Course Guide

PHIL10099: Nature of Moral Understanding
2016/17 Course Guide

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Contents
1. Course Aims and Objectives
2. Intended Learning Outcomes
3. Seminar Times and Locations
4. Seminar Content
5. Readings
6. Academic Support
7. Assessment
8. Feedback
9. Learning Resources
10. Personal Development
11. Organisation and Management
12. Marking Criteria

Department of Philosophy
School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences
University of Edinburgh
1. Course Aims and Objectives

There is a distinctive experience that humans have when they think about situations that seem to involve moral considerations. While these experiences may be amenable to theoretical formalisation, there is important philosophical reflection to be done without theory. What do people understand when they understand a situation as demanding moral consideration, reflection or decision? This course aims to make progress with this and related questions and in the process complement our other, more formal, courses in moral philosophy.

The central question with which this course is concerned is: what is the nature of the understanding someone has when they engage with their moral concerns? These moral concerns are considered to arise in relatively ordinary situations of the kinds presented in life, literature and film. These situations include decisions about what to do; wondering how to live; questions of whether one is under a moral obligation; contemplation of shame or guilt.

In this sense, this course is a philosophical examination of various phenomena—moral phenomena—about which philosophical theories are constructed. The main goals will be to focus on the nature of the understanding we have of these phenomena with a view to clarifying which are their essential features and which do not distinguish them. Central to this examination, we will consider how other philosophers have tried to delimit the phenomena or characterise our moral understanding.

2. Intended Learning Outcomes

To develop further the philosophical skills acquired in previous philosophy courses. Extend as well as deepen the knowledge acquired in previous moral philosophy courses. In particular, we will learn how to use the techniques of philosophical analysis and division, as well as the approaches of past philosophers, and apply them to familiar experiences of the moral as found in ordinary lives and literature.

3. Seminar Times and Locations

Semester 1 – Tuesdays 11.10am – 1pm, Dugald Stewart Building 1.20

4. Seminar Content

Requirements
The format of this course is a seminar. It requires your participation. There is no required text for this course. Each week there are one or two required readings indicated above the questions given for that week.

☞ You must read that article or chapter in preparation for discussion each week.
The discussion in class is no substitute for reading this material as well. You should read some of the additional reading given. This is essential if you propose to discuss that topic in an essay, exam or short dissertation. I have tried to ensure that the vast majority of the reading is online through the library’s subscriptions.

1. Introduction
No required reading.

We will discuss the content of the course and seek to identify the relation an investigation of moral understanding has to moral philosophy and ethics.

What are moral theories theories of?
To what extent, if any, is moral reflection amenable to theoretical codification?
Is Plato an ethical theorist?
How independent, if at all, are the levels of ethical theorising, viz. meta-normative, meta-ethical, normative ethical, applied ethical?
How many varieties of ethical theory are there?
Is there an experience that moral philosophy explains?

2. Facts and Choice
I. Murdoch. Vision and choice in morality. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume, XXX:32–58, 1956. (PAS is now on JSTOR; also the paper is reprinted in her collection, Existentialists and Mystics.)

Are the facts given to us in moral matters?
Do moral challenges present themselves principally as requiring choice or clarity?
Is the Socratic thesis in any way defensible?
In what sense, if any, should we distinguish the role of facts in moral matters and scientific matters?
Which facts, if any, are moral facts?

3. Perceptiveness


Are some people better at recognising the facts that bear on a moral matter?
To what extent, if any, are we responsible for our beliefs?
To what extent, if any, is perception “morally loaded”?
To what extent, if any, is one’s moral character revealed by what is perceived?
Can literature function as moral philosophy?
4. Remorse

Is remorse distinct from guilt or bad conscience?
Can one be remorseful for something done on an involuntary basis?
To what extent, if any, is remorse personal?
To what extent, if any, is the moral understanding revealed in remorse distinct from that revealed prior to acting?
Is remorse distinct from regret?
Is remorse solely a hallmark of a moral thought or experience?

5. Forgiveness

Is forgiveness possible?
Must the person who forgives also condone what is forgiven?
What, if any, are the preconditions for forgiveness?
Does forgiveness require a shared understanding between the forgiver and the forgiven?
Are we ever obliged to forgive?

6. Individuality

What scope, if any, is there for individuality in one’s understanding of moral matters?
What is the universalizability requirement on moral judgments? Does it hold?
When, if at all, does moral disagreement imply that one party is wrong?
Does the genuine possibility of faultless moral disagreement imply that there are no moral facts?

7. Moral Argument
[The library should have a copy or you can find one here: http://bit.ly/VmODUv]

To what extent, if any, are the forms of moral argument distinct from other arguments in philosophy?
To what extent, if any, are moral arguments not amenable to the logico-deductive model of proof familiar in logic and mathematics?
What role does example play in moral argument?
To what extent, if any, is there a difference between argument and persuasion?
8. The Banal and Absurd

What if anything is the mark of the absurd?
Is a formal definition of what is absurd possible, other than contradiction?
Are there things we morally should fear to think?
Is absurdity a matter of conceptual incoherence?
Is banality a form of moral misunderstanding?

9. Moral Limits

Does the moral always trump the prudential? (i.e. is morality higher than prudence?)
Can we decide in advance that some matters are never moral matters?
Is the rejection of morality of itself immoral?
Does the implication in an ethical theory that moral considerations are ubiquitous count against its prima facie plausibility?
What limits, if any, are there on morality?

10. Moral Problems and Moral Expertise

What is a moral problem?
What is the solution to a moral problem?
Can someone be morally successful?
Can moral problems be caused or solved by luck?
Are there moral experts? What do they know?
Are moral problems always inter-personal?

11. Moral Philosophy and Moral Understanding

To what extent, if any, is moral understanding distinct from moral knowledge?
How, if at all, does moral understanding increase?
What are the sources of moral understanding?
What relation, if any, is there between moral theory and moral understanding?
What is moral understanding understanding of?
5. Readings
Part I

1. Introduction


I have found the following general work on ethics to have a format and style congenial to the approach of this class. Therefore, you may find many of its entries helpful in grounding yourself in moral philosophy more broadly conceived.


In addition, for a fair-minded description of the “state of the art” in ethics and moral philosophy as it is understood now, the following book is good.


Some of the topics we will discuss are covered in more general and sometimes introductory ways in:


2. Facts and Choice


3. Perceptiveness


Brian P. McLaughlin, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (editors), Perspectives on Self-Deception, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, part V.

There is a modest but interesting literature on ethics and literature, some titles relevant to our discussion are listed below.


Part II

4. Remorse


5. Forgiveness
Hannah Arendt, “Irreversibility and the power to forgive”, The Human Condition, chapter 33, 1958, several publishers and subsequent editions.


6. Individuality
[There is a considerable literature on this topic, the below section exposes an uncommon approach.]


Hertzberg, Lars, ‘On Moral Necessity’, in: *The Limits of Experience*, volume 56 (Helsinki:Societas Philosophica Fennica, 1994), pp. 220–238. (This version subtly varies from the above. I can lend this version if required.)


Part III

7. Moral Argument


Peter Winch. “Persuasion” *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*. Volume 17 Issue 1, Pages 123 - 137.


An early question concerning the form and force of even the most basic argument was
posed by Lewis Carroll. Over a century a secondary literature developed in response to his short paper.


Rees, W.J., "What Achilles said to the Tortoise." *Mind*, 60 (1951), 241-246.


**8. The Banal and Absurd**


**9. Moral Limits**


**10. Moral Problems and Moral Expertise**

Plato, *Laches*.


Barabas, M. The Problem with the Moral Problem: An Example of Lying. Organon F, VIII. (2001), No 4, pp 353-387. (I will supply a copy of this on request.)


11. Moral Philosophy and Moral Understanding


The following books touch on many of the themes we will discuss in this course without giving the sort of treatment we will be obliged to give. You may find them stimulating.


6. Academic Support

Course Organiser

The Course Organiser (CO) is your first point of contact for any queries about the course. The CO can comment and give advice on your plans/outlines for assessed work for the course. Plans or outlines should be sent to the CO in good time before the assessment deadline. What counts as ‘in good time’ may depend on the workload of the CO, and students should consult with the CO about this. COs will help you with any problems understanding material during the course, or any issue pertaining to the organisation of the course and marking criteria. After assessed work is submitted, you can ask your CO to explain your feedback comments, and how your feedback relates to your mark, as well as giving advice on how to improve.

You are welcome to come to see the CO during his or her weekly office hours. No appointment is necessary. Outside office hours, please email the CO for an appointment.

Personal Tutor and Student Support Officers

In the event of any difficulty of a non-academic nature (illness, disability, personal circumstances), you should contact your Personal Tutor or Student Support Officer.

PPLS Undergraduate Student Handbook

More information about Academic Support is available in the PPLS Undergraduate Student Handbook, including information about academic guidance; late coursework and plagiarisim; illness and disability adjustments, and useful sources of advice. The Handbook can be found here:

7. Assessment

Exam
This course will be assessed solely on the basis of an exam given in the December 2016 diet of examinations. Students who qualify (usually fourth year single honours philosophy students) may be obliged to submit a Coursework Dissertation (formerly called long essay or short dissertation) instead of sitting the exam. The title of your short dissertation must be approved in advance by submitting it to me in person or by email. After your title is approved you will complete a form confirming this title and submit it to the departmental office by Monday 24th October 2016, by 12pm. Generally, any question listed below for discussion in a seminar is a suitable short dissertation title.

Formative Essay
In addition, anyone can submit an essay of 2000 words to me for assessment and comment. This “formative essay” will not count toward determining your mark for this class or the class of degree you are ultimately awarded, unless special circumstances prevent you from completing the prescribed assessment above. However the essay is an excellent opportunity to improve your philosophical writing and try arguments you may ultimately use in the exam or short dissertation. I strongly urge you to submit this essay. If you submit the essay by the end of teaching week 9, I will return it to you in class in teaching week 11. If you submit the essay by the end of teaching week 11, I will return the essay to you via the philosophy office in week 1 of the exam term. Essays must be submitted, with a cover sheet, in the manner prescribed by the philosophy office. Generally, any question listed below for discussion in a seminar is a suitable formative essay question.

Visiting Student Assessment

Visiting students will be assessed by exam as described above for home students.

MSc Assessment

MSc students are assessed by a single essay of 2500 words that must be submitted to the postgraduate teaching office in December at the same time as other MSc Essays. Please check with the postgraduate teaching office for precise details. Generally, any question listed for discussion in a seminar is a suitable essay question.

Submission of Coursework

For essay submission instructions please see the instructions on Learn. Please note you should not include your name or matriculation number on coursework, only your exam number.
Word Count Penalties
Essays must not exceed the word limit, which includes footnotes but excludes bibliography. The precise word count must be written on the coversheet. Overlong essays will be penalised according to the following rule: 5% will be deducted for every 100 words, or part thereof, over the word limit. So, 1-100 words over lose 5%; 101-200 words over lose 10%; 201-300 words over lose 15%; and so on.

Penalties for Late Submission of Essays
Unless an extension has been granted, essays must be submitted by the dates shown in the table of Submission Dates below. Essays submitted late without an extension may not be marked, but, if marked, will incur a penalty (in accordance with section 3.8 of the University Undergraduate Assessment Regulations at:

http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Regulations/Temp/TaughtAssessmentRegulations.pdf

For each working day that the work is late there will be a reduction of the mark by 5% of the maximum obtainable mark (e.g. a mark of 65% on the common marking scale would be reduced to 60% up to 24 hours later). This penalty applies for up to five working days, after which a mark of zero will be given. Please note:

Regulation 14 Assessment deadlines: Student responsibilities
It is a student’s responsibility to ascertain and meet his or her assessment deadlines, including examination times and locations.

If you need an extension on the submission date of your essay, please contact the Teaching Office.

8. Feedback
You will get many feedback opportunities in this course. Feedback could be in the form of an essay, a draft write-up, self-generated or peer feedback, small group discussions or quizzes within lectures. This may include ‘feedforward’ opportunities such as how to write an essay, or prepare for an exam.

Some forms of feedback are automatic, such as the feedback you will receive on assessed work. It is the School's policy that marked coursework is to be returned to students within three working weeks of submission, unless notified otherwise by email. Please remember that University holidays and vacation periods do not count as working weeks. During this 3 week period:

- The Teaching Office checks all submitted work from all courses is complete
- The Teaching Office contacts students who haven't submitted work or submitted only incomplete information
- Assessed work sent out to examiners
- 2 working weeks are allocated for marking and feedback by examiners
- 1 working week is allocated for moderation by another staff member
Teaching Office collates marks and releases them to you via Grade Center

Philosophy at Edinburgh is one of the departments most prompt at giving students feedback in the UK. Most UK philosophy departments ask students to wait for at least 4 weeks.

Feedback on assessed work is only a fraction of the feedback opportunities available to you during the course. We strongly encourage you to take advantages of the wide range of voluntary forms of feedback, including:

- Asking and answering questions in lectures or classes
- Asking questions of your Course Organiser or lecturer in their office hours, and discussing essay plans/ outlines or previous feedback on assessed work
- Discussing work with examiners on Philosophy's dedicated Feedback Days
- Participating in Autonomous Learning Groups
- Talking about your ideas outside class with fellow Philosophy students
- Taking your essay to PhilSoc essay surgeries
- Participating in PhilSoc discussion groups and study-skills events
- Participating in PhilSoc debates and talks: [http://www.philsoc.eu](http://www.philsoc.eu)
- Participating in the British Undergraduate Philosophy Society, including undergraduate conferences: [http://www.bups.org](http://www.bups.org)

9. Learning Resources

Learn

This year the majority of courses will use electronic submissions for Honours coursework. For essay submission instructions please see the instructions on LEARN. Please note you should not include your name or matriculation number on coursework, only your exam number.

University of Edinburgh Library

The University of Edinburgh has an extensive suite of paper and electronic learning resources. The library’s resources can be searched online via MyEd.

Autonomous Learning Groups (ALGs)

Each course has dedicated Autonomous Learning Groups. In week 2, you will receive an email from our Student Support Officer (Sarah Nicol, sarah.nicol@ed.ac.uk) asking if you would like to be part of an Autonomous Learning Group (ALG). If you agree, Sarah will form your ALG and email you with details of which group you are in, and the email addresses of the other members of the group. It is up to you, the members of the ALG, to organize the meetings. You decide how often to meet and what to do in your ALG. ALGs are designed to help you learn and get to know your classmates; they are not a formal requirement of the course. It is important to note that assessment in your courses is non-competitive: you are not judged against classmates, only against the general grade criteria. It is in your interests to help each other.
As a rough guide, we suggest your ALG meets every 2-3 weeks. You could use the meetings to:

- Read and discuss the papers together
- Discuss essay-writing and time-management techniques
- Constructively critique each other’s draft essays or plans
- Read some of the further readings or related papers
- Work on presentations or discussion posts that the class may involve
- Share tips on career advice

Please email the CO of the course if you feel that it would be useful for the group if she or he joined one of your sessions. Please contact Sarah if you find it necessary during the semester to transfer into a different group.

**Study Skills Workshops**

This year-long dedicated series of events for Philosophy students includes sessions on all aspects of the degree programme: essay writing, exam preparation, the dissertation, how to give a presentation, how to use learning resources effectively, and philosophy as a transferrable skill beyond the classroom:


**Innovative Learning Week**

WEEK 6  INNOVATIVE LEARNING WEEK. Normal teaching slots will be suspended and in their place will be a range of other activities such as master classes, a research day, a science fair, and guest lectures. More information will follow nearer the time so please check the School website where details will be available on the PPLS Events page:

- [http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/academic-life/studies/innovative-learning](http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/academic-life/studies/innovative-learning)

**Online learning resources**

Useful online learning resources include:

- PhilPapers: [http://philpapers.org](http://philpapers.org)
- Google Scholar: [http://scholar.google.co.uk](http://scholar.google.co.uk)
- Philosophy Tools: sign up via the ‘Self Enrol’ option on Learn

**10. Personal Development**

Philosophy is not so much a subject matter as a method of enquiry. Learning how to do philosophy is closely tied to your personal development. What you learn in the classroom will help you in contexts beyond those of your degree programme. This includes, but is not limited to:
Confidence building:
- Learning new concepts
- Critically approaching work of establisher thinkers
- Using rigorous thinking to assess the claims of yourself and others
- Managing your own time and workload

Improving communication skills:
- Participating in class discussion
- Gaining skills to research and marshal evidence
- Gaining skills to communicate complex abstract positions in writing
- Gaining skills to present clear, cogent, and sustained arguments for a claim
- Working effectively to a deadline and/or word limit

Confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems:
- Experience with solving new problems each week
- Being challenged to research problems and think critically during the course
- Acquiring a wide-reaching conceptual toolkit to analyse and address unfamiliar claims

11. Organisation and Management

Attendance monitoring
The University expects all students to attend all their University classes, lectures and tutorials etc, whether or not these are described as “compulsory” by the School. This includes participating fully in the requirements of all courses, including submitting assignments, contributing to tutorials and workshops, attending meetings with Personal Tutors and sitting examinations.

Your attendance will be monitored by the School, so that staff can help you to manage your progress through the courses. We will do this so we can be quickly alerted to any additional pastoral or academic support needs any student might require, and so that the School can provide advice, guidance or support in a timely and useful manner.

Student feedback to us

We take your views seriously, and past comments from students have prompted some of the most beneficial changes in teaching. If you have any suggestions on how to improve this course further, please contact:

- Your Course Organiser
- Your student year representative (http://www.philosophy.ed.ac.uk/phil_students/postgraduate/student_representatives.php - undergraduates)
- Dr Mark Sprevak, Director of Undergraduate Teaching (mark.sprevak@ed.ac.uk)
- Dr Tillmann Vierkant, Head of Philosophy (t.vierkant@ed.ac.uk)
12. Marking Criteria

University of Edinburgh Common Marking Scheme

- [http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/registry/exams/regulations/common-marking-scheme](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/registry/exams/regulations/common-marking-scheme)

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| A1    | 90-100      | Excellent  
Outstanding in every respect, the work is well beyond the level expected of a competent student at their level of study. |
| A2    | 80-89       | Excellent  
Outstanding in some respects, the work is often beyond what is expected of a competent student at their level of study. |
| A3    | 70-79       | Excellent  
Very good or excellent in most respects, the work is what might be expected of a very competent student. |
| B     | 60-69       | Very Good  
Good or very good in most respects, the work displays thorough mastery of the relevant learning outcomes. |
| C     | 50-59       | Good       
The work clearly meets requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes. |
| D     | 40-49       | Pass       
The work meets minimum requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes. |
| E     | 30-39       | Marginal fail  
The work fails to meet minimum requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes. |
| F     | 20-29       | Clear fail  
The work is very weak or shows a decided lack of effort. |
| G     | 10-19       | Bad fail    
The work is extremely weak. |
| H     | 0-9         | Bad fail    
The work is of very little consequence, if any, to the area in question. |

Philosophy-Specific Marking Guidelines

These guidelines explain how the University of Edinburgh’s Common Marking Scheme applies in the particular case of philosophy work. The guidelines also offer tips on how to improve your work, describing what ingredients you need to move up
a grade boundary. The approach is constructive: start with the minimal requirements, and then tell you what you need to add to do better.

*Explaining the function of these guidelines:*

1. These are only guidelines; marking still requires discretion and judgment.

2. The guidelines are “bottom up” — each band presupposes that the student has at least satisfied the criteria laid down under the lower bands. So to get a first, it is assumed that you at least satisfy all the criteria for a 2-1, etc.

3. Each set of guidelines should be understood not as providing necessary and sufficient conditions for a mark in the band specified. Rather, the guidelines under each band provide a kind of “cluster” which defines a paradigm of a piece of work falling within the band in question. A piece of work might deviate from the paradigm in certain respects but still fall within the band. It might help to explain the idea of a paradigm being invoked here. By way of comparison, an ornamental chair (as one might find in a museum, and that is not fit for sitting on) is a less paradigmatic instance of a piece of furniture than an ordinary sofa, but plausibly an ornamental chair still counts as a piece of furniture all the same. This is because it satisfies enough of the criteria in the cluster of concepts associated with being a piece of furniture, though it satisfies fewer of those criteria than an ordinary sofa. Similarly, a piece of work might be a less than fully paradigmatic instance of a 2-1 but still count as a 2-1 all the same.

4. Although they are written in a way that might naturally suggest a binary reading, the guidelines are generally scalar – satisfying each of them comes in degrees, and is not all or nothing. This is important, and relevant to the “paradigm” point above, in that doing better with respect to one criteria under a given band could offset doing slightly less well with regards to another. Also, precisely where within the band a piece of work is assessed will typically reflect how well the work does in terms of each of these criteria.

5. The guidelines apply most clearly for essays. In the case of exam questions, part of the exercise will be for the student to work out the extent to which the question calls for something going beyond pure exegesis.

6. For history of philosophy classes, where the instructor explicitly indicates this is the case, the contrast between exegesis and original argument may be less clear. In these cases, the original argumentation may be an original argument for an interpretation or reading of a text, for example. Individual instructors have some discretion in explaining how the specific details of their course mean these guidelines should be interpreted. As mere guidelines, they provide only a sort of “default setting” rather than a one size fits all set of prescriptions, amenable to only one canonical interpretation.

*General Guidelines:*

- Clarity:
o Is the writing clear?
o Is the grammar and spelling correct?
o Is the language used appropriate?

• Structure:
o Is a clear thesis or position stated?
o Is an argument, or arguments, offered in support of the thesis?
o Does each part of the essay/exam have a clearly indicated purpose?

• Understanding:
o Is a sound understanding of relevant issues demonstrated?
o Is the exposition of others’ views accurate?
o Are technical terms adequately defined?

• Originality:
o Is there evidence of independent thought?
o Is there critical engagement with the material?

• Argument:
o Is the argument convincing?
o Are the inferences valid?
o Are obvious objections anticipated?

Grade Bands:

Fail (less than 40)

Third Class (40–49):

• Writing is generally unclear. Frequent spelling or grammar mistakes, incorrect language, and/or excessively convoluted sentence structure.
• Neglects clearly to state a thesis or position and/or fails to support this with arguments. Contains irrelevant material, or material whose relevance is not adequately explained.
• Demonstrates a barely adequate understanding of central issues. Contains several errors in exposition or in explanation of concepts.
• No evidence of independent thought or critical engagement. Merely rehashes arguments from readings or lectures.
• Where arguments are given, these are weak, depend on invalid inferences or implausible premises. Fails to anticipate obvious objections.

Lower Second Class (50–59):

• Writing is generally clear, but there are occasional spelling/grammar infelicities and/or poorly constructed sentences.
• A thesis/position is indicated but not clearly defined. Some arguments given, but their structure often unclear.
• Demonstrates a basic grasp of key concepts, but occasional inaccuracies in exposition/explanation.
• Little evidence of independent thought. Some suggestion of original ideas, but these are under-developed and/or expressed unclearly.
• Arguments generally weak or unconvincing.
Upper Second Class (60–69):

- Writing is generally clear, marred only by the rare spelling/grammar infelicity or poorly constructed sentence.
- A thesis/position is indicated and clearly defined. Arguments are given with relatively clear structure. It is generally clear what is going on in each section, why one section follows on from the previous one, and how the essay as a whole hangs together.
- Demonstrates a solid understanding of the key concepts, and the exposition is generally accurate and thorough.
- Substantial evidence of original thought – either an original argument of some kind for a familiar position or an original argument for a novel position. In either case, the argument should be reasonably well developed.
- The author’s original arguments are interesting and promising, but fairly central or glaring problems with the argument are not discussed or addressed in any way, or are given only a highly cursory treatment.

Low First Class (70–79):

- Writing is very clear and engaging throughout. Where examples are used they are both relevant and memorable. The writing will also be concise.
- The essay’s structure is not only clear and well defined; it also provides a satisfying narrative arc.
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of the key concepts. Explains other philosopher’s ideas in the author’s own terms, clearly presenting those ideas in a way that indicates that the author has “made them his/her own.” Where technical terms are used they are always carefully defined.
- Highly original thought, with well developed arguments. The exegesis will generally be sufficiently concise as to allow the author to develop his or her own arguments in considerable detail.
- The author very carefully considers the most central and obvious problems with his/her original argument(s) and has interesting things to say about them.

Mid-First Class (80–89):

- Writing is crystal clear and highly engaging throughout. Memorable examples are used to underscore key points. The writing is concise without coming across as terse or stilted.
- The essay’s structure is clear and well defined, with a highly satisfying narrative arc.
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of key concepts. Not only explains the ideas of other philosophers in a way that shows he/she has “made them his/her own,” but that actually casts new light on how we might charitably understand the ideas of those philosophers.
- Very original thought, above and beyond what we would normally expect from an undergraduate. These original ideas will be developed in great detail.
- The author very carefully considers the most central and obvious problems with his/her original argument(s) and has prima facie convincing rejoinders. Author may also consider more subtle objections to his/her
argument(s)/view(s).

High First Class (90–100):

- Writing is extremely clear, concise, and engaging — of a publishable quality.
- The essay’s structure is extremely clear and well-defined, with a highly satisfying narrative arc.
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of key concepts. Not only explains the ideas of other philosophers in a way that shows he/she has “made them his/her own,” but that actually casts new light on how we might charitably understand the ideas of those philosophers.
- A highly original and well developed line of argument and/or novel view, such that the essay is publishable, at least in an undergraduate or postgraduate journal, perhaps bordering on being publishable in a mainstream professional journal.
- The author considers the most important objections to his/her arguments/views. The replies are generally convincing and subtle. If space allows, less obvious objections may also be discussed in interesting ways.