

ETHICS

Mansfield College, HT2017

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General information on the classes

I. Course content

The themes of the *Ethics* programme are threefold. The first theme asks whether we can truly participate in the ethical life. It includes questions such as: Do we have free will? Are we responsible for our actions? Can we deserve punishment or impose it on others? (We do not focus on this theme.)

The second theme is on general questions of normative ethics. It mainly asks what is a right action and what is the good. To answer the first question, it asks the following: Do only consequences of actions matter? Is there a difference between intending to bring about a state of affairs and foreseeing that it will be brought about? To answer the second, it focusses on two questions: Do only experiences matter? Does the distribution of the good matter?

The third theme is on metaethical questions. It mainly asks what moral facts are, whether they are objective, and whether they can be known. Of course, if moral facts can be known, it is because we have *moral beliefs*; but some have argued that all we have are moral *attitudes*. This is another question that is explored in the third theme.

I leave you some leeway about the topics. For instance, we can remove W2 or W8 and spend one more week on consequentialism after W3.

II. Assignments

Each week you will write an essay of approximately 1500–2000 words on the essay question that I give for each topic, below. *Email it to me 24 hours before our meeting.*

During the class, you will present your essay. Make sure you are able to sketch your arguments in less than five minutes. Re-read the first sentence of each of your paragraphs: ideally, this would give you a summary of your essay. The goal is to achieve both clarity and philosophical refinement. Always illustrate abstract principles with examples. State your conclusions clearly at the beginning and end of the essay, and include plenty of ‘signposts’ throughout the essay so that the intended structure of your argument is easy to discern. More tips can be found here: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

¹ This syllabus is inspired from the syllabi of Dr Hilary Greaves (MT2010) and of Prof. Frank Arntzenius, whom I wish to thank in passing.

It is important that you do the readings. Without them, tutorials will be much less valuable. There will be times (trust me) when you regret not having read more (both during finals and after, when you're busy with other things).

III. Marking and late work

If you hand in your essay on time, I will read it and supply written comments, and email it to you in the tutorial or a few hours before. *You get to decide whether you want me to give you a general grade (2.2, low-high-mid 2.1, first) or not.* If your essay is late, I can't make any promises. If your essays are systematically late without good reasons, however, I can make a promise: I will stop reading your essays. It is still important that you hand your essay in even if I don't have time to comment on it, as I am required to report to your college how many pieces of work you have completed to a satisfactory standard.

Notify me by email as soon as possible, and at any rate before the start of the tutorial, if you will be late handing in your essay, and/or unable to attend one of the tutorials, giving your reasons. If you are experiencing difficulties (academic or otherwise) that are affecting your ability to work at your normal standard, or you are concerned about your level of understanding of this topic, don't suffer in silence – let me know as soon as possible.

IV. 'Study questions' and Finals preparation

Finals questions are quite specific. They do not simply say 'write an essay on utilitarianism', and you can't count on the Finals paper containing questions that happen to match your tutorial essay questions. Every single examiners' report complains that many students simply recycle their tutorial essays in response to Finals questions that were asking something quite different.

To be well prepared for Finals, you will need to know (at least) two or three topics with enough depth and breadth that you can understand and intelligently discuss almost anything the examiners choose to ask on that topic. Study strategies vary, and only you can discover what works for you, but one sensible strategy would be:

- (i) As you read for tutorials: write out (in note form) your answers to the 'Study questions' that I've included with each topic. This will ensure that you are picking up most of the *basic* material from the readings.
- (ii) During the vacations, when you have more time: Choose the two or three topics that interest you most, and do further readings for that topic. Think through *your own views* in detail, and review your original answers to the Study Questions. Be original – is there anything that you think the authors whose work you've read have been missing? Work out what you think each of the listed past Finals questions is getting at, what you think about the issue it is raising, how you could structure an essay, *answering precisely that question*, that you could write in fifty minutes.
- (iii) Read widely around the subject (beyond these reading lists), and keep an eye out for non-core lectures and seminars related to Ethics that interest you.

V. Key historical readings

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. Crisp, Irwin (2nd edn.)
 Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*
 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
 J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*

VI. Internet References

The Stanford, Routledge, and Internet *Encyclopedias* (all online),
 L. & C. Becker (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics* (Routledge, 2001).
 The websites maintained by Stephen Darwall and by Larry Hinman.

VII. Introductions, Handbooks, Collections

M. Van Roojen, *Metaethics: a Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge 2015)
 J. Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (6th edition by S. Rachels).
 D. Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (OUP, 2006)
 S. Darwall, *Philosophical Ethics* (Westview, 1998)
 J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory* (Blackwell, 2006)
 J. Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (Penguin, 1977)
 S. Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Westview, 1997)
 H. LaFollette (ed.), *Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (Blackwell, 2000)
 J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin, 1973)
 J. Rachels (ed.), *Ethical Theory 1: The Question of Objectivity* (OUP, 1998)
 J. Rachels (ed.), *Ethical Theory 2: Theories about How We Should Live* (OUP, 1998)
 H. Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics* (Macmillan, 1886)
 P. Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics* (Blackwell, 1991)
 M. Timmons, *Moral Theory* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2002)
 B. Williams, *Morality* (Harper & Row, 1972)

VIII. Selection of Modern Works

J. Broome, *Weighing Lives* (OUP, 2004)
 J. Dancy, *Ethics without Principles* (Clarendon Press, 2004)
 P. Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Blackwell, 1978)
 D. Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Clarendon Press, 1986)
 A. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Clarendon Press, 1990)
 J. Griffin, *Well-Being* (Clarendon Press, 1986)
 R.M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Clarendon Press, 1981)
 C. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (CUP, 1996)
 A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Duckworth, 1981)
 G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (CUP, 1903)

- I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (RKP, 1970)
T. Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Clarendon Press, 1970)
T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (OUP, 1986)
O. O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (CUP, 1989)
D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Clarendon Press, 1984)
J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard UP, 1971)
W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Clarendon Press, 1930)
T. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Belknap, 1998)
S. Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Clarendon Press, 1982)
P. Singer, *Practical Ethics* (CUP, 1979)
M. Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Blackwell, 1994)
B. Williams, *Moral Luck* (CUP, 1981)
B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Fontana, 1985)

I also strongly suggest that you have a look at *Oxford Bibliography Online*. There you can find updated bibliographies of more specific topics within ethics and metaethics.

Weeks 1–2: Free Will, Moral Responsibility, Desert, and Punishment

We explore the free will problem and its consequences on desert and punishment. The free will problem is that there are seemingly good arguments for the disturbing conclusion that we are never free and hence never morally responsible for our actions. These arguments have taken many forms: here are two. On the one hand, it seems like control is necessary for free will but that without alternatives we don't have control; and that we don't truly have alternatives. On the other hand, it looks plausible to say that actions need to *come from us* or to *reflect who we are* for us to be responsible for them. But it is hard to conciliate the way that the world seems to be (determined, physical) with our being responsible for *who we are*. Yet to say that we are responsible for our actions but not for who we are seems problematic. Should we then be sceptics about free will?

Whether we are free will sceptics or not, we have to do something with people who behave in an immoral manner. The natural way to deal with them is blame and punishment. But are these legitimate if we are free will sceptics? If we are not, what justifies blame and punishment? And what are the limits that should be placed on punishment and blame?

Study questions: What is a free will? Is it conceptually possible? Does it exist? Can you act voluntarily even if you don't have a free will? Why would one be a free will sceptic? What is the free will worth wanting? Are alternative possibilities important for free will? Does 'ought' implies 'can' and if so, does it follow that alternative possibilities are important for free will? Is free will necessary for blame? Is the practice of attributing moral responsibility insulated from metaphysical objections? Can one be morally responsible for an action that one does not control? What are attributionism and volitionism? Are we morally responsible for our actions, for their consequences, for our attitudes, for our character, or for nothing? Do we need to understand moral reasons to be morally responsible (are psychopaths morally responsible)? What is retributivism about punishment? What is the deterrence theory of punishment? Should we revise our concept of free will or abandon it? Is there such a thing as moral luck?

Week 1: Attribution, Control, and Scepticism

Essay question, W1: *No one is ever morally responsible for their actions because everything we do is unavoidable.* Discuss whether it is true and why.

Mandatory readings for W1:

Frankfurt, Harry G. 1969. 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility.' *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (23): 829–39.

Fischer and Ravizza, 1993. 'Conclusion', 240–259, in: *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, Ed. Fischer and Ravizza, Cambridge University Press.

Widerker, David. 2000. 'Frankfurt's Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities: A Further Look.' *Philosophical Perspectives* 14: 181–201.

Wolf, Susan. 1993. 'The Real Self View (In Which a Nonautonomous Conception of Free Will and Responsibility Is Examined and Criticized)', 151–169, in *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, Ed. Fischer and Ravizza, Cornell University Press.

Pereboom, Derk. 2014 'Defending a Source View' in *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*, Oxford University Press.

Past Finals questions on free will:

(2011, q11) 'If determinism is true, there are no obligations, since to be obligated to perform an action requires the ability to freely choose the action.' Discuss.

(2012, Q10) 'Freedom cannot consist in acting on attitudes with which one is identified, because there is no clear sense to be made of identification.' Discuss.

(2014, Q6) Is it possible for one to be in a situation in which, whatever one did, one would act wrongly?

(2015, Q7) How free does the will need to be?

Week 2: Punishment and desert

Essay question, W2: *Retributivism about punishment is wrong because it rests on a problematic metaphor.* Comment.

Mandatory readings for W2:

Hart, H.L.A. 1968. 'Prolegomenon to the Principles of Punishment.' In *Punishment and Responsibility: Essays in the Philosophy of Law*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968. 1–27.

Kenny, Anthony. 'Reason, deterrence and punishment' In *Freewill and Responsibility*, 1978, 69–98.

Murtagh, 'Punishment', *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/punishme/>.

Pereboom, Derk. 2013 'Free Will Skepticism and Criminal Punishment' 49–78, in: *The Future of Punishment*, Thomas Nadelhoffer, Oxford University Press.

Rawls, J. 1955. 'Two Concepts of Rules', *The Philosophical Review*, 64: (3–32) (also in readings for W4)

Past Finals questions on punishment and desert:

(2003, q6) **EITHER**

Is consequentialism the kernel of truth in utilitarianism?

OR

Can consequentialists give an adequate account of personal responsibility?

(2011, q10) 'Joe is less blameworthy than Hilary because he tried to kill the innocent but his gun malfunctioned whereas she tried to kill the innocent and succeeded.' Discuss.

(2014, Q12) Is there a case for distributing goods on the basis of desert? If so, what makes someone deserving?

(2015, Q14) 'The deterrence theory of punishment has no plausible response to the fact that most criminals would be more effectively deterred by the threat of incarcerating their family members, rather than themselves.' Is that so?

Further readings on free will, moral responsibility, punishment, and desert

Copp, David. 2008. "Ought" Implies "can" and the Derivation of the Principle of Alternate Possibilities.' *Analysis* 68 (1): 67–75.

Dennett, Daniel, 1984. *Elbow Room: the Varieties of Free Will worth Wanting*, MIT Press.

Fischer, John Martin, and Mark Ravizza. 1998. *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*. Cambridge University Press.

Frankfurt, Harry. 1971. 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person.' *The Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1): 5–20.

Ginet, Carl. 1996. 'In Defense of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities: Why I Don't Find Frankfurt's Argument Convincing.' *Philosophical Perspectives* 10: 403–17.

Nelkin, Dana Kay. 2015. 'Psychopaths, Incurable Racists, and the Faces of Responsibility.' *Ethics* 125.

Smith, Angela M. 2005. 'Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life.' *Ethics* 115 (2): 236–71.

Tadros, Victor. 2016 'Doing without Desert' *Criminal Law and Philosophy*. 10: (1–12)

Weeks 3-4: Normative Ethics

We firstly explore the theoretical downsides of consequentialism, in particular of utilitarianism. We discuss what could be called alethic objections to utilitarianism while and some non-alethic objections to utilitarianism. Alethic objections to a doctrine are objections according to which the doctrine is false. Non-alethic objections to a doctrine are objections according to which the doctrine is problematic for other reasons. Secondly, we discuss one sort of principle which is incompatible with utilitarianism and which is often a key point of non-consequentialist doctrine, the difference between intending and foreseeing.

Study questions: What are the key differences between Bentham's and Mill's forms of utilitarianism? What is the distinction between 'act utilitarianism' and 'rule utilitarianism'? Does rule utilitarianism collapse into act utilitarianism? Insofar as it doesn't, is ruled utilitarianism at all plausible? What roles do moral rules (such as 'don't lie') play in act utilitarianism? Should a utilitarian advocate maximisation of average utility, or of total utility?

What is the difference between a maximising and a satisficing consequentialism? Is a maximising consequentialism too demanding? What are the main objections that apply equally to any form of consequentialism? What are the best arguments for consequentialism? Should I have, in some sense, special concern for those close to me; if so, why, in precisely what sense, and is this a problem for consequentialism? What is the doctrine of negative responsibility, what is its connection to consequentialism, and does *this* generate any problem for consequentialism? Is there a tension between utilitarianism and justice? Are there any values that ought to be 'honoured' rather than 'promoted' (in Brink's terminology)? Can you think of examples of moral dilemmas in which your intuitions about what is the morally right thing to do disagree with the recommendations of the (by your lights) most plausible version of consequentialism?

What does Williams mean by an agent's 'projects'? What is Williams' 'one thought too many' argument; in particular, what is its conclusion? What is the charge of 'moral self-indulgence'? Is the anti-utilitarian any more open to the charge of moral self-indulgence than is the utilitarian? What (according to Williams) is 'integrity', what is the relationship between integrity and moral self-indulgence? Do considerations of 'integrity' generate any sound objection either to consequentialism in general, or to utilitarianism in particular? What, if anything, is wrong with an agent who is entirely motivated by the desire to conform to an impersonal morality (e.g. who is kind to his wife only because he thinks that this is utilitarianly the best thing he can do)? What is the paradox of hedonism? What is Railton's distinction (a) between subjective and objective hedonism, (b) between subjective and objective consequentialism? Which of the usual objections to consequentialism are avoided by an 'objective' form of the theory? Explain the various senses in which one moral theory or another can involve 'alienation'.

Is there a distinction between intending and foreseeing that can be adequately formulated? If so, is such a difference morally relevant? Should it replace, be replaced or work jointly with the distinction between doing and allowing? Is there a distinction between doing and allowing on the one hand and acting and omitting on the other?

Week 3: Consequentialism and utilitarianism

NOTE: *This essay's question is important enough to warrant spending two to three classes on the topic. It depends on whether you have worked on consequentialism/utilitarianism before.*

Essay question: *The most important problem with utilitarianism is shared by other forms of consequentialism. Comment.*

(For the purpose of this essay, you do not need to demonstrate that the problem that you have picked is *the* most important problem by comparing it with other problems.)

On hedonism

1. Mill, J. S. (1998). *Utilitarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chs 1–2.
2. Crisp, R. (1997). *Routledge philosophy guidebook to Mill on Utilitarianism*. London: Routledge, ch. 2.
3. Smart, J. J. C. (1987). *Utilitarianism: for and against* (Repr. with corrections.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 12–27.
4. Nozick, R. (2013). *Anarchy, state and Utopia*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 48–50. (available online through SOLO)

On integrity

1. Williams, B. 'A Critique of Utilitarianism' in Smart, J.J.C. & Williams, B. (1973). *Utilitarianism: for and against*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 77–150.
2. D. Cox, M. La Caze and M. Levine, 'Integrity', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, section 7. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/integrity/#7>.
3. Kagan, S. 1984. 'Does Consequentialism Demand too Much?', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*.
4. Railton, Peter. 1984. 'Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*.

On consequentialism (in general)

1. Nozick, R. (2013). *Anarchy, state and Utopia*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 37–48. (available online through SOLO)
2. Smart, J.J.C. (1987). *Utilitarianism: for and against* (Repr. with corrections.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 67–73.
3. Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. 2015. 'Consequentialism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Ed. Zalta, E.N., <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism>

Past Finals questions on integrity, alienation and demandingness of utilitarianism:

(2000, q4) In what sense, if any, is consequentialism alienating?

(2011, q4) **EITHER**

(a) Can it ever be morally right to bring about a worse rather than a better state of affairs?

OR

(b) Can a utilitarian be a good friend? Does it matter whether or not she can?

(2012, q12) **EITHER**

(a) Must consequentialism misunderstand the value of close personal relations?

OR

(b) 'Consequentialism can make no sense of excusable wrongs, so consequentialism is false.' Discuss.

(2015, q2) **EITHER**

(a) Can a consequentialist make sense of the idea that I should be more concerned with my wrongdoings than with yours? Does she need to?

OR

(b) Suppose that Charity A and Charity B avert the same number of deaths per unit of money donated, but that Charity A works by campaigning for peace while Charity B works by immunising against life-threatening diseases. If killing were worse than letting die, would this ground any case for donating to Charity A rather than Charity B?

(2015, Q16) 16. Is it wrong knowingly to buy 'blood diamonds' if one knows that the diamonds will eventually be bought anyway?

Past Finals questions on other aspects of utilitarianism and consequentialism:

(2002, q7) Does consequentialism pose a threat to individual rights?

(2001, q16) 'If there were a fire where five people will die unless you save them at the cost of your own life, morality does not require you to save them'. Do you agree?

(2014, q8) **EITHER**

(a) 'Consequentialism is impossibly demanding. So it cannot be correct.' Discuss.

OR

(b) ‘Since a deontologist can always hold that rule-breakings are intrinsically bad, there is no serious question over whether consequentialism is true – the question is only which consequences are important.’ Is that so?

Further readings on consequentialism and utilitarianism in general:

- Adams, R. 1976. ‘Motive utilitarianism’, Jour. Phil. repr. in Rachels (ed.), *Ethical Theory 2*.
- Crisp, Roger. 1977. *Mill on Utilitarianism*, Routledge, ch. 5.
- P. Foot, 1985. ‘Utilitarianism and the Virtues’, *Mind*.
- Hooker, B. ‘Rule consequentialism’, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Jackson, F. 1991. ‘Decision-theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection’, *Ethics*, 101: (461–482).
- Kamm, F. 1992. ‘Non-consequentialism, the Person as End-in-itself, and the Significance of Status’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*.
- McNaughton, D. & P. Rawling, 1993. ‘Deontology and Agency’, *The Monist*.
- Norcross, A. 2006. ‘The Scalar Approach to Utilitarianism’, in H. West (ed.), *Blackwell Guide to Mill’s Utilitarianism*, Blackwell.
- Norcross, A. 2006. ‘Reasons without demands: Rethinking rightness’, in J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary debates in moral theory*, Blackwell 2005, pp. 38–54.
- Rachels, J. 2003. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, McGraw-Hill, chapters. on ‘The Utilitarian Approach’ and ‘The Debate over Utilitarianism’.
- Shaw, S. et al., 2003. ‘Is the Rightness of Action Determined by the Value of Consequences?’, in J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*.
- Slote, M. 1985. *Common-sense Morality and Consequentialism*, Routledge, chs. 2–3.
- Williams, Bernard. 1985. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 6.
- . ‘Persons, 1981. Character and Morality’, in his *Moral Luck*, Cambridge University Press.
- . ‘Utilitarianism and Self-indulgence’, in his *Moral Luck*, Cambridge University Press.
- . ‘Utilitarianism and Integrity’, in Glover: *Utilitarianism and its critics*
- Stocker, M. 1976. ‘The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theory’, *The Journal of Philosophy*.

Vallentyne, P. 'Against Maximizing Act Consequentialism', in Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates* (2nd edition), Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Week 4: Intending and foreseeing

Essay question: *The distinction between foreseeing and intending in the Doctrine of Double Effect (however construed) is not morally relevant (perhaps a better distinction is available). Discuss.*

Mandatory readings (in suggested reading order):

Foot, Philippa. 1967. 'The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect.' *Oxford Review* 5: 1–7.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. 1976. 'Killing, Letting Die and the Trolley Problem.' *The Monist* 59: 204–217. (Thomson's paper is also on the distinction between doing and allowing)

Quinn, Warren S. 1989. "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 18: 334-351.

Enoch, D. 2007. 'Intending, foreseeing, and the state.' *Legal Theory*, 13(2), 69-99.
(stop at the 16th page)

McMahan, J. (2009). 'Intention, permissibility, terrorism, and war.' *Philosophical Perspectives*, 23(1), 345-372.

Further readings:

Foot, Philippa. 1985. 'Morality, Action and Outcome.' In *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J. L. Mackie*. Edited by Ted Honderich, 23–38. London: Routledge.

Masek, Lawrence, 2010. 'Intentions, Motives, and the Doctrine of Double Effect,' *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 60 (24): 567–544

McIntyre, Alison, 2001. 'Doing Away with Double Effect,' *Ethics*, 111(2): 219–255.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. 2008. 'Turning the Trolley,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 36(4): 201–12.

NOTE: this essay's question is on the doctrine of the double effect, but we could have easily done a week on the doctrine of doing and allowing, which would also be very useful and interesting for you to work on. Here are two papers on this:

Quinn, Warren S. 1989. 'Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing.' *Philosophical Review* 98: 287–312.

Kagan, Shelly. 'Doing Harm'. In: *The Limits of Morality*. 1989. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0198239165.001.0001/acprof-9780198239161-chapter-3>

You can find plenty others on:

<http://oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396577/obo-9780195396577-0304.xml#obo-9780195396577-0304-bibItem-0031>

Past final questions on Double Effect

(2011, q15) 'If you foresee killing some civilians as a side-effect of bombing a military factory, you thereby choose to kill and should be held responsible for your choice.' Discuss.

(2012, q6) 'The distinction between intended and foreseen but unintended consequences is real enough, but it cannot bear any moral weight.' Discuss.

Weeks 5–8: Metaethics

We start by assuming moral realism: roughly, there are moral facts and they do not depend on our preferences or our beliefs. As such, they are objective, and they obtain mind-independently. In weeks 5 and 6, we see whether this view can resist two kinds of challenge. The first has to do with the ‘queerness’ of moral properties and with the strangeness of our alleged capacity to discover moral truths. The second has to do with the idea that moral claims ought to be non-descriptive but expressive of attitudes.

But even if moral realism is correct, does it make a difference to us? Differently put, while there might be objective moral facts, do we know them? In week 7, we explore a third challenge, that is the challenge of evolutionary explanations.

In week 8, we leave aside the assumption of moral realism and ask in what sense moral facts could be relative.

Study questions: Do moral judgements have truth value? If not, what are they? If moral judgements do not have truth value, does it mean that most of us are wrong about what they are (error theory)? Do some of our practices imply that moral judgements have a truth value? Can we have moral knowledge even if moral judgements are not propositional? Does rational deliberation about morality conflict with emotivism or with expressivism? What is the difference between emotivism and expressivism? What is the Frege-Geach puzzle?

What is (a) cultural relativism, (b) emotivism, (c) ideal observer theory (Kantian constructivism)? What are the main arguments for and against each? Can a subjectivist account for moral disagreement? What, exactly, is the [Mackie’s] thesis that there are no objective values? What are Mackie’s ‘argument from relativity’ and ‘argument from queerness’ in favour of his subjectivism, and are these arguments sound? What is Mackie’s error theory? Should we stop using moral vocabulary? What is minimalism about truth, and what problem does it generate for the realist-antirealist debate? What is the distinction between naturalistic and non-naturalistic moral realism, and which is more plausible? What is Moore’s Open Question argument, and what does it show? What is the distinction between synthetic and analytic naturalistic moral realism? What is the distinction between non-relativistic and relativistic internalist naturalistic moral realism? What is Nagel’s version of moral realism? What are (a) the similarities and (b) the differences between methods of theory-testing in science, ethics and mathematics? Do the differences suggest antirealism about ethics?

Week 5: Queerness and Non-Reductionism

Essay question W5: Does Mackie’s Argument from Queerness successfully show that there are no moral facts? Does Moore’s Open Question Argument show that moral facts cannot be reduced to natural facts?

Mandatory readings W5:

Hurka, Thomas. (2015) 'Moore's Moral Philosophy', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moore-moral/>

Mackie, John. *Ethics*, ch. 1–2 (also in W7: read the part on queerness)

Moore, G.E. *Principia Ethica*, ch. 1–2

Smith, John M. 'Moral Realism', in H. LaFollette (ed.), *Blackwell Guide*

Further readings:

Dworkin, Ronald (1996). Objectivity and truth: You'd better believe it. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 25(2), 87-139.

Harman, Gilbert. and Thomson, Judith. 1995. *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*

Horgan, Terence and Timmons, Mark "Troubles on moral twin earth: Moral queerness revived".

Nagel, Thomas. *The View From Nowhere*, ch. 8

Past Finals questions on *Queerness and Non-Reductionism*:

(2002, q5) 'If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe' (MACKIE). Has the objectivist an effective reply?

(2011, q13) 'If "good" means the same as "pleasant", the question "Are pleasant things good?" would mean the same as "Are pleasant things pleasant?". But these questions differ in meaning. So, "good" does not mean the same as "pleasant".' Is this a good argument against naturalism?

(2012, q3) 'The only intelligible way of relating moral properties to natural properties is to reduce the former to the latter.' Discuss.

(2014, Q4) **EITHER**

(a) How worried should a moral realist be by the fact that there is no science of ethics?

OR

(b) Are moral intuitions evidence of truth in ethics?

(2015, Q12) **EITHER**

(a) 'Moral naturalists claim that they can easily explain how we can have moral knowledge, by holding that we can know moral facts just as we can know other

natural facts. However, this explanation backfires against naturalism, because the way we do know moral facts is clearly different from the way in which we know natural facts.’ Is this a good argument against moral naturalism?

OR

(b) Must a moral realist believe in a mysterious ‘faculty of rational intuition’? What could such a faculty possibly amount to?

(2015, Q13) ‘The way the moral properties are distributed in a world cannot change without some natural properties changing. Therefore it is implausible to hold that moral properties are *sui generis* non-natural properties.’ Is this a good argument against non-naturalist moral realism?

(2015, Q11) **EITHER**

(a) ‘Metaphysicians have no business telling physicists anything about physical facts. Likewise, metaethics must be neutral with regard to substantive moral claims. Error theory violates this requirement. Hence error theory is false.’ Is this a good argument?

OR

(b) ‘Murder is wrong. If murder is wrong, then there are moral facts, for example, the fact that murder is wrong. Hence there are moral facts.’ Is this a good argument?

Week 6: Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism

Essay question: Can the non-cognitivist make sense of the following claim: ‘I don’t think that incest is morally wrong, but I find it repulsive.’?

OR

Does Hare’s missionary argument (1952, 148) work?

Mandatory Readings:

Ayer, A.J. *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd edition (Gollancz, 1946), Chapter 6; reprinted in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, *Essays on Moral Realism* (Cornell UP, 1988).

Hare, R.M. *The Language of Morals* (Oxford UP, 1952), Chapters 9 (further readings: 1, 5, 6).

Blackburn, Simon. *Spreading the Word* (Oxford UP, 1984), Chapter 6.

Harman, G. and Thomson, J. 1995. *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, Blackwell 1996

Marturano, A. ‘Non-Cognitivism in Ethics’, in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [<http://www.iep.utm.edu/non-cogn/>. Accessed 3rd November 2017]

Michael Smith, 'Some Not-Much-Discussed Problems for Non-Cognitivism in Ethics', *Ratio* 61 (2001), 254–266; available from <<http://ejournals.ouls.ox.ac.uk/>>

Past Finals questions:

(2011, q6) 'If there is no truth in morality, there can be no rational moral arguments.' Discuss.

(2011, q7) If I think abortion is right and you think it is wrong, is it possible that neither of us is making a mistake?

(2014, Q5) Can a non-cognitivist account for the validity of moral arguments?

(2015, Q10) 'We cannot find any distinctly moral attitudes in ourselves. Hence non-cognitivism cannot make sense of the difference between ethical and other evaluative judgements, and is thus mistaken.' Discuss.

Further readings for W5:

Ayer, A.J. *Philosophical Essays* (Macmillan, 1954), Essay 10.

Blackburn, Simon. *Ruling Passions* (Oxford UP, 1998), Chapters 1 and 3.

Gibbard, Allan. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Harvard UP, 1990), Chapters 1–4.

Harman, Gilbert. *The Nature of Morality* (OUP, 1977), chs. 1, 3–4.

Wedgwood, Ralph. 'Non-Cognitivism, Truth and Logic', *Philosophical Studies* 86 (1997), 73–91.

Week 7: Evolutionary Debunking Arguments

Essay question W7: Is the theory of evolution evidence against moral realism?

Mandatory Readings W7:

Hanson, Louise. (2016) 'The Real Problem with Evolutionary Debunking Arguments', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 508-533.

Mogensen, Andreas. (2015) 'Do Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Rest on a Mistake about Evolutionary Explanations?', *Philosophical Studies*, 173: (1799–1817).

Srinivasan, Amia. *The Archimedean Urge*, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 29: (325–362).

Street, Sharon. 2006. 'A Darwinian Dilemma for Moral Realism', *Philosophical Studies*, 109–166.

Further Readings W7:

Lenman, John 2006. 'Cornel Realism' in *Moral Naturalism*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/naturalism-moral/#CorRea>

Past Finals Questions on Evolutionary Debunking (and other similar epistemic issues):

(2011, q8) **EITHER**

(a) 'Since people have irresolvable moral disagreements, we should not believe that there are any objective moral facts.' Do you agree?

OR

(b) 'Since beliefs don't motivate but moral judgements necessarily do, moral realism is false.' Is this a good argument?

(2012, q4) **EITHER**

(a) 'The best explanations of moral beliefs explain them by appeal to factors that are incidental to their truth. So we cannot have any justified moral beliefs.' Discuss.

OR

(b) Should we be surprised if convinced moral error theorists continue to care about the difference between moral right and wrong?

Week 8: Relativism and Constructivism

Essay question W8: *The constructivist/relativist can have her cake and eat it by securing some objectivity of morality but by securing further theoretical advantages over moral realism.* Discuss.

Mandatory Readings W8:

Bagnoli, Carla. 2011. 'Constructivism in Metaethics', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

Harman, G. and Thomson, J. 1995. *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*.

Rawls, John. 1980. 'Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 515-572.

Korsgaard, Christine. 2003. 'Realism and Constructivism in 20th Century Moral Philosophy', *Journal of Philosophical Research*.

Street, Sharon. 'Coming to Terms with Contingency: Humean Constructivism about Practical Reason' In *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*. 2012. OUP.
<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199609833.001.0001/acprof-9780199609833-chapter-3>.

Further readings:

D. McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, chs. 1, 3–5

D. Wiggins, 'Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life', in his *Needs, Values, Truth*

J. McDowell, 'Values and Secondary Qualities', in T. Honderich (ed.), *Morality and Objectivity*

J. Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, chs. on 'Cultural Relativism' and 'Subjectivism'

Past Finals questions on relativism, error theory, and constructivism:

(2000, q14) In what ways is morality relative?

(2001, q6) 'Moral experience presents moral values as being objective, or real?'
Does this put any constraints on what could be an adequate moral theory?

(2001, q8) 'Moral relativism is the moral theory which best supports toleration of others' moral views.' Discuss.

(2012, q2) 'Even the best arguments for moral relativism succeed only in establishing moral scepticism.' Discuss.

(2014, Q7) What is the best response to the amoralist?