Course aims and objectives

Our focus in this course is on Normative ethics. Normative ethical theory aims to answer the questions ‘How should I act?’ and ‘How should I live?’.

This course 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 Bernard 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 a 2,500 word essay.
- ☑ Gain transferable skills in research, analysis and argumentation.

**Syllabus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Introduction to Normative Ethics: Socrates’ Question</th>
<th>Synchronous seminar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Consequentialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Kant’s Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Contractualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Virtue Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Theory</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Williams against Utilitarianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Moral Particularism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Moral Particularism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Week 1: Introduction to Normative Ethics: Socrates’ Question**

**Class reading**

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

**Week 2: Consequentialism**

**Class reading**

J. S. Mill *Utilitarianism* (chapter 3 optional)
Week 3: Kant’s Ethics
Class reading

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

Week 4: Contractualism
Class reading

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

Week 5: Virtue Ethics
Class reading


Week 6: Williams against Utilitarianism
Class reading

Bernard Williams ‘A Critique of Utilitarianism’ in Smart and Williams *Utilitarianism For and Against*

Week 7: Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy I
Class reading

Bernard Williams, Chapters two and three of his *Ethics and the Limits and Philosophy*

Week 8: Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy II
Class reading

Bernard Williams, Chapters four and five of his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*

Week 9: Particularism
Class reading

Jonathan Dancy ‘What are the Options’ Chapter one of his *Ethics without Principles*

Week 10: Particularism
Class reading

Jonathan Dancy ‘Holism and its Consequences’ Chapter five of his *Ethics without Principles*