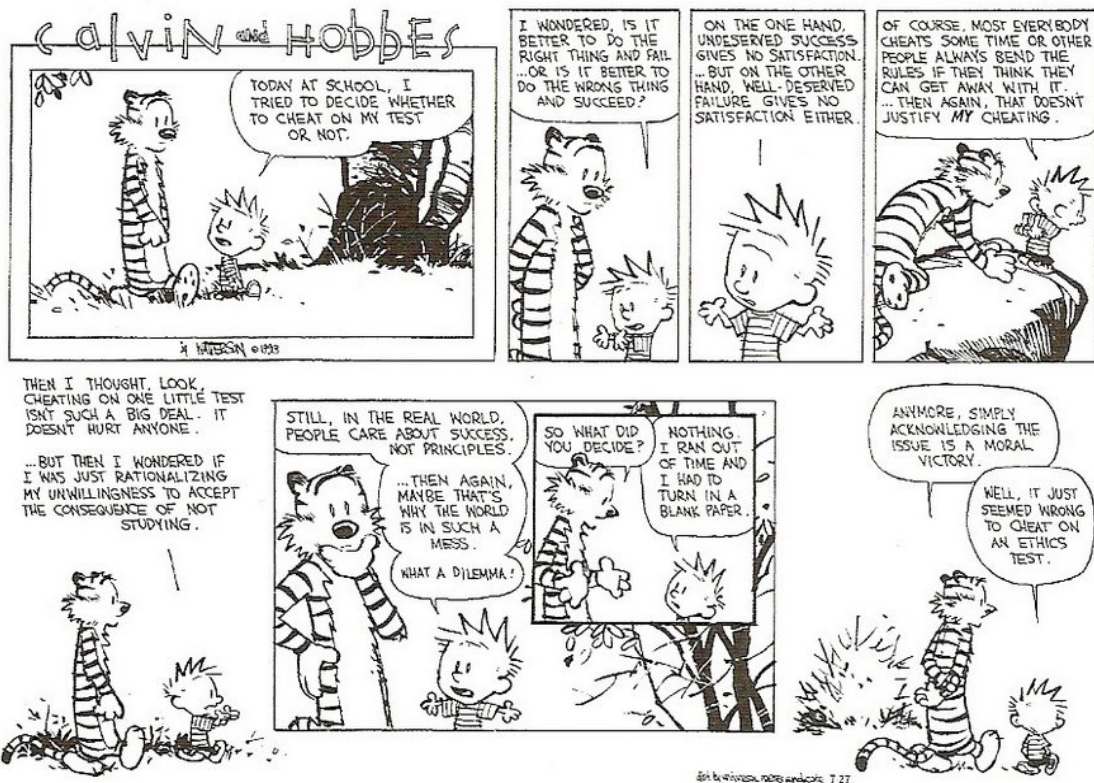


ETHICS

2020/21

WELCOME TO ETHICS!



Learn Site

The Learn site for this course is your main source of information and course content. Please make sure you familiarise yourself with the site and check it regularly.

People

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Practical Information

Office Hours

See Learn

Seminar and Tutorial

See Learn

You will have a **tutorial** each week. Please stick to the group that you are officially in.

Overview

In this course we focus on the branch of moral philosophy known as normative ethics. Normative ethics focuses on the questions ‘How ought I to live and act?’. Normative ethical theories attempt, for the most part, to provide answers to these questions which tell us both *which* acts are right, and/or *which* lives ethically good, and, more importantly, *what it is that makes it the case that* these acts are right, and/or these lives good. *Why* is it right to e.g. help refugees crossing the channel, *why* is best to live the virtuous life?

One way of thinking about normative ethical theories is that they involve the search for the fundamental moral principle or principles. For example, **Utilitarians** argue that right acts are those that maximize happiness for the greatest number; and **Virtue Ethicists** argue that the best life to live is the fully virtuous life.

In this course we’ll examine the dominant traditions in **normative ethical theory**, focusing on both the core historical texts (for example the works of Mill, Kant and Aristotle) as well as contemporary works. But we’ll also be taking a step back and reflecting on the extent to which we should expect philosophy to be able to provide universal and general theoretical answers to the questions of how we should act and live.

To that end we will examine two prominent critiques of normative ethical theories: Williams’s **anti-theory** and Dancy’s **moral particularism**. Both Williams and Dancy argue, though in significantly different ways, that the prospects for normative ethical theories are dim.

One of the things that Williams is concerned to show is that all attempts to provide a universal foundation for normative ethical theories fail. Dancy, on the other hand, makes the provocative claim that there are no true moral principles. If he’s correct, theories that aim to provide fundamental moral principles are thus doomed to fail. Both Williams and Dancy do have positive claims to make about the nature of ethics however, and we’ll be looking at their positive accounts as well as their critiques of normative theory.

Course aims and objectives

All in all, this course will encourage you to reflect on and work out the answers that you think are most plausible to two of the most important questions for human life: how you should live and act.

It provides a systematic comparison of some of the major normative traditions. The organizing theme will be the debate between theory and anti-theory in normative ethics. To that end we will spend some time on Williams’ seminal work in this area: *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

Broadly speaking, there are some (e.g. Mill and Kant) who think that philosophy can give us theories that answer the questions of how we ought to live and act; and there are some (e.g. Williams, Dancy and, on some interpretations, Aristotle) who think that such theories are not possible.

More specifically, the course aims and objectives are:

1. To learn about the main normative ethical approaches
2. To see how they have been, and could be, applied to practical ethical questions.
3. To understand how and why they support similar and different verdicts.
4. To read classic works in ethics
5. To think about difficult practical questions and be able to defend one's view.

Intended learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students should:

- Have a grasp of fundamental issues and views in normative theory and anti-theory
- Be able to critically analyse and engage with literature by key philosophers in this field.
- Be able to present arguments clearly and concisely both within a classroom context and in an essay.
- Gain transferable skills in research, analysis and argumentation

Syllabus

	Week 1	Introduction to Normative Ethics: Socrates' Question
Theory	Week 2	Consequentialism
	Week 3	Kant's Ethics
	Week 4	Contractualism
	Week 5	Virtue Ethics
	Anti-Theory	Week 6
Week 7		Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy
Week 8		Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy
Week 9		Moral Particularism
Week 10		Moral Particularism
	Week 11	Review

Assessment

Mid-term essay 1500 words	30%
Final essay 2000	65%
Participation	5%

Essay topics and participation requirements will be posted on Learn.

Information regarding Assessment, Feedback and Student Support can be found here:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/ppls/philosophy/current/undergraduate/handbooks>

Reading List

Listed below are the topics and readings, organized by week.

The required readings are **necessary** background reading for the seminar and are the **focus** for the tutorial.

Further readings are to learn more about the topic and to start your research if thinking of writing an essay on a particular topic, or to discuss with your ALG. Some are included on this list. From time to time, more may be posted on the Learn site depending on the interests of the class. You are also encouraged to do your own research. Good resources/ starting points are the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the online *Philosophical Papers*, both of which can be easily searched by topic.

You *must* do the required reading for the seminar and the tutorial. You are not required to read everything, or any particular thing, on the further readings list. Be guided by your interests here. You are also encouraged to do your own research beyond this list, especially for your essays.

Accessing Readings

Most readings are available online or online through the library website, or in the library. Only readings not accessible in these ways will be uploaded to the Learn page.

Background Reading

“Ethics” entry in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Week 1 Introduction to Normative Ethics: Socrates’ Question

○ Required:

B. Williams ‘Socrates’ Question’ *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Chapter one.

H. Arendt ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture’ *Social Research*, 1984, Vol. 51, No. 1/2. pp. 7-37

○ Secondary:

E. Anscombe ‘Modern Moral Philosophy,’ *Philosophy*, 1958, Vol. 33, reprinted in her *Ethics, Religion and Politics* (Blackwell, 1981)

J. Driver *Ethics: the Fundamentals*, chapter one of her ‘The challenge to moral universalism’ (Blackwell, 2007)

S. Wolf ‘One thought too many: Love, Morality and the Ordering of Commitment’ in *Luck, Value and Commitment* Heuer and Lang (eds) (OUP, 2012)

Week 2: Consequentialism

○ Required:

J. S. Mill *Utilitarianism* (chapter 3 optional)

○ Secondary:

Anderson, E. ‘John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living’, *Ethics*, 102 (1991), 4-26.

Annas, J., 1977, ‘Mill and the Subjection of Women,’ *Philosophy*, 52: 179–94

Brink, D ‘Mill’s Moral and Political Philosophy’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Crisp, R. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Mill on Utilitarianism* (Routledge, 1997)
Driver, J. 'Classical Utilitarianism' and 'Contemporary Consequentialism' in her *Ethics: The Fundamentals*

Week 3: Kant's Ethics

- Required:

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (Chapter one and chapter two)

- Secondary:

Sedgwick, S. *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: An Introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008

Sayre-McCord, G. *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: A very brief, selective summary of sections I and II*, 1992

Baron, M. 'The Alleged Moral Repugnance of Acting from Duty', *Journal of Philosophy*, 81, (1984); reprinted with minor alterations as 'Is Acting from Duty Morally Repugnant?', in her *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Korsgaard, C. *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 2&3

Korsgaard, C. 'The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 15, (1986), 325-49.

Herman, B. *The Practice of Moral Judgement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), ch. 10.

Herman, B. 1981, "On the Value of Acting From the Motive of Duty" *Philosophical Review* 90(3)

O'Neill, O. *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 7& 8.

Rae Langton, 'Maria von Herbert's challenge to Kant'

https://lms.manhattan.edu/pluginfile.php/41280/mod_resource/content/1/Langton%20von%20Herbert%20and%20Kant.pdf

Week 4: Contractualism

- Required:

T. Scanlon 'The Structure of Contractualism' in *What We Owe To Each Other*.

- Secondary:

Ashford, E. 2003. "The Demandingness of Scanlon's Contractualism", *Ethics*, 113(2): 273-302.

Hills, A. 2010. "Utilitarianism, Contractualism and Demandingness", *Philosophical Quarterly*, 60: 225-242.

Hills, A. 2010. "Utilitarianism, Contractualism and Demandingness", *Philosophical Quarterly*, 60: 225-242

Kamm, F. M., 2002. "Owing, Justifying, Rejecting: Thomas Scanlon's What We Owe to Each Other", *Mind*, 111: 323-54

Kamm, F. 2005. "Aggregation and Two Moral Methods", *Utilitas*, 17(1): 1-23

Stratton-Lake, P. 2003. "Scanlon's Contractualism and the Redundancy Objection", *Analysis*, 63: 70-76.

- Swanson, J. (2011). Contractualism and the Moral Status of Animals. *Between the Species* 14 (1):1
- Taurek, J., 1977. "Should the Numbers Count?", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 6: 293–316

Week 5: Virtue Ethics

- Required:

J. McDowell 'Virtue and Reason' *The Monist* 62 (3):331-350 (1979)
- Secondary:

Annas, J., 2006, "Virtue Ethics", in David Copp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 515–36.

Anscombe, G. E. M., 1958, "Modern Moral Philosophy" *Philosophy*, 33, 1-19

Crisp, Roger and Michael Slote (eds.), 1997, *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Nussbaum, M., 1993, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach", in *The Quality of Life*, Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 242–70.

—, 1995, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics" in *World, Mind, Ethics: Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams*

Swanton, C., 2011, "Virtue Ethics", in Christian Miller (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Ethics*, New York: Continuum, 190–213.

Annas, Julia, 2004, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, Presidential Address, 78 (2): 61–75.

Hursthouse, R. 1991, "Virtue Theory and Abortion" *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 20(3), 223-246.

Week 6: Williams against Utilitarianism

- Required:

B.Williams 'A Critique of Utilitarianism' in Smart and Williams *Utilitarianism For and Against*
- Secondary:

Ashford, E. 2000. Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Partiality. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 97(8): 421–439

Chappell, S-G., and Smyth, N. 'Bernard Williams', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Smart, J.J.C & Williams, B. *Utilitarianism For and Against*

Hills, A. 2010. "Utilitarianism, Contractualism and Demandingness", *Philosophical Quarterly*, 60: 225–242.

Hernandez, J. "The Integrity Objection Reloaded" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 2013

McFall, L. 1992. "Integrity". In *Ethics and Personality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, Edited by: Deigh, J. Chicago: Chicago University Press

Railton, P. 1984. Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 13: 134–71

Week 7: Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy I

- Required:
B. Williams, Chapters two and three of *Ethics and the Limits and Philosophy*
- Secondary:
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1
McDowell, J 'The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics' reprinted in his *Mind, Value, Reality* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998.
Nussbaum, M., 1993, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach", in *The Quality of Life*, Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 242–70.
—, 1995, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics" in *World, Mind, Ethics: Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams*
Hurley, S 'Commentary on "Martha Nussbaum: Non-relative Virtues, an Aristotelian Approach"' in Nussbaum and Sen (eds) *The Quality of Life*
Williams, B. 'Replies' in *World, Mind, Ethics: Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams*

Week 8: Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy II

- Required:
B. Williams, Chapters four and five of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*
- Secondary:
Chappell, S-G., and Smyth, N. 'Bernard Williams', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
Jenkins, Mark, 2006, *Bernard Williams*, London: Acumen
Thomas, Alan (ed.), 2007, *Bernard Williams: Contemporary Philosophers in Focus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
See also the readings and secondary readings for weeks 3&4

Week 9: Particularism

- Required:
J. Dancy 'What are the Options' Chapter one of *Ethics without Principles*
- Secondary:
Berker, S. 2007, "Particular Reasons", *Ethics*, 118(1): 109–139
Dancy, J 'Moral Particularism' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
Hooker, B and Little, M(eds), 2000, *Moral Particularism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
McKeever & Ridge 'Moral Particularism and Moral Generalism' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
Smith, H, 2012, "Using Moral Principles to Guide Decisions", *Philosophical Issues*, 22: 26–48. doi:10.1111/j.1533-6077.2012.00235.x
Stangl, R, 2006, "Particularism and the Point of Moral Principles," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 9: 201–229.
Vayrynen, P. 'Moral Particularism' in the *Continuum Companion to Ethics*

Week 10: Particularism

- Required:

J. Dancy 'Holism and its Consequences' Chapter five of *Ethics without Principles*

- Secondary:

Crisp, Roger, 2000, 'Particularizing Particularism,' in Hooker and Little 2000, 23-47.

Hooker, B. 2000, 'Moral Particularism: Wrong and Bad,' in Hooker and Little 2000, 1-22.

Hooker, Brad, and Little, Margaret (eds.), 2000, *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Jackson, Frank, Pettit, Philip, and Smith, Michael, 2001, 'Ethical Particularism and Patterns,' in Hooker and Little 2000, 79-99.

Lance, Mark, and Little, Margaret, 2006a, 'Particularism and Anti-Theory,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 567-94.

Lance, Mark, and Little, Margaret, 2006b, 'Defending Moral Particularism,' in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*, ed. James Dreier (Oxford: Blackwell), 305-21.

McKeever, Sean, and Ridge, Michael, 2005, 'What Does Holism Have to Do with Moral Particularism?', *Ratio* 18, 93-103.

McKeever, Sean, and Ridge, Michael, 2006, *Principled Ethics: Generalism as a Regulative Ideal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Schroeder, Mark, 2009, 'A Matter of Principle,' *Noûs* 43, 568-80

Week 11: Review