

Ethics

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You should write **8 essays** in total. Please email me your essays by **2pm on the day before our meeting**. Your essay should be about **1,000 to 1,500 words** in length. Don't tackle everything in a single essay and be selective about your readings. The reading lists below are quite extensive, so that you can follow up on the issues you find interesting. Pick one interesting aspect of the topic, pick an argument/view that you like or dislike, and try to come up with interesting arguments. Try to have a clear structure and write in a simple and concise manner.

Useful resources:

<https://philpapers.org>

<https://plato.stanford.edu>

Podcasts:

<http://www.philosophybites.com>

Advice on writing philosophy essays:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

<http://oyc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/philosophy-paper.pdf>

Week 1

Moral Realism and Non-Cognitivism

Essay topic (pick one):

1. 'If we deny realism about moral facts, we must by parity of reasoning deny it about mathematical and epistemological facts. That would be unacceptable. So, we should not deny realism about moral facts.' Is this a good argument?

OR

1. 'Morality is a useful fiction.' Do you agree?

Key reading

- Mackie, John L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991. (Chapter 1).

Further reading

- Smith, Michael, "Moral Realism" in LaFollette, Hugh, and Ingmar Persson. (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*. 2nd ed. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, 17-42.
- Rachels, Stuart, and Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 9th ed., New York, 2018. (Chapter 3 on "Subjectivism in Ethics").
- Ayer, Alfred J. *Language, Truth and Logic*. 2nd ed. revised and reset. ed., London, Gollancz, 1946. (Introduction section entitled "The Emotive Theory of Values", and Chapter 6).
- Sturgeon, Nicholas, "Moral Explanations Defended", in Dreier, James Lawrence (ed.). *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, 241-262.
- Street, Sharon. "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." *Philosophical Studies* 127.1 (2006): 109-66.

Week 2

Moral Relativism

Essay topic:

1. Can a moral relativist give a compelling account of cross-cultural moral criticism?

Key reading

- Rachels, Stuart, and Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 9th ed., New York (2018), (Chapter 2 on “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”).

Further reading

- Driver, Julia. *Ethics: The Fundamentals*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Pub., 2006. (Chapter 1).
- Harman, Gilbert. “Moral Relativism Defended.” *The Philosophical Review* 84.1 (1975): 3-22.
- Boghossian, Paul, “Three Kinds of Relativism” in Hales, Steven D. *A Companion to Relativism*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 53-69.
- Dreier, James, “Moral Relativism and Moral Nihilism”, in Copp, David (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 240-264.
- Wong, David B. *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. (Introduction, and Chapters 1-2).
- Williams, Bernard, “The Truth of Relativism”, in his *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 132-143.

Week 3

Egoism and Amoralism

Essay topic (pick one):

1. ‘The answer to the question “Why be prudent?” is neither more nor less clear than the answer to the question “Why be moral?”’ Is that true? What does your answer imply, if anything, about the plausibility of egoism as opposed to moralism?

OR

2. ‘There is no essential conflict between morality and self-interest because a good life is one that involves attention to the interests of others.’ Discuss.

Key reading

- Rachels, Stuart, and Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 9th ed., New York, 2018. (Chapter 5 “Ethical Egoism”).

Further reading

- Plato (trans. Grube, G. M. A.; ed. Reeve, C. D. C.). *Republic*. Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett, 1992 (Book II, to 367e).
- Shaver, Robert, “Egoism” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Kraut, Richard, “Altruism”, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Williams, Bernard. *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*. New York; London, Harper & Row, 1972. (Chapter 1).
- Hills, Alison. *The Beloved Self: Morality and the Challenge from Egoism*. Oxford, Oxford UP, 2010.
- Mackie, John L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977. (Chapter 5).

Week 4

Utilitarianism and Consequentialism: Overview

Essay topic:

1. ‘There exists no plausible theoretical account of how we could fail to be obligated to bring about the best available outcome whenever doing so is permissible. Therefore, the objection that consequentialism is too demanding is ineffective.’ Discuss.

Key reading

- Rachels, Stuart, and Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 9th ed., New York, 2018. (Chapters 7, 8 on “The Utilitarian Approach” and “The Debate over Utilitarianism”).

Further reading

- Bykvist, K., *Utilitarianism: a Guide for the Perplexed*, London: Continuum, 2009, ch. 7.
- Driver, Julia. *Ethics: The Fundamentals*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Pub., 2006. (Chapters 3-4)
- Smart, John Jamieson Carswell, and Bernard Williams. *Utilitarianism: For and against*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973.
- Griffin, James. “Modern Utilitarianism” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* (1982):331-75.
- Sen, Amartya, and Bernard Williams. *Utilitarianism and beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. (Introduction).
- Brink, David, “Some Forms and Limits of Consequentialism” in Copp, David (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 380-423.
- Kagan, Shelly, “Does Consequentialism Demand Too Much? Recent Work on the Limits of Obligation.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 13.3 (1984): 239-54

Week 5

Utilitarianism, Integrity and Character

Essay topic (pick one):

1. What is the integrity objection to utilitarianism? How good is it?

OR

2. Can consequentialists make adequate sense of moral dilemmas?

Key reading

- Smart, J. J. C. & B. Williams, *Utilitarianism, For and Against*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 93-118.

Further reading

- Scheffler, Samuel (ed.). *Consequentialism and Its Critics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. (Introduction).
- Williams, Bernard, "Persons, Character and Morality", in his *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 1-19.
- Williams, Bernard, "Utilitarianism and Self-Indulgence", in his *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 40-53.
- Railton, Peter, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 13.2 (1984): 134-71.
[This article is also reprinted in Scheffler, Samuel (ed.). *Consequentialism and Its Critics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.]
- Stocker, Michael, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories." *The Journal of Philosophy* 73.14 (1976): 453-66.
[This article is also reprinted in Crisp, Roger, and Michael Slote (ed.). *Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997].

- Jackson, Frank, “Decision-theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection.” *Ethics* 101.3 (1991): 461-82.

Week 6

Deontology and Contractualism

Essay topic (pick one):

1. ‘Contractualists tie the wrongness of an action to whether all principles for the general regulation of behavior which permit it can be reasonably rejected. However, whatever explains why those principles can be reasonably rejected can on its own explain why the action is wrong. So, contractualists should drop the talk about reasonable rejection and just talk about what makes actions right or wrong.’ Do you agree?

OR

2. Does contractualism imply that we have no obligations to beings who do not understand what it means to enter into a contract? What does your answer imply about the plausibility of contractualism?

Key reading

- Hieronymi, Pamela, “Of Metaethics and Motivation: The Appeal of Contractualism”, in Wallace, R. Jay et al. (ed.). *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T.M. Scanlon*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 101-128.

Further reading

- Scanlon, Thomas. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1998. (Chapter 5).
- Price, Richard, (ed. D. D. Raphael). *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974. (Chapters 6-7).
- Ross, W. David. *The Right and the Good*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2002. (Chapter 2).

- Dancy, Jonathan, “An Ethic of Prima Facie Duties”, in Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1993, 219-229.
- Frick, Johann, "Contractualism and Social Risk." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 43.3 (2015): 175-223.

Week 7

Happiness and Well-being

Essay topic (pick one):

1. ‘As a theory of which things make a person’s life go well, the objective list account is attractive. But, unlike its competitors, this account does not adequately explain what *makes* them good.’ Assess.

OR

2. Does wanting something suffice to make it good for you to get it?

Key reading

- Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. 2nd Repr. with Corrections of 1984 ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987 (the 1984 edition is available as an ebook) app. I “What Makes Someone's Life Go Best”, pp. 493-502.
- Scanlon, Thomas. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1998. (Chapter 3).

Further reading

- Fletcher, Guy. *The Philosophy of Well-being: An Introduction*. London, 2016. Chapter 1 (Hedonism), chapter 2 (Desire-fulfilment theory) and chapter 3 (Objective list theories).

- Aristotle (trans.; ed. Irwin, Terence). *Nicomachean Ethics*. 2nd ed. Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1999. (or other editions cited in Key Historical Readings, above). Book 1; Book 10, Chapters 6-9.
- Griffin, James. *Well-being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986. (Part 1).
- Sumner, L. W. *Abortion and Moral Theory*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981. (Chapter 5).

Week 8

Equality, Fairness, and Desert

Essay topic (pick one):

1. ‘The Levelling Down Objection to egalitarianism depends upon scepticism about impersonal value. Prioritarians are also committed to impersonal value. So the Levelling Down Objection does not favour prioritarianism over egalitarianism.’ Assess this argument.

OR

2. ‘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 in itself significant.’ Discuss.

Key reading

- Parfit, Derek, “Equality and Priority.” *Ratio*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1997, pp. 202–221. [Reprinted in Mason, Andrew. (ed.) *Ideals of Equality*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, 1-20].

Further reading

- Williams, Bernard, “The Idea of Equality” in Laslett, Peter, and W. G. Runciman (ed.). *Philosophy, Politics and Society. Second Series: A Collection*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962,

110-131. [Reprinted in his *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers, 1956- 1972*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973.].

- Arneson, Richard, “Egalitarianism”, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Raz, Joseph. *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986. (Chapter 9).
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Rev. ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 1999 (First edition as ebook). (Sections 1-4, 11-12, 20, 24-6).
- Kagan, Shelly, “Equality and Desert” in Pojman, Louis P., and Owen McLeod (ed.). *What Do We Deserve? A Reader on Justice and Desert*. New York; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999, 298-314.
- Larry Temkin, *Inequality*, (1993), Chapter 9 - 9.5.
- Michael Otsuka and Alex Voorhoeve, ‘Why it Matters that Some are Worse Off than Others: An Argument against the Priority View’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, (2009).