

Ethics

Preliminaries

1. Logistics I would like you to write six essays (1,600-2,000 words each) for me across the term. It is up to you in which weeks you write these essays. For each topic I have suggested an essay question. It is up to you whether you answer this question or come up with your own. In weeks when you do write an essay, please email it to me by 19.00 the day before our tutorial to give me a chance to read through it before we meet. When emailing me your essay, I would appreciate it if you could include both your name and the essay topic in the name of the document. In the two weeks in which you do not write an essay, you should still aim to do the reading for that week's topic. If for any reason (illness, a pileup of other commitments, etc.) writing an essay proves to be difficult in a week when an essay is due, do not worry: just email me and we can sort something out (e.g. writing the essay in week 9, or whatever works best).

2. Topics (i) We will begin by spending two weeks on Kant ("Categorical Imperative" followed by "Moral Motivation"). After that you can choose which topic we look at each week from those remaining on the list. If you choose to look at either virtue ethics or realism and non-cognitivism, those topics will take two weeks to cover. (ii) Three topics (disability, surrogacy, and the treatment of non-human animals) are taken from the Practical Ethics paper. You should be aware that if you also take Practical Ethics then you will be unable to answer questions on these topics in the Ethics exam. This is not necessarily a reason to avoid looking at these topics this term. For one thing, if you are considering taking Practical Ethics then looking at these topics could help you make up your mind. For another, if you do take Practical Ethics then you will of course be able to answer on these topics in the Practical Ethics exam. Finally, you are unlikely to revise more than four or so topics for the Ethics exam in any case.

3. Reading (i) *Order* I recommend reading the texts listed for each topic in roughly the order I have listed them. (ii) *Quantity* I do not expect you to get through all the texts listed for a given topic during the given week in term time, but you should aim to get through at least half. (iii) *Note-taking* It is important that as you read you take high-quality notes from which you will later be able to revise. You will be better-off in the long-run reading fewer texts while taking high-quality notes than reading more texts without taking high-quality notes. (iv) *Revising* At the end of term you should decide which four topics you will prepare to answer on in Finals, and use the vacation to get

through any remaining texts listed for those topics. You should also make sure to consult the faculty reading list for those topics prior to Finals.

4. Writing I strongly recommend reading Rachel Fraser's "Essay Writing Instructions" and "What Not to Do" before writing your first essay, available here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1V-fuU89qX-JZAXVu3V3zWS1dQNz0bjQd>.

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Kant I: Categorical Imperative

QUESTION: Is it morally permissible for me to act on the maxim "I will buy clothes but not sell them"? What are the implications for Kant's moral theory?

Sally Sedgwick, *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chs.1-4.

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (any edition), Sections I and II.

Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), Chs.1, 3 & 5.

Japa Pallikkathayil, "Deriving Morality From Politics: Rethinking the Formula of Humanity" in *Ethics* Vol.121 no.1 (2010), pp.116-147.

Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), Ch.6 "Kant's *Untermenschen*".

Kant II: Moral Motivation

QUESTION: "Acting from duty seems to me to be crucial to morally good conduct." (MARCIA BARON) Is it?

Marcia Baron, "The Alleged Moral Repugnance of Acting from Duty" in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.81 no.4 (1984), pp.197-220.

Barbara Herman, "On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty" in *The Philosophical Review* Vol.90 no.3 (1981), pp.359-382.

Rae Langton, "Duty and Desolation" in *Philosophy* Vol.67 no.262 (1992), pp.481-505.

Nomy Arpaly, "Moral Worth" in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.99 no.5 (2002), pp.223-245.

Jessica Isserow, "Doubts About Duty as a Secondary Motive" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol.105 no.2 (2021), pp.276-298.

Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints" in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.79 no.8 (1982), pp.419-439.

Ami Harbin, *Disorientation and Moral Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), Chs.1&2.

Virtue Ethics I: A Third Method of Ethics?

QUESTION: "To call someone virtuous is just an old-fashioned way of saying that they reliably act in accordance with the correct moral principles. So we can do without the notion of a virtue." Discuss.

Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics" in D. Copp ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp.515-536.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (various editions), Bk 1.

Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy" in *Philosophy* Vol.33 no.124 (1958), pp.1-19.

Roger Crisp, "A Third Method of Ethics?" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol.90 no.2 (2015), pp.257-273.

Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Ch.1 "Virtues and Vices".

Sebastian Purcell, "Life on the Slippery Earth" in *Aeon* (July 2018).

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (3rd ed., London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

Virtue Ethics II: Action-Guidance

QUESTION: Is it a good objection to virtue ethics that it fails to provide any practical guidance?

Rosalind Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics" in Roger Crisp ed., *How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp.19-36.

Gilbert Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error" in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Vol.99 (1999), pp.315-331.

Robert Johnson, "Virtue and Right" in *Ethics* Vol.113 no.4 (2003), pp.810-834.

Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Ch.8 "Against Virtue Ethics".

John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason" in *The Monist* Vol.62 no.3 (1979), pp.331-350.

Raja Halwani, "Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics" in *Hypatia* Vol.18 no.3 (2003), pp.161-192.

Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), Introduction and Chs.4-6.

Moral Realism and Non-Cognitivism I: Realism and the Error Theory

QUESTION: What is the best argument for the Error Theory? Does it succeed?

Stephen Finlay, "Four Faces of Moral Realism" in *Philosophy Compass* Vol.2 no.6 (2007), pp.820-849.

David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Ch.1 "Introduction" and Ch.2 "Moral Realism and Moral Inquiry".

David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), Ch.1 "The View, the Motivation, the Book".

Jonas Olson, "Error Theory in Metaethics" in Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp.58-71.

J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), Ch.1 "The Subjectivity of Values".

Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* Vol.2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Ch.34 "Agreement".

Christine Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Ch.10 "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy".

Moral Realism and Non-Cognitivism II: Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism

QUESTION: Are moral judgments nothing more than the expression of desires?

Matthew S. Bedke, "Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism" in Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp.292-307.

A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (any edition), "Introduction" and Ch.6 "Critique of Ethics and Theology".

Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), Ch.1 "Introduction: A Possibility Proof".

Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Ch.6 "Evaluations, Projections, and Quasi-Realism".

Mark Schroeder, "What is the Frege-Geach Problem?" in *Philosophy Compass* Vol.3 (2008), pp.703-720.

Andy Egan, "Quasi-Realism and Fundamental Moral Error" in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* Vol.85 no.2 (2007), pp.205-219.

MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue* (3rd ed., London: Bloomsbury, 2007), Chs.1-3.

Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Character

QUESTION: "Utilitarianism cannot account for the importance of integrity." Discuss.

Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" in J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For & Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp.75-150.

Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories" in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.73 no.14 (1976), pp.453-466.

Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol.13 no.2 (1984), pp.134-171.

Elizabeth Ashford, "Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Partiality" in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.97 no.8 (2000), pp.421-439.

Nikhil Venkatesh, "Against Commitment" in *Philosophical Studies* Vol. 179 (2022), pp.3511-3534.

Nikhil Venkatesh, "Williams's Integrity Objection as a Psychological Problem" in *Topoi* Vol.43 (2024), pp.491-501.

Julia Driver, "Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics" in *Hypatia* Vol.20 no.4 (2005), pp.183-199.

Freedom and Responsibility

QUESTION: "I am morally responsible for my actions only when I could have acted otherwise. But it is never the case that I could have acted otherwise. So I am never morally responsible for my actions." Is this a good argument?

John Martin Fischer, "Free Will and Moral Responsibility" in David Copp ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.321-354.

Peter Van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism" in *Philosophical Studies* Vol.27 no.3 (1975), pp.185-199.

Galen Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility" in *Philosophical Studies* Vol.75 no.1 (1994), pp.5-24.

Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.66 no.23 (1969), pp.829-839.

Daniel Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (London: Penguin, 2003), Ch.3 "Thinking About Determinism" [or this lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwbmGqOrAEM>].

Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment" in his *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), pp.1-28.

Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), Ch.11 "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme".

Equality, Fairness, and Desert

QUESTION: "The important thing is not whether I have as much of some good as you but whether I have enough of it. Hence, equality is not itself important." Discuss.

Jonathan Wolff, "Equality: The recent history of an idea" in *Journal of Moral Philosophy* Vol.4 no.1 (2007), pp.125-136.

Bernard Williams, "The Idea of Equality" in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers, 1956-1972* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973).

Harry Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal" in *Ethics* Vol.98 no.1 (1987), pp.21-43.

Paula Casal, "Why Sufficiency Is Not Enough" in *Ethics* Vol.117 no.2 (2007), pp.296-326.

Derek Parfit, "Equality and Priority" in *Ratio* Vol.10 no.3 (1997), pp.202-221.

Larry Temkin, "Equality, Priority, and the Levelling Down Objection" in Matthew Clayton & Andrew Williams eds., *The Ideal of Equality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp.126-161.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" in *The Atlantic* (June 2014).

Happiness and Well-Being

QUESTION: Is hedonism a plausible theory of well-being?

Guy Fletcher, *The Philosophy of Well-being: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2016) Chs.1-3.

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), Appendix I.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (any edition), Bk 1.

G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Rev. ed., Cambridge: CUP, 1993), Ch.6 "The Ideal".

Shelly Kagan, "The Limits of Well-Being" in *Social Philosophy & Policy* Vol.9 no.2 (1992), pp.169-189.

Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), esp. Introduction and Ch.2 "Feminist Killjoys".

Andrea Long Chu, "My New Vagina Won't Make Me Happy" in *The New York Times* (24th Nov 2018).

Guilt and Shame

QUESTION: Is it ever morally appropriate to feel shame?

Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Ch.4 & Endnote 1.

Herbert Morris, "Guilt and Shame" in *On Guilt and Innocence: Essays in Legal Philosophy and Moral Psychology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), pp.59-63.

Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), Ch.6 "Shame and Gender".

Olúfémi O. Táíwò, 'How Can We Live Together?' in *Boston Review* (2025), available at: <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/how-can-we-live-together/>.

Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Shame* (London: Verso, 2025).

Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*" in *GLQ* Vol.1 no.1 (1993), pp.1-16.

Disability

QUESTION: Is disability a mere difference?

Elizabeth Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability" in *Ethics* Vol.125 no.1, pp.88-113.

Guy Kahane and Julian Savulescu, "Disability and Mere Difference" in *Ethics* Vol.126 no.3 (2016), pp.774-788.

Elizabeth Barnes, "Reply to Guy Kahane and Julian Savulescu" in *Res Philosophica* Vol.93 no.1 (2016), pp.295-309.

Thomas Nadelhoffer, "Chronic Pain, Mere-Differences, and Disability Variantism" in *Journal of Philosophy of Disability* Vol.2 (2022), pp.6-27.

Tom Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability" in L.J. Davis ed., *The Disability Studies Reader* (5th ed., London: Routledge, 2016), pp.214-221.

Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 2013), Ch.3 "Debating Feminist Futures".

Artie Vierkant and Beatrice Adler-Boulton, *Health Communism* (London: Verso, 2022).

Surrogacy

QUESTION: Should women's reproductive labour be treated differently from other forms of labour?

Rosemarie Tong, "Surrogate Motherhood" in R.G. Frey and Christopher Heath Wellman eds., *A Companion to Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp.369-381.

Elizabeth S. Anderson, "Is Women's Labor a Commodity?" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol.19 no.1 (1990), pp.71-92.

Debra Satz, "Markets in Women's Reproductive Labor" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol.21 no.2 (1992), pp.107-131.

Richard J. Arneson, "Commodification and Commercial Surrogacy" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol.21 no.2 (1992), pp.132-164.

Alan Wertheimer, "Two Questions About Surrogacy and Exploitation" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol.21 no.3 (1992), pp.211-239.

Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now* (London: Verso, 2018), Ch.1 "Introduction" and Ch.2 "'But Aren't You Against It?'".

Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015), Chs.1, 4, and 10.

The Treatment of Non-Human Animals

QUESTION: "We ought not to eat meat for the reason that animals are sentient." Is this right?

Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (2nd ed., London: Random House, 1995), Ch.1 "All Animals Are Equal".

Tom Regan, "Animal rights, human wrongs" in *Environmental Ethics* Vol.2 (1980), pp.99-120.

Shelly Kagan, "What's Wrong with Speciesism?" in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* Vol.33 (2016), pp.1-21.

Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People" in *Philosophy* Vol.53 (1978), pp.465-479.

Sunaura Taylor, "Beasts of Burden: Disability Studies and Animal Rights" in *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.19 no.2 (2011), pp.191-222.

Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (3rd ed., London: Bloomsbury, 2015), Ch.1 "The Sexual Politics of Meat".

John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), Ch.1 "Why Look at Animals?".