

Ethics

Background on useful readings

Asterisks below mark works likely to be especially helpful.

Publication details given for books are usually for first editions; later editions are often available.

Key historical readings

- *Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. Crisp, Irwin (2nd edn.), or Ross (OUP World's Classics, revised L. Brown)
- *Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*
- *Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (trans. Beck, Gregor, Hill & Zweig, Paton, or Wood)
- *J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Reference

In addition to the Stanford and Routledge *Encyclopedias* (both online in the Oxford domain), see L. & C. Becker (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics* (Routledge, 2001). These resources all contain helpful bibliographies. See also the websites maintained by Stephen Darwall and by Larry Hinman.

Introductions, Handbooks, Collections

A particularly useful “first port of call” is the following (extremely accessible) introductory textbook:

J. Rachels, *The Elements of Morality*.

Also useful are:

- M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Smith, *Three Methods of Ethics* (Blackwell, 1998)
- C. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (RKP, 1930)
- *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)
- *R. Norman, *The Moral Philosophers* (Clarendon Press, 1983)
- * 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)
- *D. Wiggins, *Ethics* (Penguin, 2006)
- *B. Williams, *Morality* (Harper & Row, 1972)
- *B. Williams, ‘Ethics’, in A. Grayling (ed.), *Philosophy: A Guide through the Subject* (OUP, 1995)

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)

1. Moral Realism and Objectivity

Essay question: Are moral claims “objective”? If so, in exactly what sense? If it is not an objective truth that rape is wrong, what exactly is the status of the thought that rape is wrong (i.e. is that thought meaningless, false, true but better translated into some more transparent terms, or what)?

Study questions: What is (a) cultural relativism, (b) emotivism, (c) ideal observer theory? 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 externalist and internalist 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?

Core reading

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

Introductory discussion, setting out but rejecting relativism and subjectivism.

A. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (2nd edn), ch. 6.

Classic exposition and defence of emotivism.

J. Mackie, *Ethics*, ch. 1

A defence of subjectivism, and an “error theory” concerning why common-sense morality presumes that there are objective values.

M. Smith, ‘Moral Realism’, in H. LaFollette (ed.), *Blackwell Guide*

A more sophisticated discussion of what it would take for moral realism or anti-realism to be correct, and defence of moral realism.

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

An original alternative view of how to think about objectivity, in ethics and elsewhere, and defence of the associated form of realism.

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

A discussion of how we (allegedly) come to “know moral facts”, and a more sophisticated discussion of the most plausible anti-realist views (emotivism and ideal observer theory) that these reflections on the epistemology of morality might drive one to.

Further readings

P. Railton, ‘Moral Factualism’, in J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*

- R. Wedgwood, 'The Meaning of "Ought"', *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 2006
- S. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Clarendon Press, 1984), ch. 6
- 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*

Past Finals questions:

- (2000, q 8) Is the fact that people's moral judgments motivate them a problem for believers in moral objectivity?
- (2001, q 6) 'Moral experience presents moral values as being objective, or real.' Does this put any constraints on what could be an adequate moral theory?
- (2002, q 5) '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?
- (2004 q 3) EITHER a) When we form the belief that someone acted wrongly, does the wrongness of the action explain that belief?
OR b) What is the relation between moral properties and non-moral properties?
- (2004 q 4) Can the expressivist explain the requirement to be consistent in our moral judgements?
- (2005 q 6) EITHER a) Can one be an objectivist about morality without being a realist?
b) Can moral judgements be explained without postulating moral facts?
- (2006 q 6) Is talk of moral reality just empty rhetoric?
- (2006 q 7) The following argument is valid: 'If murder is wrong, then getting one's little brother to commit murder is wrong. Murder is wrong. Therefore, getting one's little brother to commit murder is wrong.' In what ways is this a problem for expressivism? Is there a satisfactory solution?
- (2007 q 5) Are moral facts queerer than other facts?
- (2008 q 4) Can a non-cognitivist maintain that there is sometimes reason to act contrary to one's desires?
- (2008 q 5) Is the wrongness of slavery something we have discovered or something we have invented?
- (2009 q 9) Is it an *essential* feature of ethical judgements that they are in some way connected to motivation? If so, would it show that ethics is not objective?
- (2009 q 10) 'If we were aware of [objective values], it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.' (Mackie). Is this a decisive objection to the view that there are objective moral values?
- (2009 q 13) What is the best explanation of the way in which moral properties might 'supervene' on natural properties?
- (2010 q 3) Can an error theorist who denies that there are objective moral values continue to engage wholeheartedly in moral discourse?
- (2010 q 4) 'The best explanation of our judgment that a given action is wrong need not cite any moral facts. Therefore, we have no reason to postulate moral facts.' Is this a good argument against moral realism?
- (2011 q 6) 'If there is no truth in morality, there can be no rational moral arguments.' Discuss.
OR b) 'Since beliefs don't motivate but moral judgments necessarily do, moral realism is false.' Is this a good argument?

2. The Frege-Geach problem

Essay question: Is there any adequate solution to the Frege-Geach problem that does not embrace moral realism?

Study questions: What exactly is expressivism? What is Geach's distinction between predication and assertion? Why does Geach say that: the correct account of terms like 'voluntary' and 'good' must explain the uses of those terms in assertion in terms of their uses in predication, rather than the other way round? Why is this a problem for expressivist theories in metaethics? What is Hare's response to this problem; in particular, what is Hare's account of uses of 'good' embedded within (i) questions (ii) negations (iii) conditionals? According to Schroeder, why is Hare's response not enough on its own, and is Schroeder correct about this? What is Blackburn's quasi-realism? Explain Blackburn's point that one would expect discourse in a genuinely expressivist language to look much like ordinary English moral discourse, *including* both (i) modus ponens reasoning and (ii) ascriptions of truth and falsity to verbalisations of moral judgments. Explain the point that there are more places to insert a negation in "John thinks that stealing is wrong" than there are in any standard expressivist account of the meaning of this sentence. Does this constitute a problem for expressivism; if so, why exactly? What is the significance of the point that the same phenomenon occurs with many different ways of constructing complex sentences (as on p.713 of Schroeder's article) – i.e., why does this make things even harder for the expressivist?

Core reading

Schroeder, M. (2008) What is the Frege-Geach problem? *Philosophy Compass* 3/4 (2008): 703–720.

A survey of the debate over the Frege-Geach problem.

Geach, P. T. (1960) Ascriptivism. *Philosophical Review* 69: 221–225.

A seminal article - poses the problem for expressivism that subsequently became known as 'the Frege-Geach problem'.

Hare, R. M. (1970) Meaning and speech acts. *Philosophical Review* 79(1): 3-24.

Proposes an expressivist solution to the Frege-Geach problem.

Blackburn, S. (1984) *Spreading the word*. Oxford University Press. Sections 5.6 (pp.167-71) and section 6.2 (pp.189-96).

Introduces Blackburn's quasi-realism, and proposes a quasi-realist response to the Frege-Geach problem.

Unwin, N. (1999) Quasi-realism, negation and the Frege-Geach problem. *Philosophical Quarterly* 49: 337-52.

Poses a further problem for Hare-Blackburn type responses to the Frege-Geach problem, based on negation.

Further reading

van Roojen, M. (2011) "Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Online at

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/moral-cognitivism/>.

Horgan, T. and M. Timmons (2006). Cognitivist expressivism. In their (eds.) *Metaethics after Moore*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

Then follow up further references cited in this and/or Schroeder's survey article, following your interests.

3. Egoism and Altruism

Essay question: Is there any way of convincing a person who intends always to act strictly in her own self-interest, *by rational argument*, instead to act morally? If so, how? If not, is there any way of convincing her at all?

Study questions: What is (i) psychological egoism, (ii) ethical egoism? *Would* anyone continue to act morally, if (s)he could e.g. lie/steal/murder and be certain that no-one would find out? *Should* anyone continue to act morally in those circumstances? (Consider arguments for both a positive and a negative answer.) Is an agent's being morally good good for that agent, or only for other people? What is the relationship between (a) the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives, and (b) the distinction between moral and non-moral imperatives?

Core reading

J. Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, chs. on 'Psychological Egoism' and 'Ethical Egoism'

An introductory survey, sharply distinguishing psychological and ethical egoism from one another, and setting out the main arguments for and against each.

B. Williams, *Morality*, ch. 1

Discusses the sorts of processes by which a person who initially sees no reason to be moral might be brought to regard moral reasons as motivating.

K. Baier, 'Egoism', in Singer, *Companion to Ethics*

A more subtle discussion of various forms of egoism, and their relationship to the common idea ("ethical rationalism") that moral requirements must have the feature that complying with them is in accordance with reason.

J. Mackie, *Ethics*, ch. 5

Examines the issue of what the point is in having a system of morality, more from the point of view of society as a whole than from that of the individual.

Further reading

Plato, *Republic*, Book II, to 367e (trans. Grube, rev. Reeve)

A classic historical source, in which (inter alia) the character Thrasymachus advocates a close cousin of the view modern theorists call "psychological hedonism".

H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (7th edn., Macmillan, 1907), 2.1; Concluding Chapter
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7; IX.8

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13

Hume, *Enquiry*, sects. 5, 9; app. 2

B. Hooker, 'Does Being Moral Benefit the Agent?', in R. Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live?* (Clarendon Press, 1986)

J. Butler, *Sermons at the Rolls Chapel*, 1, 11.

Past Finals questions:

(2000, q12) 'Man would like to be an egoist but cannot. This is the most striking characteristic of his wretchedness and the source of his greatness' (SIMONE WEIL). Discuss. (This quotation comes from her book, *Gravity and Grace*.)

(2001, q12) 'If an action is my action, then its motive is my motive. Thus all motivation is self-regarding'. Does this argument exclude the possibility of truly altruistic action?

(2002, q13) 'I know it's wrong, but I'm going to do it anyway.' What, if anything, is puzzling about this statement?

(2003, q9) Even if a morally decent person would have a reason to Φ in my circumstances, does it follow that *I* have a reason to Φ ?

(2004 q 5) 'It's mercy, compassion and forgiveness I lack, not rationality'. (Uma Thurman, *Kill Bill*). Discuss

(2004 q 18) Is any version of egoism plausible?

(2005 q 5) Is ethical egoism irrational?

(2005 q 12) Could a reason count morally for me but not for you?

(2005 q 18) Is it possible to desire something because it is bad?

(2006 q 13) Is contractualism a form of egoism in disguise?

(2007 q 15) Is it better to be an egoist satisfied or a moral person dissatisfied?

(2008 q 1) 'Trying to be moral makes me less efficient in the pursuit of my own interests. Therefore, I have good reason to abandon the attempt.' What would you say to someone who is making such a claim?

(2009 q 11) Would someone who does not care about the goals of morality have any reason to avoid acting wrongly?

(2010 q 1) 'There are no truly evil people, for it is impossible to do evil for evil's sake'. Discuss.

(2010 q 5) 'When you help others, what you want is that *you* help others. So you are never truly altruistic'. Discuss.

(2011 q 5) If a life of virtue is a flourishing life, must a virtuous person be either ignorant about the nature of morality, or an egoist?

4. Consequentialism, Integrity and Character

Essay question: Should a consequentialist desire that people are routinely motivated by non-consequentialist concerns? If it does/did, does/would this entail that consequentialism is self-defeating?

*Note: This week's topic is unusual in that most of you will already have significant acquaintance with it from your first year studies. Accordingly, the above essay question is relatively advanced, and the associated "mandatory" readings listed below presuppose that you already have a sound grasp of the basic issues. **It is particularly important this week that you work through the Study Questions, and make sure that you are able to answer those as well as the tutorial essay question, and that in your vacation studies, you revise your first year material as well as the more advanced material treated here.***

*If you do **not** thoroughly understand the basics from the first year, I recommend that you don't attempt the question above, but answer instead the following much broader and more introductory question:*

Alternative essay question: What is (a) consequentialism, (b) utilitarianism? What is the most plausible form of utilitarianism? How plausible is it?

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 rule-utilitarianism at all plausible? What roles do moral rules (such as "don't lie") play in act utilitarianism? Should a utilitarian advocate maximization of average utility, or of total utility?

What is the difference between a maximising and a satisficing consequentialism? Is a maximizing 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”.

Preliminary readings:

I expect that most students will be familiar with much of the material in these readings, from first-year studies. Read these if you want to recap the basics of utilitarianism/consequentialism, if you are answering the “alternative essay question” suggested above, and/or if they sound helpful.

J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, esp. chs. 2, 4

Classic historical source for utilitarianism.

J. Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, chs. on ‘The Utilitarian Approach’ and ‘The Debate over Utilitarianism’

An introductory discussion of utilitarianism and the principle objections to it.

S. Scheffler, ‘Introduction’ to his (ed.) *Consequentialism and its Critics*

A clear survey of the main arguments for and against consequentialism.

D. Brink, ‘Some Forms and Limits of Consequentialism’, in Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*

*A taxonomy of a large number of types of consequentialism (particularly useful to bear in mind when you are considering a purported objection “to consequentialism”, and wondering whether *any* form of consequentialism can escape this particular objection).*

Mandatory readings for standard essay question:

W. Sinnott-Armstrong, “Consequentialism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Online at

*An overview of consequentialism, its various versions, and arguments for and against. (I recommend starting with this article in order to recap and reinforce clarity, even if you *do* have a solid grip on utilitarianism and consequentialism from the first year.)*

Smart and Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (CUP, 1973)

Relatively advanced discussions advocating (Smart) and arguing against (Williams) utilitarianism.

D. Cox, M. La Caze and M. Levine, “Integrity”, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, section 7 (“Integrity and moral theory”). Online at

A concise account of Williams’ “integrity”-based objection to consequentialism, and a survey of the consequentialist’s possible replies.

P. Railton, ‘Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality’, *Philosophy and*

Public Affairs 1984 (repr. in S. Scheffler (ed.), *Consequentialism and its Critics*)
Examines the place of immediate personal motivations (such as affection for a family member or close friend) in an ultimately impersonal morality. Argues that consequentialism should not, by its own lights, be constantly employed in decision-making, but that this does not show that consequentialism is self-defeating. Discusses the various senses in which a moral theory may involve “alienation”.

F. Jackson, ‘Decision-theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection’,

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Defends consequentialism against Williams' charge that consequentialism requires us to abandon those things that make life worth living.

A. Norcross, 'Reasons without demands: Rethinking rightness', in J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary debates in moral theory* (Blackwell, 2006), pp. 38-54.

Further readings:

W. Shaw, et al., 'Is the Rightness of Action Determined by the Value of Consequences?', in J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*

R. Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism* (Routledge, 1997), ch. 5

P. Vallentyne, 'Against Maximizing Act Consequentialism', in Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates*

A. Norcross, 'The Scalar Approach to Utilitarianism', in H. West (ed.), *Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism* (Blackwell, 2006)

P. Foot, 'Utilitarianism and the Virtues', *Mind* 1985; repr. in S. Scheffler (ed.), *Consequentialism and its Critics* (OUP, 1988)

B. Hooker, 'Rule consequentialism', in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

M. Stocker, 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theory', *Jour. Phil.* 1976; repr. in R. Crisp & M. Slote (ed.), *Virtue Ethics* (OUP, 1997)

B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 6

B. Williams, 'Persons, Character and Morality', in his *Moral Luck*

Discussion of the relationship between moral theory and a Parfitian view of personal identity over time, and of the implications of deep personal attachments and "projects" for moral theory.

B. Williams, 'Utilitarianism and Self-indulgence', in *Moral Luck*

Defends non-consequentialist theories against the charge that when faced with a forced choice between doing something horrible (e.g. killing one person oneself) and allowing something with worse consequences to occur (e.g. twenty people being killed by someone else), the reason for refraining from committing the horrible act can only be an objectionable sort of "moral self-indulgence".

F. Kamm, 'Non-consequentialism, the Person as End-in-itself, and the Significance of Status', *Phil. Pub. Aff.* 1992

S. Kagan, 'Does Consequentialism Demand too Much?', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1984

M. Slote, *Common-sense Morality and Consequentialism* (Routledge, 1985), chs. 2-3

R. Adams, 'Motive utilitarianism', *Jour. Phil.* 1976; repr. in Rachels (ed.), *Ethical Theory 2*

D. McNaughton & P. Rawling, 'Deontology and Agency', *The Monist* 1993

Past Finals questions:

(2000 q 4) In what sense, if any, is consequentialism alienating?

(2000 q 5) How might a deontologist explain why it is wrong for me to kill another person, even if that is the only way to prevent two or more killings by others?

- (2001 q 4) 'Mill's "proof" of utilitarianism is the best argument for utilitarianism that there is'. Discuss.
- (2001 q 5) Is it an objection to a consequentialist theory that it cannot be used as a guide to action?
- (2001 q 16) '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?
- (2002 q 7) Does consequentialism pose a threat to individual rights?
- (2003 q 6) EITHER Is consequentialism the kernel of truth in utilitarianism?
OR Can consequentialists give an adequate account of personal responsibility?
- (2004 q 6) Would it be wrong of a vet to cut up one healthy cat to save five other cats?
- (2004 q 8) To what extent can a consequentialist allow that one should not reason in consequentialist terms?
- (2005 q 7) Can utilitarianism give an adequate account of the value it is aiming to maximize?
- (2005 q 11) Is there an important moral difference between so acting that a person's death foreseeably ensues in consequence of your action and deliberately killing them?
- (2006 q 8) 'If someone really thinks, in advance, that it is open to question whether such an action as procuring the judicial execution of the innocent should be quite excluded from consideration – I do not want to argue with him; he shows a corrupt mind.' (ANSCOMBE)
Discuss.
- (2007 q 6) 'If consequentialism is true, there is no such thing as supererogation. There is such a thing as supererogation. Therefore, consequentialism is false.' Explain and assess this argument.
- (2007 q 10) Must a utilitarian believe that people matter and that they matter equally?
- (2007 q 11) Can morality be too demanding?
- (2008 q 9) If it were shown that Consequentialists tended to produce worse consequences than non-Consequentialists, what implications would that have for the acceptability of Consequentialism?
- (2008 q 15) Is there a morally important distinction between the intended consequences of an action and the foreseen but unintended consequences of the action?
- (2009 q 5) EITHER a) 'There is no important difference between consequentialism and other moral theories, since any plausible theory can be defined in consequentialist terms.' Discuss
OR b) 'A consequentialist does not care about people; he only cares about goodness.' Is this a fair criticism of consequentialism?
- (2009 q 18) If it is worse to do harm than to allow harm, does it follow that it is better to do good than to allow good? If so, should you push other volunteers aside to ensure that you do good?
- (2010 q 12) 'There are intentional allowings that are just as bad as intentional doings, so there cannot be a morally significant difference between doing and allowing.' Discuss.
- (2010 q 13) EITHER a) Consequentialism is a good theory for bureaucratic planners, but unless every aspect of life should be bureaucratically planned, it cannot be a good ethical theory.' Discuss. OR b) 'Unless we are to be allowed to rewrite our moral duties to suit our convenience, there can be no truth in the claim that consequentialism is too demanding'.
Discuss.
- (2011 q 4) 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 he or she can?

5. Kant: Universalizability

Essay question: What is the relationship between subsidiary moral principles (such as prohibitions on lying and suicide) and the “universal law” version of Kant’s categorical imperative? In particular, can the former soundly be derived from the latter?

Study questions: What is the distinction between an hypothetical and a categorical imperative? What are the reasons for thinking that moral imperatives are categorical? What is “the” Kantian categorical imperative (CI)? (Write down the clearest statements you can of the Kantian “formula of universal law”, “formula of humanity”, “formula of autonomy”, and decide which, if any, you think it makes most sense to take as fundamental. Are the three formulae logically equivalent?) What reasons can be given for the claim that every rational person must accept the CI, and how good are those reasons? What is “the maxim” of a given action? In what ways might particular actions be forbidden by the CI? Assess the quality of the arguments from the CI to the subsidiary moral principles it is alleged to entail. What is Kant’s view of free will, and why is this important to his ethics? Does the fact that universalizable maxims can mutually conflict generate a problem for, or an argument in favour of, Kantian ethics? Explain the distinctions between (i) inner and outer duties, (ii) perfect and imperfect duties, (iii) strict and broad obligations, giving examples of each.

Mandatory readings

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

The classic historical source for “Kantian ethics”. (You might prefer to read Rachels and/or Johnson before reading Kant, to “prime” yourself – or you might not.)

J. Rachels, “Are there absolute moral rules?”, in his *The elements of moral philosophy*.

An introductory discussion, with plenty of examples to illustrate various Kantian claims and objections to them.

Johnson, Robert, "Kant's Moral Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = . (Stable forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/kant-moral/>.)

A more advanced, but still introductory, survey of Kant’s views.

C. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, ch. 5

An extremely clear exposition of Kant’s ethics, with incisive criticisms.

T. Hill, ‘Kantian Normative Ethics’, in Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*

An examination of Kant’s three formulations of the Categorical Imperative, what each implies, and their relationships to one another.

J. Mackie, *Ethics*, ch. 4

A careful examination of the precise meaning of universalizability, and of exactly what may be derived from various versions of ‘the’ principle of universalizability.

Further readings

P. Foot, ‘Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives’, in her *Virtues and Vices*

Challenges a received wisdom according to which moral imperatives cannot be hypothetical imperatives. Includes a probing discussion of what, exactly, the distinction between a categorical and an hypothetical imperative is.

P. Winch, ‘The Universalizability of Moral Judgements’, *Monist* 1965; repr. in his *Ethics and Action* (RKP, 1972)

Argues that no substantive moral judgments can be derived from a universalizability principle.

- C. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (CUP, 1996), chs. 1, 3
Another survey, with more emphasis (in chapter 1) on placing Kant's ethics in the context of his wider philosophical thought, and (in chapter 3) a more probing discussion of how particular moral principles are supposed to be derived from the categorical imperative.
- O. O'Neill, 'Kantian Ethics', in Singer, *Companion to Ethics*
Another survey, again placing Kant's ethics in the context of his wider philosophy, and distinguishing Kant's own claims from the various forms of so-called "Kantian ethics" inspired by him.
- B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 4
- J. Mackie, 'The Three Stages of Universalization', in his *Persons and Values* (Clarendon Press, 1985)
- D. Wiggins, 'Universalizability, Impartiality, Truth', in his *Needs, Values, Truth* (OUP, preferably 3rd edn., 1998)
- H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (7th edn), pp. xix, 209-10, 379-80
- R. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, chs. 5-7
- D. Locke, 'The Principle of Equal Interests', *Phil. Review* 1981
- Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, ch 12 ('The Kantian perspective: autonomy and respect')
- The Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics ed Thomas Hill. Robert N. Johnson -- The universal law formulas; Richard Galvin -- The formula of humanity as an end in itself.

Past Finals questions:

- 2000 q 2) 'Nothing in the world can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will' (KANT). Elucidate and discuss.
- (2000 q 3) Is Kant right that we may never treat humanity simply as a means?
- (2001 q 3) Is the imperative that one never treat a rational being as a means only, but always also as an end, just another way of representing the requirement that one act only on those maxims which one can will to be universal laws?
- (2002 q 2) Are there any categorical imperatives?
- (2003 q 5) 'Since I have robbed the will of every inducement that might arise for it as a consequence of obeying any particular law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions to universal law as such, and this alone must serve the will as principle.' (KANT) Discuss.
- (2005 q 1) What is it to treat someone merely as a means? Why is it wrong?
- (2005 q 4) Should universalization require that we abstract from our own attitudes and values?
- (2006 q 5) What does it mean to say that moral judgements are universalisable? How useful is the notion of universalizability in moral reasoning?
- (2007 q 2) '[A]n action done from duty has its moral worth not in the purpose to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon.' (KANT) Elucidate and discuss.
- (2008 q 6) 'I have taken Kant's categorical imperative as my norm, I did long ago. I have ordered my life by that imperative.' (EICHMANN) Sometimes known as 'The Architect of the Holocaust', Eichmann facilitated millions of murders. Could he yet have been a genuine Kantian?
- (NB: this is a fascinating question that you could answer well with general knowledge of the Nazi holocaust and with detailed knowledge of Kant. However, a highly relevant work is Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on The Banality of Evil*)

(2008 q 8) Are categorical imperatives more problematic than hypothetical imperatives?

(2009 q 4) Should we be persuaded by Kant's arguments for the wrongfulness of suicide?

(2010 q 7) If the 'principle, that humanity and generally every rational nature is an end of itself ... is the supreme limiting condition of every man's freedom of action' (KANT), how can we have any obligations to infants or animals?

(2010 q 8) Can I ever properly conclude that I ought to act otherwise than as morality requires?

(2011 q 1) EITHER a) 'In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity.' (KANT) Is this true? What would follow if it were true?
OR b) Is it morally permissible for me to act on the maxim 'I will buy clothes but not sell them'. What are the implications of this for Kant's moral theory?

(2011 q 3) Can a moral theory which tells me what to do in an idealized situation ever be relevant to me when I am in the real world?

6. Kant: Acting from Duty

Essay question: What is Kant's view on how an action must be motivated in order for that action to have "moral worth"? Is this view correct?

Study questions: What is Kant's distinction between acting in accordance with duty, and acting from duty? What is Kant's notion of "moral worth"? In what sense, and why, does Kant think that the actions of a "naturally sympathetic" person who helps others because he feels a natural inclination to do so have no moral worth? Is there really no moral worth in acting from natural feelings of sympathy? Are altruistic emotions too unreliable to be a source of moral motivation? Is altruistic action a special case of egoistic action?

Core reading:

Kant, *Groundwork*

L. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (RKP, 1980), chs. 1-2

Defends the moral significance of altruistic emotions, against a "Kantian" view that such emotions are irrelevant to morality.

C. Korsgaard, 'From Duty and for the sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on morally good action', in S. Engstrom & J. Whiting (ed.), *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics* (CUP, 1996)
Argues that Kant's and Aristotle's apparently conflicting views on the issue of "moral saints vs moral heroes" are, each properly understood, very similar.

R. Henson, 'What Kant Might Have Said: Moral Worth and the Overdetermination of Dutiful Action'. [The Philosophical Review](#), Vol. 88, No. 1 (Jan., 1979), pp. 39-54.

B. Herman, 'On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty', *Phil. Review* 1981

A closer examination of Kant's notion of "moral worth", and its relationship to acting from duty.

S. Wolf, 'Moral Saints', *Jour. Phil.* 1982

Further readings:

N. Arpaly, 'Moral Worth', in her *Unprincipled Virtue* (OUP, 2003)

M. Baron, 'The Alleged Moral Repugnance of Acting from Duty', *Jour. Phil.* 1984

Argues that some ways of "acting from duty", but not others, are morally repugnant.

O. O'Neill, 'Kant after Virtue', *Inquiry* 1983

Gospel of St John, ch. 15

A. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Theory* (CUP, 1999), chs. 2-4

J. Scheewind, 'Autonomy, Obligation, and Virtue: An Overview of Kant's Moral Philosophy',

in P. Guyer (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Kant* (CUP, 1992)

Korsgaard, Christine. 1986. Aristotle and Kant on the source of value. *Ethics* 96(3): 486-505.

Past Finals questions:

(2000 q 5) How might a deontologist explain why it is wrong for me to kill another person, even if that is the only way to prevent two or more killings by others?

(2001 q 2) 'The feeling of sympathy and warm-hearted fellow-feeling... is burdensome even to right-thinking persons, confusing their considered maxims and creating the wish to be free

from them and subject only to law-giving reason' (KANT). Is Kant right to say this?

(2002 q 3) 'Imitation has no place in morality, and examples serve us only for encouragement ... they can never entitle us to set aside their true original, which resides in reason.' (KANT) Discuss.

(2004 q2) 'Kant was right to deny moral worth to an action done out of compassion, since it's not up to you whether you have such an inclination.' Discuss.

(2006 q 2) Explain and evaluate Kant's view that a benevolent action done from inclination, 'however it may conform with duty and however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth'.

(2007 q 3) Is Kant right to say that 'all objects of inclination have only a conditional worth'?

(2008 q 7) Does Kant give the right account of why it is wrong to make false promises?

(2009 q 3) 'It is impossible to think of anything in the world ... that could be considered good without qualification except a good will.' (KANT). Is this true? What would it show if it were?

7. Hume: Reason and Passion

Essay question: ‘Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions’ (HUME). Is Hume right about this? Whether or not he is in fact right, would it follow from Hume’s assertion that morality is irrational?

Core reading:

Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, bk. 2, pt. 3, sect. 3; bk. 3, pt. 1; *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, app. I

P. Railton, “Humean Theory of Practical Rationality”, in Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook*

R. Norman, *The Moral Philosophers*, ch. 5

J. Mackie, *Hume’s Moral Theory*, chs. 3-4

W. Quinn, “Putting Rationality in its Place”, in R. Frey and C. Morris (ed.), *Value, Welfare and Morality* (CUP, 1993); repr. in Quinn, *Morality and Action* (CUP, 1993)

C. Korsgaard, “Skepticism about Practical Reason”, *Jour. Phil.* 1986; repr. in her *Creating the*

Kingdom of Ends (CUP, 1996)

Further reading:

J. Dreier, “Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality”, in G. Cullity and B. Gaut (ed.), *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Clarendon Press, 1997)

B. Williams, “Internal and External Reasons”, in his *Moral Luck*

M. Smith, *The Moral Problem*, chs. 1, 3, 5

D. McNaughton, *Moral Vision* (Blackwell, 1988), chs. 2-3

D. Wiggins, *Ethics*, chs. 3-4

T. Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*, ch. 5

Past Finals questions:

(2001, q 1) Is it Hume’s view that morality is a system of hypothetical imperatives?

(2002, q 1) ‘Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my little finger’ (HUME). Do you agree?

(2002, q 13) ‘I know it’s wrong, but I’m going to do it anyway.’ What, if anything, is puzzling about this statement?

(2003 q 1) ‘Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar’d to sounds, colours, heats and cold, which according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.’ (HUME). Do you agree?

(2003 q 2) ‘What does Hume mean by calling morality ‘an active principle’? Does this have the implications he takes it to have?

(2005 q 2) ‘It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.’ (HUME). Discuss.

(2006 q 1) ‘Take any action allow’d to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or existence, which you call vice. [...] You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you towards this action.’ (HUME) Discuss.

(2007 q 1) ‘Since morals [...] have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be derived from reason.’ (HUME) Discuss.

(2008, q 3) ‘Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent action. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.’

(HUME). Are Hume's premises correct? Does his conclusion follow from them?

(2008, q 4) Can a non-cognitivist maintain that there is sometimes reason to act contrary to one's desires?

(2009 q 1) EITHER a) 'Passions can be contrary to reason only so far as they are *accompany'd* with some [false] judgment or opinion ... and even then 'tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment.' (HUME). Discuss.

OR b) Was Hume right to claim that all 'moral distinctions' are 'derived' from sentiments?

(2010 q 2) EITHER a) 'Since morals [...] have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be derived from reason; and that because reason alone ... can never have any such influence,' (HUME) Is this a good argument for non-cognitivism?

OR b) Can a non-cognitivist accept that torturing animals for fun would be wrong even if everyone desired to do it?

(2011 q 6) 'If there is no truth in morality, there can be no rational moral arguments.' Discuss.

(2011 q 12a) 'The reason why good and strong-willed moral agents do what they think is right is that they have a standing desire to do what they think is right.' Is this a plausible account of moral motivation?

8. Virtue and Virtue Ethics

Essay question: What is virtue ethics, and what is the best objection to it?

Hints: Note that this is a *comparative* question: in order to *argue* that a particular objection is the *best*, you need to argue that it is *better than the others*, and hence your essay needs to *compare* one objection to others (not just to discuss the one that you happen to think is the best one). Further, the “best” objection is presumably the one that provides the strongest reason for thinking that virtue ethics is false, so this in turn requires thinking through how virtue ethics might be defended against each of the objections you survey.

You might begin your essay with a concise statement of what exactly the most defensible version of “virtue ethics” claims, then survey a few of the best objections you have come across or can think of, consider the available responses to each, and conclude by noting which objection seems to be the most difficult to rebut.

Study questions: What are the best arguments for the conclusion that virtue ethics is preferable to utilitarianism and/or to Kantianism as a moral theory? What are the best defences of utilitarianism/Kantianism that might be offered in the face of those arguments, and how plausible are those best defences? What is the distinction between “pure” virtue ethics and a mixed theory? Is a “pure” virtue ethics plausible? If not, what place should an appeal to virtues occupy in a satisfactory overall moral theory?

Core reading

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 1, ch. 7; 2.1-6;6.1; 6.12-13; 10.7-8

The classic historical discussion of virtue ethics.

Hursthouse, Rosalind, "Virtue Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/ethics-virtue/>.

Introductory survey article.

R. Hursthouse, 'Normative virtue ethics', in R. Crisp (ed.), *How should one live?: essays on the virtues*, OUP 1996.

C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (OUP, 2003), ch. 11.

T. Hurka, 'Against Virtue Ethics', ch. 8 of his *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (OUP, 2001)
Distinguishes various types of virtue ethics, and argues against all of them.

Further readings

Rachels, "The ethics of virtue", in his *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*.

Introductory survey of virtue ethics, its advantages and drawbacks. Distinguishes between "pure virtue ethics" and mixed strategies, and (finding a "pure" approach inadequate) discusses how virtue ethics might fit into an overall moral philosophy.

P. Foot, 'Virtues and Vices', in her *Virtues and Vices*; repr. in R. Crisp & M. Slote (ed.), *Virtue*

Ethics (OUP, 1997), as are Hursthouse, McDowell, Anscombe

*Discusses what a virtue is, and how virtue is to be distinguished from e.g. practical and theoretical skills. Argues (in response to problem cases concerning the connection between praiseworthiness of actions and virtue) that an action is *praiseworthy* if it is both performed in accordance with virtue and displays virtue. Discusses cases of virtue conflict (is it true to describe a murderer who carries out a difficult murder as*

**courageous*?).*

J. McDowell, 'Virtue and Reason', *Monist* 1979

Argues for the "anti-theoretical" view that rightness cannot be codified in principles, and concludes in favour of a certain kind of virtue ethics.

G. Triantosky, 'What is Virtue Ethics All About?', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1990

G. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy* 1958

G. Harman, 'Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1998-9.

R. Audi, 'Acting from Virtue', *Mind* 1995

R. Johnson, 'Virtue and Right', *Ethics* 2003

R. Hursthouse, 'Virtue theory and abortion', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1991;

Defence of virtue ethics. Articulates several objections (some very bad, some better) to virtue ethics, and argues against them. Illustrates virtue ethics by examining the question of whether and when it would be morally correct to have an abortion from a virtue-ethics point of view.

Past Finals questions:

(2000 q16) 'The considerations to which a virtuous person is sensitive are more fundamental than the virtues themselves.' Is this true? If so, is the project of 'virtue ethics' doomed?

(2001 q 9) Can the right and the good be defined in terms of what a virtuous agent would do?

(2001 q 15) Is singlemindedness a virtue?

(2002 q 8) Do the virtues benefit their possessor? Must a defender of virtue ethics claim that they do?

(2003 q 8) 'Virtue ethics assumes powers of ethical discernment that we do not possess and a homogenous ethical culture that no longer exists.' Discuss.

(2004 q 10) Can virtue theory give a plausible account of what makes a character trait a virtue?

(2005 Can a good life fail to be virtuous?

(2006 q 12) Is the virtuous person one who habitually and correctly applies true moral principles?

(2007 q 9) EITHER a) Is it compatible with virtue ethics to claim that an agent did the right thing for the wrong reasons?

OR b) Does virtue ethics imply relativism?

(2008 q 2) EITHER a) 'We are not called good or bad in respect of our emotions, but are called so in respect of our virtues and vices'. (ARISTOTLE) Is this true?

OR b) Is Hume right to define virtue as 'whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary'?

(2009 q 2) 'No one today would accept Aristotle's derivation of a conception of moral virtue from an account of human nature'. Discuss.

(2009 q 8) Does virtue ethics have anything to say to immoral agents who can't act on virtuous motives?

(2010 q 9) EITHER a) Is it more truly virtuous to be tempted to do wrong and successfully to resist the temptation, or not to be tempted at all?

OR b) 'It can be no objection to virtue ethics that it does not yield a credible criterion of right action, as it was never intended to do so.' Discuss.

(2011 q 2) 'Someone who withstands frightening things and does so cheerfully, or anyway without distress, is a courageous person, while someone who is distressed at them is cowardly.' (ARISTOTLE) Discuss.

(2011 q 5) If the life of virtue is a flourishing life, must a virtuous person be either ignorant about the nature of morality, or an egoist?