

Ethics

Preliminaries

1. Logistics I'd like you to write six essays (1,600-2,000 words each) across the term. It's up to you in which weeks you write these essays. For each topic I've suggested an essay question. More often than not this question has been taken from a past paper. It's up to you whether you answer this question or come up with your own. In the two weeks in which you don't 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, please don't worry: just email me and we can sort something out (e.g. writing the essay in week 9, or whatever works best). I am conscious that Oxford terms can be very demanding at the best of times, and your well-being is much more important than any given week's work.

2. Topics (i) Listed below are the topics from the Ethics paper I am happy to teach. Some topics have been split into two: should you choose to look at Kant, virtue ethics, and/or realism and non-cognitivism, that topic will take two weeks to cover. (ii) Two topics, disability and the treatment of non-human animals, are taken from the Practical Ethics paper. You should be aware that if you decide to take Practical Ethics then you will be unable to answer questions on these topics in the Ethics exam. This isn't necessarily a reason to avoid looking at these topics this term. For one thing, if you're deciding whether or not to take Practical Ethics then looking at one of these topics could help you make up your mind. For another, if you do take Practical Ethics then you'll be able to answer on that topic in the Practical Ethics exam. Finally, you're unlikely to revise more than five topics for the Ethics exam in any case.

3. Reading (i) For each topic I've prescribed four or five texts for you to read. Most are taken from the Faculty reading list (available on both Canvas and ORLO). Aim to get through at least a majority of these each week. (ii) For each topic I've also suggested another text which provides an important (e.g. feminist, non-Western) perspective absent from the Faculty reading list. I strongly recommend engaging with these texts, primarily because doing so is intrinsically worthwhile but also because doing so will help you stand out in Finals. (iii) Finally, for most topics I've suggested a thematically-relevant and hopefully thought-provoking film which you could seek out for something a bit different.

4. Writing Rachel Fraser maintains three excellent short guides to different aspects of essay writing on her website: "How to Write a Philosophy Essay", "What Not to Do" and "A Taxonomy of Finals Questions": <http://www.rachelelizabethfraser.com/teaching.html>. I strongly recommend reading these before writing your first essay.



Kant I: Universalisability and the 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?

Kant, I., *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (any edition);

Korsgaard, C.M., *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), Chs.1&3;

O’Neil, O., “Kantian Ethics” in P. Singer ed., *A Companion to Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp.175-185;

Winch, P., “The Universalizability of Moral Judgments” in *The Monist* Vol.49 no.2 (1965), pp.196-214.

Mills, C.W., *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?

Arpaly, N., “Moral Worth” in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.99 no.5 (2002), pp.223-245;

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

Herman, B., “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty” in *The Philosophical Review* Vol.90 no.3 (1981), pp.359-332;

Langton, R., “Duty and Desolation” in *Philosophy* Vol.67 no.262 (1992), pp.481-505;

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

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

Film: *A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood* (2019), dir. Marielle Heller.

Virtue Ethics I: Return to the Greeks

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.

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

Anscombe, G.E.M., “Modern Moral Philosophy” in *Philosophy* Vol.33 no.124 (1958), pp.1-19;

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

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

MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue* (3rd ed., London: Bloomsbury, 2007) [likely a vacation project].

Purcell, S., “Life on the Slippery Earth” in *Aeon* (July 2018).

Virtue Ethics II: Action-Guidance

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

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

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

Johnson, R., “Virtue and Right” in *Ethics* Vol.113 no.4 (2003), pp.810-834;

McDowell, J., “Virtue and Reason” in *The Monist* Vol.62 no.3 (1979), pp.331-350;

Rachels, J., *Elements of Moral Philosophy* (8th ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 2015), Ch.12.

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

Film: Force Majeure (2014), dir. Ruben Östlund.

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

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

Enoch, D., *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), Chs. 1, 6-8;

Mackie, J.L., *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), Ch.1;

McDowell, J., "Values and Secondary Qualities" in T. Honderich ed., *Morality and Objectivity* (London: Routledge, 1985), pp.110-129;

Rachels, J., *Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), Ch.3;

Sturgeon, N., "Moral Explanations Defended" in J. Dreier ed., *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp.241-262.

Srinivasan, A., "Feminism and Metaethics" in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (London: Routledge, 2017).

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

QUESTION: What is the best argument against non-cognitivism? Does it succeed?

Ayer, A.J., *Language, Truth, and Logic* (any edition), Ch.6;

Blackburn, S., *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), Chs.5&6;

Foot, P., *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), Ch.1;

Gibbard, A., *Thinking How to Live* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), Ch.1;

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

MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue* (3rd ed., London: Bloomsbury, 2007), Chs.2&3.

Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Character

QUESTION: "Utilitarianism can't account for the importance of integrity." Discuss.

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

Calhoun, C., "Standing for Something" in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.92 no.5 (1995), pp.235-260;

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

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

Williams, B., "Persons, Character, and Morality" and "Utilitarianism and Self-Indulgence" in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Venkatesh, N., "Against Commitment" in *Philosophical Studies* (forthcoming).

Film: *This is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection* (2019), dir. Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese.

Freedom and Responsibility

QUESTION: "We don't need to be free; it's enough that we can't help regarding ourselves as free." Is that so?

Dennett, D., *Freedom Evolves* (London: Penguin, 2003), Ch.3 [or this lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwbnGqOrAEM>];

Hume, D., *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (any edition), Ch.8;

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

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

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

Calhoun, C., "Responsibility and Reproach" in *Ethics* Vol.99 no.2 (1989), pp.389-406.

Film: *M* (1931), dir. Fritz Lang.

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.

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

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

Temkin, L., "Equality, Priority, and the Levelling Down Objection" in M. Clayton & A. Williams eds., *The Ideal of Equality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002);

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

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

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

Film: *Parasite* (2020), dir. Bong Joon-ho.

Happiness and Well-Being

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

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

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

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

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

Ahmed, S., *The Promise of Happiness* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), esp. Introduction and Ch.2;

Chu, A.L., “My New Vagina Won’t Make Me Happy” in *The New York Times* (24th Nov 2018).

Film: *Le Bonheur* (1965), dir. Agnès Varda.

Guilt and Shame

QUESTION: Is it ever morally appropriate to feel shame?

Bartky, S., *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), Ch.6;

Freud, S., *Civilisation and its Discontents* (various editions), Ch.7;

Nussbaum, M., *Hiding from Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Chs.4&5;

Taylor, G., *Pride, Shame and Guilt: Emotions of Self-assessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Chs.3&4;

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

Sedgwick, E.K., “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*” in *GLQ* Vol.1 no.1 (1993), pp.1-16.

Film: *Victim* (1961), dir. Basil Dearden.

Disability

QUESTION: “Disability can be desirable.” Discuss.

Barnes, E., “Valuing disability, causing disability” in *Ethics* Vol.125 no.1, pp.88-113;

Barnes, E., *The minority body: a theory of disability* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), Ch.6;

Kafer, A., *Feminist Queer Crip* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 2013), Ch.3;

Kahane, G., & Savulescu, J., "The welfarist account of disability" in K. Brownlee & A. Cureton eds., *Disability and Disadvantage* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp.14-53;

Shakespeare, T., "The social model of disability" in L.J. Davis ed., *The disability studies reader* (5th ed., London: Routledge, 2016), pp.214-221.

Clare, E., "reading across the grain" in *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (2nd ed., London: Duke University Press, 2015), pp.119-141.

Film: Sound of Metal (2020), dir. Darius Marder.

The Treatment of Non-Human Animals

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

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

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

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

Singer, P., *Animal Liberation* (2nd ed., London: Random House, 1995), Ch.1.

Adams, C.J., *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), Ch.1;

Berger, J., "Why Look at Animals?" in *Why Look at Animals?* (London: Penguin, 2009);

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

Film: Cow (2022), dir. Andrea Arnold.