

Ethics

Lecturer: Cathy Mason

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Semester: Fall 2022

Date and Time: Thursdays, 13:30 – 15:10

No. of Credits and no. of ECTS credits: 2 credits, 4 ECTS credits

Prerequisites: None

Course Level: MA

Format: Lectures with discussion

Course Description

This course will introduce students to some influential ideas and debates in ethical theory, focusing on normative ethical theorizing. Students will study utilitarian (and more broadly consequentialist) theories, Kantian theories, contractualist theories and virtue ethics. The aim will be to examine and explore these theories, so as to understand these historically important positions. Students will also assess the respects in which they can shed light on questions about how we should act, or who we should aim to become.

In the course of doing this students will also consider some broader questions about ethical theory such as what its role ought to be and what a good ethical theory should look like.

The course will be split into five parts:

Weeks 1 – 4: Utilitarianism/Consequentialism

Weeks 5 – 6: Kantian ethics

Weeks 7 – 8: Contractualism

Weeks 9 – 10: Virtue Ethics

Weeks 11 – 12: Reflections on Ethical Theory

Course Objectives:

In studying this course, students will:

- Gain a clear understanding of consequentialist, Kantian, contractualist and virtue ethical theories, and be able to apply these approaches to concrete cases
- Critically assess these positions
- Reconstruct and critically analyse arguments from the texts

Requirements

- All students *must* read the core reading each week
- Attendance is compulsory. Please email me as soon as possible if you cannot make it to a class
- Participate in class discussions: before each seminar students should read the core readings, and consider a) what do I think the reading is saying? b) why do they seem to be saying it? c) does that seem right to me? d) are there things that seem unclear or that you'd like to discuss?

Assessment

For 2 year MA students:

Assessment will be done via a final exam in the Spring term. Students will be given possible exam questions in advance.

Grades may be adjusted by a third of a letter grade on the basis of participation and performance in the classroom.

Students are encouraged to submit a critical analysis of a text mid-way through term to receive feedback.

For one-year MA students:

Participation: 15%

Critical analysis of a text (up to 800 words): 20%

Final paper (up to 2500 words): 65%

Assessment and Grading Criteria

Students will be assessed according to their:

- Understanding of the key issues and texts
- Clarity and nuance of expression
- Ability to answer the specific task set (e.g., explaining a view vs. assessing it)

Some good advice on writing philosophy essays can be found here:
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Helpful General Texts and Resources

James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, (McGraw-Hill, various editions). (This is a helpful introductory work that covers much of the material we'll look at)

Peter Singer, *A Companion to Ethics* (Blackwell, 1991). (This is a collection of fairly introductory articles)

The online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is a professional reference work for all areas of philosophy. Articles are often aimed at academics, and therefore long and challenging, but nearly always worth consulting: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Week by Week Schedule

Part 1: Consequentialism

Week 1 Introduction to Consequentialism

Core Reading: Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the principles of morals and legislation*, chs. 1-4.

- Optional Reading: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1972)

Week 2 JS Mill

Core Reading: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapters 1-2

- Optional Reading: Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World: A Rule-Consequentialist Theory of Morality* (2003), 1-30, 93-102.

Week 3 Objections to Utilitarianism

Core Reading: Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine" from *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974)

- Optional Reading: James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance* (1988), chs. 1-2

Week 4 Objections to Consequentialism

Core Reading: Neera Badhwar Kapur, “Why It Is Wrong to be Always Guided by the Best: Consequentialism and Friendship”, *Ethics* (1991)

- Optional Reading: Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism”, in Smart, J.J.C. & Williams, B. *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (1973), sects. 3-5

Part 2: Kantian Ethics

Week 5: Introducing Kantian Ethics

Core Reading: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J Gregor, sec. I.

- Optional Reading: Christine Korsgaard, “Kant’s Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of Groundwork I” and “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law” in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (1996), 43- 105

Week 6: Acting from Duty

Core Reading: Herman, Barbara “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty”, *Phil. Review* (1981)

- Optional Reading: Baron, Marcia, "On the Alleged Repugnance of Acting from Duty", *Journal of Philosophy*, (1984)

Part 3: Contractualism

Week 7: Introduction to Contractualism

Core Reading: T M Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism” in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (1982), 103-128

- Optional: T M Scanlon, *What we Owe to Each Other* (1998), chs 4 and 5

Week 8: Contractualism and Aggregation

Core Reading: Michael Otsuka, “Saving Lives, Moral Theory and the Claims of Individuals”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (2006)

- Optional: John Taurek, “Should the Numbers Count?”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1997)

Part 4: Virtue Ethics

Week 9: Introduction to Virtue Ethics

Core Reading: Philippa Foot, “Virtues and Vices” in *Virtues and Vices* (2002)

- Optional: Elizabeth Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, *Philosophy* (1958)

Week 10: Virtue Theory and Action- Guidance

Core Reading: Rosalind Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1991)

- Optional: Robert Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics", *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1984)

Part 5: Reflections on Ethical Theory

Week 11: What Do we Want from an Ethical Theory?

Core Reading: Bernard Williams, "Socrates' Question" in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985), chapter 1

- Optional: Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints", *Journal of Philosophy* (1982)

Week 12: public holiday (no class)