical obligation and the implications for thinking about consequences and duties in decision-making and action (VCECD017)

9 & 10

Discuss issues raised by thinking about consequences and duties, in approaches to decision-making and action, and arguments for and against these approaches (VCECD022)

# Our Society

This episode is focussed on the questions arising from our attempts to apply ethical principles and concepts to social institutions. It explores the dilemma of egalitarian and libertarian philosophies, questioning whether the ethical concept of justice is best understood through the concept of equality, or of freedom. It distinguishes between different types of freedom (positive and negative) and explores the social benefits which can arise from restricting or regulating some individual freedoms.

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship,

VCE Global Politics

VCE Legal Studies (Unit 3)

VCE Sociology

HSC Legal Studies

HSC Society and Culture

## Questions and discussion points

Is freedom fundamental to justice, or is equality fundamental to justice? How do we resolve the conflict between these two apparently opposing ethical perspectives?

How would society operate if all of our freedoms were completely unrestricted?

When should we consider our government's exercise of power (as in the example of the bike helmets) a threat to personal liberty?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Explore the contested meaning of concepts including freedom, justice, and rights and responsibilities, and the extent they are and should be valued by different individuals and groups (VCECU014)

9 & 10

Investigate the connections and distinctions between and the relative value of concepts including fairness and equality, and respect and tolerance (VCECU019)

Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups (VCECD023)

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# Free Expression

This episode is primarily focussed on ethical issues arising from freedom of speech. It questions whether (and in what contexts) speech should be restricted or censored, and whether there are some forms of speech (and expression more generally) which should not be protected. The episode considers the question of whether pornography should be considered as free expression, and briefly explores debates related to censorship of video games and other media. It raises the ethical dilemma of whether we should protect the freedom of people to express themselves, or protect people from the harm which can be caused by others' speech.

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Health

VCE Health & Human Development

VCE Global Politics

VCE Media (Unit 2)

7-10 Syllabus PDHPE

HSC Community and Family Services

HSC PDHPE

## Questions and discussion points

Should we ban or restrict speech which is racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise harms individuals and communities?

How often does an opinion you disagree with appear on your social media feeds? How do you react when someone says something online which you disagree with?

Should I be held responsible for any harm which might speech might cause, even if I had no intent to cause harm?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Explore the contested meaning of concepts including freedom, justice, and rights and responsibilities, and the extent they are and should be valued by different individuals and groups (VCECU014)

Investigate why ethical principles may differ between people and groups, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU015)

Investigate criteria for determining the relative importance of matters of ethical concern (VCECU016)

9 & 10

Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups (VCECD023)

# Shaping Our Bodies

This episode is focussed on the ethical issues arising from the social expectations and regulations on how we treat our own bodies. It begins with the question of bodily freedom and the effects of social and cultural values regulating what is acceptable and what is not. It explores the role of culture in creating social obligations regarding clothing, hair-styles and body modification which restrict individual freedom. It concludes with a brief exploration of disability, questioning the ethical role of scientific responses to disability, and whether 'problems' arising from disability (for instance wheelchair inaccessibility) are problems of the body, or of the social structures which privilege the able-bodied.

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Intercultural Capability

Victorian Curriculum: Personal and Social

VCE Health and Human Development

VCE Product Design and tech (the last few minutes)

HSC Community and Family Studies

HSC Design and Technology (the last few minutes)

## Questions and discussion points

Is it right for society to establish standards of dress and personal grooming to which individuals are expected to conform?

What is the ethical difference between using steroids as a medicine to improve people's quality of life, and using steroids to improve people's quality of athletic performance?

Is there any ethical distinction between using science to preserve a property of a person (such as preventing a loss of IQ) and using science to enhance a property (such as boosting IQ)?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Investigate why ethical principles may differ between people and groups, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU015)

Discuss the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and actions (VCECD018)

9 & 10

Explore a range of ethical problems and examine the extent to which different positions are related to commonly held ethical concepts and principles, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU020)

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# Forgive or Punish?

This episode focusses on the ethical issues arising from punishment and forgiveness. It considers whether resentment or anger have an ethically positive role to play when responding to wrong-doing, and whether forgiveness should have limits. Through a case-study of holocaust survivors the episode explores the psychological burdens and benefits of forgiveness. It also considers the ethical justifications for institutionalised (state) punishments and the communicative purpose of the criminal justice and gaol systems.

## Complementary curricula

Civics & Citizenship

VCE Legal Studies (Units 2&3)

HSC Legal Studies

## Questions and discussion points

Is forgiveness always the 'good' or 'right' response to being wronged?

Are any wrongs unforgivable? What do we mean by 'unforgivable'?

Should society continue to punish people even after the person they harmed has forgiven them?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Investigate why ethical principles may differ between people and groups, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU015)

9 & 10

Explore a range of ethical problems and examine the extent to which different positions are related to commonly held ethical concepts and principles, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU020)

Distinguish between the ethical and non-ethical dimensions of complex issues, including the distinction between ethical and legal issues (VCECU021)

# Ethical Consumption

This episode is focussed on the ethical issues arising from our global market economy. There is a particular focus on ethical consumerism as it applies to 'sweatshop' industries and products produced cheaply by poorly paid workers in potentially dangerous workplaces. The episode questions where the responsibility should rest for any wrong-doing in a company's supply chain, and to what extent the consumer of a product is responsible for any wrong-doing which occurred in the products manufacture, transport or sale. It considers the ethics of boycotting products and explores alternative actions through which people can try to act as ethical consumers.

## Complementary curricula

VCE Economics (Unit 1)  
VCE Food (Unit 2)  
7-10 HSIE syllabus (Geography)  
HSC Economics  
HSC Food Technology

## Questions and discussion points

Am I responsible for harm done to persons or animals, without my knowledge, in order to produce the goods which I have purchased?

Should we boycott companies which have proven or repeated cases of mistreating workers or animals?

If a company follows all of the local laws in the country(-ies) where they operate, can I still justify an ethical objection to their (legal) practices?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Explore the contested meaning of concepts including freedom, justice, and rights and responsibilities, and the extent they are and should be valued by different individuals and groups (VCECU014)

Investigate why ethical principles may differ between people and groups, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU015)

9 & 10

Explore a range of ethical problems and examine the extent to which different positions are related to commonly held ethical concepts and principles, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU020)

Distinguish between the ethical and non-ethical dimensions of complex issues, including the distinction between ethical and legal issues (VCECU021)

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# Past Injustices

This episode focusses on the question of whether we should bear any responsibility for the actions of our ancestors. It considers Australia's history, with a particular focus on the treatment of Indigenous Australians and the Stolen Generations, and asks whether a nation should be treated as an intergenerational ethical person. The discussion distinguishes between the ethical acts of apology, acknowledgment, and guilt.

## Complementary curricula

Victoria: History, Intercultural Capability & Personal and Social Capability  
VCE Global Politics  
VCE History  
VCE Legal Studies (Units 2&3)  
7-10 HSIE Syllabus – History, History Elective, Aboriginal Studies  
HSC Aboriginal Studies  
HSC Modern History  
HSC Society and Culture  
HSC Legal Studies

## Questions and discussion points

Activity (pre-watching or post-watching: Have students create "Australia's Facebook page". If this is done as a pre-viewing activity, use it to illustrate whether students have selected only the 'good parts' of Australia's history.

If I am proud to be an Australian because of the good parts of our history should I then also accept responsibility for the other parts?

Should we judge the actions of past generations against the ethical values and principles of today's society?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Explore the contested meaning of concepts including freedom, justice, and rights and responsibilities, and the extent they are and should be valued by different individuals and groups (VCECU014)

Investigate why ethical principles may differ between people and groups, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU015)

Discuss the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and actions (VCECD018)

9 & 10

Explore a range of ethical problems and examine the extent to which different positions are related to commonly held ethical concepts and principles, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU020)

# Religious Diversity

This episode begins with a discussion of why a separation of church and state has been historically valued. It explores the effects of stereotypes and over-generalising, and the effects of religion on establishing secular ethical values. The episode also addresses how religions can divide society, and the dilemmas we face when religious practices run counter to secular ethical principles, or to the ethical principles of other religious groups. It concludes on a distinction between tolerance and acceptance of other religious beliefs (or no religious belief).

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship,  
Victorian Curriculum: Intercultural Capability  
VCE Global Politics  
VCE Religion and Society  
7-10 HSIE Syllabuses  
HSC Studies of Religion  
HSC Society and Culture

## Questions and discussion points

Is there truly a separation between church and state in Australia?  
To what extent is Australia's secular culture affected by the historically Christian culture in which the basis of many secular values were established?  
Is it enough in a pluralistic society to merely tolerate people's belief in other religions (or no religion), or should we also respect them? What is the difference between tolerance of and respect for other religions?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Investigate why ethical principles may differ between people and groups, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU015)

9 & 10

Investigate the connections and distinctions between and the relative value of concepts including fairness and equality, and respect and tolerance (VCECU019)

Explore a range of ethical problems and examine the extent to which different positions are related to commonly held ethical concepts and principles, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU020)

Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups (VCECD023)

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# Creating Borders

This episode is focussed on ethical issues arising from national borders and the migration of people. It begins from the question of why borders should be valued, and considers the arbitrary effects of borders on quality of life and freedom of movement. The episode also explores concepts of national identity, our humanitarian ethical obligations, and the ethical dilemmas which can arise from multiculturalism.

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship  
Victorian Curriculum: Personal and Social Capability  
VCE Geography (Unit 4)  
7-10 PDHPE Syllabus  
HSC Geography

## Questions and discussion points

To what extent should we value our Australian national identity?  
How accurate is this to modern Australia, and to what extent is it based on a past Australia?  
What responsibility does an affluent society, like Australia, have in terms of global equality and accommodating refugees?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Explore the extent of ethical obligation and the implications for thinking about consequences and duties in decision-making and action (VCECD017)

9 & 10

Discuss issues raised by thinking about consequences and duties, in approaches to decision-making and action, and arguments for and against these approaches (VCECD022)

Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups (VCECD023)

# Animals

This episode is focussed on ethical issues arising from our treatment of animals. It begins from the question of what rights we should grant animals, and discusses factory farming, vegetarianism, Buddhist traditions, animal sentience, the protection of endangered species, animal experimentation, and the potential creation of genetic chimeras.

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Science

VCE Biology (Unit 4 – manipulating DNA and biotechnologies)

VCE Food (Unit 4)

7-10 Science Syllabus

HSC Biology

HSC Food Technology

## Questions and discussion points

Should animals have the same rights as humans?

Is it ever ethically defensible to eat meat?

If we could save humans lives, even if it meant causing great suffering and death to animals, should we do it? Would we be able to ethically justify allowing people to die in order to prevent the suffering of animals?

## Links to Ethical Capability

7 & 8

Investigate why ethical principles may differ between people and groups, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU015)

9 & 10

Explore a range of ethical problems and examine the extent to which different positions are related to commonly held ethical concepts and principles, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought (VCECU020)

Distinguish between the ethical and non-ethical dimensions of complex issues, including the distinction between ethical and legal issues (VCECU021)

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# The Environment

This episode considers ethical issues related to the environment and arising from human interaction with the natural world. Discussion begins with a question of whether the environment is valuable only for its benefits to humanity, or whether it is inherently valuable.

The episode also explores concepts of responsibility, collectivism and global inequality.

## Complementary curricula

Victorian Curriculum: Geography

VCE Environmental Science (Units 1, 3&4)

VCE Food (Unit 4)

VCE Geography (Unit 3)

7-10 HSIE syllabus (Geography)

HSC Earth and Environmental Science

HSC Agriculture

HSC Food Technology

HSC Geography

## Questions and discussion points

Why should we care about the environment?

Is it more important to save animals of an endangered species than it is to save animals from a common species?

Who has the greatest ethical responsibility to respond to climate change?

## Links to Ethical Capability

9 & 10

Distinguish between the ethical and non-ethical dimensions of complex issues, including the distinction between ethical and legal issues (VCECU021)

Discuss issues raised by thinking about consequences and duties, in approaches to decision-making and action, and arguments for and against these approaches (VCECD022)

Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups (VCECD023)