Using relevant examples explain ethical issues arising from two applications of psychology in the real world. (15 marks)

An example of applications of psychology in the real world is in the military – this creates a number of ethical issues. One such issue is that of distress/harm to human participants, in which people are stripped of all their senses through the use of face masks, ear muffs and specially adapted arm covers. Psychologists originally intended to study the effects of Sensory Deprivation (S.D.) out of curiosity and possibly in the rehabilitation of those who are isolated for extended periods of time. Hebb (1958) conducted an experiment wherein people were deprived of their senses in an air-conditioned room with a comfortable bed and good food – overall a pleasant environment. But they found that most people after a short time they could not distinguish being awake from sleeping and started having audio/visual hallucinations. Most only lasted 2 days, they found that Ps were much more susceptible to propaganda. This has been unfortunately applied in the military to the torture of people for information. Although it does prevent death by corporal torture methods (Electroshock torture) and the information may save lives in the long run.

Another issue is deception, as it means the participants do not know the true meaning of the study and what will happen to them which they may disagree with. An example of this is Sherif et al. (1961) - The Robber’s cave experiment. Sherif divided boys into 2 groups at first they lived separately with no knowledge of one-another’s existence, they were then made aware of one-another’s presence by seeing cups left behind, strong territorial reactions ensued. A conflict was made. Conflict was introduced and the situation deteriorated into name-calling and eventually fighting – this is when the counsellors intervened. Originally non-competitive activities were used e.g. watching films but these failed. It was found that co-operation towards shared goals was the most effective means of creating peace a “common enemy” per say. But this study raises many issues – including how psychologists refuse to intervene when harm was clearly going to be caused. Although its results are considered invaluable in the process of negotiation particularly post-war.

Another application is in the media, in which the issues of right of withdrawal/informed consent are present. This is especially true of the documentary “Child of our time”, which follows the lives of 25 children from birth to the age of 20. The main purpose of this is to answer the question “Are we born or are we made”. The psychologists here will most likely be unable to conduct certain experiments as it is not ‘good television’. Also, psychologists are following children who have been volunteered (no informed consent/right to withdraw) around for years detailing every part of their personal life – which may have a profound psychological effect on the children themselves. Although there is once again the idea of ‘one for many’ in that any distress caused to these humans would be outweighed by the number of possible ideas gleamed for the research.