

ETHICS TUTORIAL READING AND ESSAYS

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2016



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INTRODUCTION

READING

Generally the reading is given in the order in which I'd suggest reading it. It's important that you read it all: if you leave any out, you're likely to have a gap in your understanding of the topic that will make it very difficult to answer the essay question. (Note also that for the vast majority of papers, reading them once is not enough: there are very few papers that I could understand after one reading.) Let me know if there's any week in which you think I've assigned too much (or too little) reading.

ESSAY

Your essays should be something like 2000 words; that's about four single spaced pages. More or less is fine, but keep it under 2500 words. When you email your essay to me, *cc everyone else in your tutorial group*. And be sure to read *and think about* your tutorial peers' essays. Email your essay to me by 6 PM the day before the tutorial (unless I specify another time); I won't read late essays.

Please pay close attention to the following advice, especially 1 and 2. They try to cater for the most common and most easily solved problems I find in students' essays. Please take them seriously.

- 1 *Explain*. In short: explain *everything*. It should be possible for an intelligent peer who hasn't studied philosophy to fully understand your essay without needing read the authors you're writing about. So, for example: if you use a technical term or mention a concept that has particular significance for an author, make sure you clearly define/explain it; similarly, for any argument or position you discuss, you must clearly explain it to your reader. This is partly because good academic writing should be explicit and easily understood, but this is not the only or even the main reason. Rather, your ability to explain the ideas you're discussing—clearly, precisely, and succinctly—is one of the principal things you're being assessed on. You might well know, say, what a categorical imperative is, but you need to *show* that you know it and how precisely you know it. Explaining even small, simple ideas well is a lot harder than you might think; don't underestimate how important it is, and how much work it takes.
- 2 *Justify*. Assume that for every claim you make, the reader is asking 'why should I believe that?' In a philosophy essay, there should always be an excellent answer to this question. You should consider this to be, above all else, your aim when writing an essay. The worst thing you can do is to make bold assertions without defending them, and the second worst is to make bold assertions and defend them weakly. Note that this includes interpretive claims: if you write 'Plato believes that p', you need to show your reader, perhaps by giving a supporting quote, that this is indeed something Plato believes.

A bad essay: 'p!'

A good essay: 'For reasons x, y, and z, it seems that p.'

An excellent essay: ‘Reasons x, y, and z give us good grounds for thinking that p, although someone might offer an objection along the following lines ... However, I think there is a promising response to this objection ...’

- 3 *Use headings.* Before you start writing, sketch a structure for your essay. When writing, use headings that reflect this structure. A typical essay might have 2–4 headings.
- 4 *First understand, then assess.* Be careful not to rush into criticisms of what you read before you’ve fully understood it. Approach everything you read with charity. That is, assume (since it’s likely) that the author has thought intelligently and carefully about what they’ve written, so is unlikely to have made obvious mistakes. For example, if you notice a *prima facie* objection to something you’re reading, read it again carefully to see if there’s a way to understand it that avoids the objection or try to think of a plausible implicit assumption the author might have made that caters for the objection.
- 5 *Go from general to particular.* The topics we’ll look at are broad. One could reasonably spend years writing hundreds of pages about them—you only have a few pages and one week. This presents a challenge: on the one hand, you want to cover the whole topic, showing that you’re familiar with all the major issues that arise; on the other hand, you want to do more than simply scratch the surface, never looking at anything in detail. This can be a difficult balance to achieve, but in general it is much better to *err on the side of detail*. A good approach might be to devote about the first third or half of your essay to a more general discussion and then use the last half or two-thirds to examine one or two smaller points in much greater detail—you might, for example, focus on one argument, premise, or objection that you think is especially important or interesting.
- 6 *Ensure your conclusions reflect your arguments.* You might have been taught that strong, persuasive prose requires confident assertions, rather than hesitant, qualified ones. This is not the case in philosophy: your assertions should reflect the actual degree of confidence that is warranted by the evidence you’ve provided. Decisive arguments are rare—even rarer are decisive arguments in just a few lines of a student’s essay. So be very careful not to mistake considerations that give us a good reason for believing that p for an argument that conclusively proves that p. A good essay is likely to have a large range of (appropriate) qualifying phrases: ‘this shows decisively that p’; ‘this is a strong reason to believe that p’; ‘this suggests that p’; ‘this makes it less implausible that p’; and so forth. Be especially careful with ‘factive’ or ‘success’ verbs like refute or prove.
- 7 *Use quotes.* Especially in historical subjects, including quotes from the relevant primary texts can be an excellent way to illustrate, justify, and give some focus to your discussion. One way (of many ways) to use a quote would be the following: make a claim; present a quote that you think backs up the claim; and then explain and interpret the text of the quote in order to show that and why it backs up your claim. Two cautions: first, quotes from secondary sources are less useful; second, avoid using a quote as a way of *saying* something—rather, a quote should be presented as evidence *about which* you have something to say.

SOME BASICS OF TYPOGRAPHY

The following are a few typographic conventions worth learning. They are not mandatory, but if you ignore them I'll be annoyed; unfortunately, it won't affect your mark or report, because no one else cares.

- 1 *Indent paragraphs.* But do not indent the opening paragraph of the document or the first paragraph after a section heading. You may instead—not in addition—separate paragraphs with a blank line, although this is better suited to list-like texts, such as legal documents, than continuous prose.
- 2 *Use single line spacing.* It's easier to read. Double spacing is only necessary when a printed copy of your work will be annotated.
- 3 *A footnote mark is always placed after punctuation.*¹ It is almost always best to place a footnote at the end of the sentence, *after* the sentence-ending full stop, even if you are referring to something earlier in the sentence. Avoid consecutive footnotes; instead, place all information in one footnote if possible.
- 4 *Indicate quotes with either quotation marks or by using a block quote.* Extra flourishes, such as italicising, are unnecessary. And never place a block quote within quotation marks.
- 5 *Learn the difference between a hyphen (-), en-dash (–), and em-dash (—).* Use an en-dash like 'to' in ranges of dates or numbers (e.g. 87–142) and to express certain relationships between words: for example, an 'on–off switch' or 'Irish–American relations'. Either an en- or em-dash can be used to indicate a parenthetical phrase. If you use an en-dash, add a space either side – like so – but em-dashes are always unspaced—like so.
- 6 *Make ellipses with three full stops separated by spaces.* Like this . . . , with a space either side. You will most commonly use an ellipsis to indicate portions of text that you've omitted from quotes. Don't omit any sentence-ending full stops that precede an ellipsis (i.e. together they make four stops). For example:

[P]articulate care needs to be exercised when eliding text to ensure that the sense of the original is not lost . . . A deletion must not result in a statement alien to the original material. . . . Accuracy of sense and emphasis must accompany accuracy of transcription. (CMS, 16th, 13.49)

- 7 *Use a single space after full-stops.* A double space, once common, is now rightly recognised as unnecessary.

REFERENCING

In your essays you should reference both quotes and claims or arguments that originate from one of the authors you've been reading. You should also have a bibliography of all the works you've referred to in the text.

1. This includes full stops, commas, colons, semi-colons, and quotation marks.

You can use whatever bibliographical style you choose, so long as it's consistent. The following is an example of a typical author-year referencing style, starting with what the bibliography will look like:

Book: Author (Year) *Title*, Place: Publisher.

Fine, G. (1993) *On Ideas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freeman, S. (ed.) (2003) *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Article: Author (Year) 'Title', *Journal*, Volume, pp. Pages.

Irwin, T.H. (1977) 'Plato's Heracleiteanism', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 27, pp. 1–13.

Article in book: Author (Year) 'Article Title' in Editor(s) (ed(s)). *Book Title*, Place: Publisher.

Scanlon, T.M. (2003) 'Rawls on Justification' in S. Freeman (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

In-text citation: (Author, Year, Page(s))

It has been argued that the charge of conservatism laid against Rawls' idea of reflective equilibrium is unsound (Scanlon, 2003, pp. 150–151).

Scanlon argues that the charge of conservatism laid against Rawls' reflective equilibrium is unsound (2003, pp. 150–151).

PLAGIARISM

The university guidelines are here: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/plagiarism. From the college regulations:

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's work without acknowledgement as if it were your own. Typically, this involves copying an essay from another student or from the Internet, or copying passages from a book without quotation marks and a clear page reference. It is a very serious offence to plagiarise someone else's work, and there are serious academic penalties which may include the offender being sent down from the College and the University. ... Please also be aware that poor academic work practices, such as copying sections directly from academic articles into your notes for information, might lead to unintentional plagiarism, but that this unintentional offence will still be dealt with severely by the University as 'reckless' plagiarism.

Two good reasons not to plagiarise. 1. I'll spot it. It's really easy. 2. If you think about it, there is really no advantage to plagiarising an essay, just serious disadvantage if you're caught. The most you'll gain, if you're lucky, is to make me believe that you wrote an essay when you didn't—but why would you care what I believe? If you genuinely can't write an essay for whatever reason, try to write part of an essay, some notes, or—in the worst case—nothing.

WEEK 1: EGOISM

This week we're thinking about three related questions: (1) Are we psychological egoists? (2) Is ethical egoism a tenable position? (3) What do we say to someone who decides that they are opting out of morality altogether? These questions are—for me at least—in order of difficulty. With respect to question (3), think carefully about what motivates ethical action (readings 3–5 address this question).

ESSAY

What reason do I have to act ethically?

Think about the following. Is it better for *me* to act ethically? Even if egoism is false, is it important that our prudential and ethical aims coincide? Is it coherent for a person to say 'I ought to ϕ ' and yet have no intention to ϕ ? Whether you'd answer 'yes' or 'no' to the last question, what does this person mean by 'ought'?

Pay close attention to reading 4, on moral motivation. For example, what position do you think Williams (reading 3) takes on moral motivation?

READING

- 1 James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th Edition, (McGraw-Hill: Boston, 2003), chapter 6: 'Ethical Egoism' [Introductory]
- 2 Kurt Baier, 'Egoism' in P. Singer (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991)
- 3 Bernard Williams, 'The Amoralist' in *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (CUP: Cambridge, 1993)
- 4 Connie Rosati, [Moral Motivation](#), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- 5 Philippa Foot, 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' *The Philosophical Review* 81 (1972) 305–316; also in P. Foot *Virtues and Vices* (OUP: Oxford, 2002)

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

'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?

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

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 ?

'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?

WEEK 2: MORAL REALISM AND OBJECTIVITY

ESSAY

Can moral claims be true? If they can be true, what makes them true?

There's a minefield of terminology this week—realism, naturalism, subjectivism, relativism, cognitivism, error-theory, etc. Be sure to use these terms correctly; to explain what terms you do use; and especially to avoid confusing some of the related, but importantly different, positions (e.g. anti-realism/non-naturalism or subjectivism/relativism).

READING

- 1 J. Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th Edition, (McGraw-Hill: Boston, 2003), chapters 2 & 3: 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism' and 'Subjectivism in Ethics'
- 2 M. Smith 'Moral Realism' in H. LaFollette *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2000)
- 3 R. Shafer-Landau 'Ethics as Philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Nonnaturalism' in Terry Horgan & Mark Timmons (eds) *Metaethics After Moore* (OUP: Oxford, 2006); also in Shafer-Landau (ed) *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2007)
- 4 A.J. Ayer *Language, Truth, and Logic*, chapter 6 [The classic defence of emotivism]
- 5 J. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin, 1977), chapter 1 [A defence of error theory]

Optional:

- 1 There are many useful Stanford Encyclopedia articles: 'Moral Realism', 'Moral Relativism', 'Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism' and so on
- 2 Peter Railton 'Realism and its alternatives' in John Skorupski (ed) *Routledge Companion to Ethics* (Routledge, 2010)
- 3 Geoffrey Sayre-McCord 'Moral Realism' in David Copp (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (OUP: Oxford, 2006)
- 4 G. Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (OUP: Oxford, 1977), chapters 1 & 3–4
- 5 N. Sturgeon 'Ethical Naturalism' in D. Copp (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 91–121
- 6 T. Nagel *The View From Nowhere* (OUP: Oxford, 1986), chapter 8 [Defence of a form of realism]

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

Can an error theorist who denies that there are objective moral values continue to engage wholeheartedly in moral discourse?

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

'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?

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

Can the expressivist explain the requirement to be consistent in our moral judgments?

Is the wrongness of slavery something we have discovered or something we have invented?

WEEK 3: CONSEQUENTIALISM

This week's topic assumes a reasonably good knowledge of consequentialism (from the prelims Moral Philosophy course). The aim this week is to carefully consider the putative difficulties for consequentialist theories presented by 'alienation' and/or catering for personal relationships, and to assess the responses available to a defender of consequentialism.

ESSAY

What are the principal differences between consequentialist and deontological ethical theories? And either:

Must consequentialism misunderstand the value of close personal relations?

Or:

In what sense, if any, is consequentialism alienating?

Keep in mind the difference between consequentialist and deontological ethical theories, and think about whether or not these objections apply to deontological theories too, and why.

READING

- 1 Philip Petite, 'Consequentialism' in Peter Singer (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991)
- 2 David McNaughton & Piers Rawling, 'Deontology' in David Copp (ed) *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (OUP: Oxford, 2006)
- 3 B. Williams 'A Critique of Utilitarianism', in J.J.C. Smart & B. Williams (eds) *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (CUP, 1973), sections 3–5
- 4 Michael Stocker, 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' *The Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976) 453–466 [Argues that in current consequentialist and deontological theories there is an unacceptable gap between one's motives and one's moral reasons]

Either [though even better if you read both]:

- 5 Peter Railton, 'Alienation, consequentialism and the demands of morality' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 (1984) 134–171 [Defence of a sophisticated form of consequentialism, which, he argues, avoids the alienation objection]

Or:

- 6 Frank Jackson, 'Decision-theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection' *Ethics* 101 (1991) 461–482 [Defends consequentialism against the can't-accommodate-personal-relationships objection]

Optional reading:

- 6 Samuel Scheffler, *Consequentialism and Its Critics* (OUP: Oxford 1988) [Collection with lots of useful essays]

- 7 J.J.C Smart & Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (CUP: Cambridge, 1973)
- 8 Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints' *The Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1988) pp. 419–439 [Argues that both consequentialism's and deontology's ideals of moral perfection are unattractive, largely because they overshadow other sources of value]

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

'Consequentialism is false, since the consequences of teaching it would be bad'. Discuss.

Must consequentialism misunderstand the value of close personal relations?

In what sense, if any, is consequentialism alienating?

Is it an objection to a consequentialist theory that it cannot be used as a guide to action?

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?

'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?

'A consequentialist does not care about people; he only cares about goodness.' Is this a fair criticism of consequentialism?

WEEK 4: INTRODUCTION TO KANT

We'll be looking at Kant over two weeks. Your aim this week should be simply to get a good basic understanding of Kant's *Groundwork*. Most of the reading (2–4) is quite straightforward and introductory.

ESSAY

Summarise Kant's moral philosophy. [Reading 1–4]

This is an opportunity to try to get a clear idea of Kant's moral philosophy and to highlight any areas you find difficult. Illustrate your account with examples, such as promise keeping. Aim to answer, for example, the following questions: What is a maxim? (Careful with this one: what is a maxim's relationship to an action? Can any practical law-like statement be a maxim?) What is the relationship between morality and rationality? What is the difference between a hypothetical and a categorical imperative? What are Kant's three formulations of the categorical imperative? How are they related? What's the difference between perfect and imperfect duties? In what way is autonomy important in Kant's theory?

TO THINK ABOUT

'One's action is morally praiseworthy only if one's motive is simply that it is the morally right thing to do.' Does Kant agree? Do you? [See especially reading 1, 4, and 5]

READING

- 1 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [This is relatively short; this week, be sure to read at least the first two of its three sections]
- 2 Onara O'Neil, 'Kantian Ethics' in Peter Singer (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991)
- 3 Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (CUP: Cambridge, 1996), chapter 1 [at least up to p. 27]
- 4 C.D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (Kegan Paul: London, 1930), chapter 5
- 5 Barbara Herman, 'On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty' *Philosophical Review* 90 (1981) 359–382

Optional:

- 6 Robert Johnson, '[Kant's Moral Philosophy](#)' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

'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.

‘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.’ Is Kant right to say this?

WEEK 5: KANT & UNIVERSALISABILITY

ESSAY

What is the relationship between Kant's 'formula of universal law' and 'formula of humanity'? Are either or both good guides to moral action?

Your answer will be clearer if you illustrate it through examples, such as false promising or aiding those in need. Some issues that should arise in your answer are: ethical principles are surely universalisable in some sense—what, then, is distinctive about Kant's appeal to universalisability? In what sense is the categorical imperative *categorical*? What is the difference between contradiction in conception and contradiction in will? In what sense is either a genuine contradiction? And are they a good way to test our moral maxims? (Recall that universalisability was one difficulty faced by ethical egoism—maybe an interesting point to discuss.)

READING

- 1 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- 2 Thomas Hill, 'Kantian Normative Ethics' in David Copp (ed) *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (OUP: Oxford, 2006)
- 3 Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (CUP: Cambridge, 1996), chapter 3 and 4
- 4 Christine Korsgaard, 'Kant's Formula of Humanity' *Kant-Studien* 77 (1986) 183–202
- 5 J. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin, 1977), chapter 4
- 6 Philippa Foot, 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' *The Philosophical Review* 81 (1972) 305–316 [You read this in week 1, but do reread it.]

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

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?

Are there any categorical imperatives?

Are categorical imperatives more problematic than hypothetical imperatives?

'The requirements of morality are requirements of rationality only if I am rationally required to ask, of any maxim of action of mine, whether I can will it as a universal law.' Discuss.

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?

Could I rationally will it to be a universal law that no one ever helps anyone else?

'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.

What does it mean to say that moral judgements are universalizable? How useful is the notion of universalizability in moral reasoning?

WEEK 6: VIRTUE ETHICS

ESSAY

What is virtue ethics and how does it differ from consequentialist and deontological ethical theories? What is the (one) best objection to virtue ethics? How might a virtue ethicist respond?

Note that there are many versions of virtue ethics—mention some of the differences in your essay, and try to give a clear statement of what you think is the most plausible version (in addition to explaining how the theory works, make sure you explain why someone might find it preferable to deontological and consequentialist theories). Also note: if you're like me, you might find the focus on some specific virtues—e.g. courage or temperance—a little old fashioned. This is rarely how I assess someone's character. Remember that we could reject, e.g., Hursthouse's way of describing the virtues and still accept virtue ethics.

Most importantly: rather than simply thinking about what's plausible or implausible about virtue ethics—e.g. what first-order moral intuitions it explains that consequentialism fails to—be sure to think carefully about why someone might think that there are fundamental problems with deontology or consequentialism that *necessitate* the move to a theory like virtue ethics.

READING

- 1 Gregory Trianosky, 'What is Virtue Ethics All About?' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1990) 335–343
- 2 Rosalind Hursthouse, 'Virtue Theory and Abortion' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 20 (1991) 223–236
- 3 Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (OUP: Oxford, 2002), chapter 1, 'Virtues and Vices': pp. 1–18
- 4 Christine Swanton, 'Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Indirection: A Pluralistic Value-Centred Approach' *Utilitas* 9 (1997) 168–181 (If you find time, you might also look at: Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (OUP: Oxford, 2003), ch. 11.)

Optional reading:

- 5 T. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (OUP: Oxford, 2001), chapter 8: 'Against Virtue Ethics' [Try to find time to read this]
- 6 Rosalind Hursthouse, '[Virtue Ethics](#)' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Another summary]
- 7 Roger Crisp, *How Should One Live?* (OUP: Oxford, 1998), chapter 1: pp. 1–18 [Introductory again, but also a guide to the many useful papers on virtue ethics in this book]

- 8 John McDowell, 'Virtue and Reason' *Monist* 62 (1979) 331-350 [Perhaps the strongest, and most influential, rejection of the claim that we can have set of general moral principles that we simply need to consult and apply to particular actions]

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

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

Can virtue theory give a plausible account of what makes a character trait a virtue?

Can a good life fail to be virtuous?

Is the virtuous person one who habitually and correctly applies true moral principles?

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?

'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.

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

WEEK 7: FREE WILL AND RESPONSIBILITY

ESSAY

Is a person morally responsible for doing something at a certain time only if he could have done otherwise at that time?

READING

If you did free will and determinism in the General Philosophy course, it will be worth having another look at the reading you did then.

- 1 J.M. Fisher, 'Free Will and Moral Responsibility' in David Copp (ed) *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (OUP: Oxford, 2006)
- 2 J. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin, 1977), chapter 9
- 3 P. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962) pp. 1–25.
- 4 H. Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility' *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969) pp. 829–839. Also in Gary Watson (ed.) *Free Will* (2nd edition) (OUP: Oxford, 2002), Chapter 8, pp. 167–176.
- 5 G. Strawson, 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility' *Philosophical Studies* 75 (1994) pp. 5–25

Optional:

- 6 A. Eshleman 'Moral Responsibility' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- 7 J. M. Fischer 'The Cards That Are Dealt You' *The Journal of Ethics* 10 (2006) 107–129 [Response to Galen Strawson]
- 8 R. Young 'The Implications of Determinism' in P. Singer (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991)
- 9 H. Frankfurt 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971) pp. 5–20

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

Has freedom got anything to do with resentment?

'If I acquired all my motivations thanks to circumstances beyond my control, this would show only that my actions were not authentic, not that they were not autonomous.' Discuss.

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

'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.

Can responsibility for action be adequately explained in terms of motivations the agent endorses?

WEEK 8: NON-COGNITIVISM AND THE FREGE–GEACH PROBLEM

ESSAY

Clearly and precisely explain (a) moral non-cognitivism and (b) the Frege–Geach problem. Is there any adequate solution to the Frege–Geach problem?

Makes sure this week to keep a careful eye not only on the set of objections that illustrate the Frege–Geach problem, but also the various responses that have been proposed. For example, there is more than one way in which non-cognitivists have tried to characterise the conflict between, say, a moral claim and its negation. You will find Schroeder’s article and the relevant sections of van Roojen very helpful in getting a good grasp of the Frege–Geach problem—read them carefully, and I’d recommend reading them multiple times.

READING

- 1 M. van Roojen ‘[Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism](#)’ in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- 2 P.T. Geach ‘Ascriptivism’ *Philosophical Review* 69 (1960) 221–225
- 3 R.M. Hare ‘Meaning and speech acts’ *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970) 3–24
- 4 S. Blackburn *Spreading the Word* (OUP: Oxford, 1984), sections 5.6 (pp. 167–171) and section 6.2 (pp. 189–196)
- 5 M. Schroeder ‘What is the Frege-Geach problem?’ *Philosophy Compass* 3/4 (2008) 703–720

Optional:

- 6 N. Unwin (1999) ‘Quasi-realism, Negation and the Frege-Geach Problem’ *Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (1999) 337–352

WEEK 9: RIGHTS (OPTIONAL)

ESSAY

What are rights? What kind of rights are there? What role, if any, should they have in (a) a consequentialist moral theory or (b) a deontological moral theory? Be sure to think about what each of the ethical theories we've look at might say about rights.

READING

- 1 Jeremy Waldron, 'Introduction' in J. Waldron (ed.) *Theories of Rights* (OUP: Oxford, 1984)
- 2 H.L.A. Hart, 'Are there any Natural Rights?' *Philosophical Review* 64 (1955) pp. 175–191; also in J. Waldron (ed.) *Theories of Rights* (OUP: Oxford, 1984)
- 3 Ronald Dworkin, 'Rights as Trumps' in J. Waldron (ed.) *Theories of Rights* (OUP: Oxford, 1984)
- 4 Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1986), chapters 7 and 8

Optional:

- 5 Leif Wenar, 'Rights' *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

'If a mouse cannot have any moral rights, severely mentally challenged humans cannot have any moral rights either'. Is this a good argument?

Can Robinson Crusoe have rights?

Does consequentialism pose a threat to individual rights?

Do rights trump utility? If they do, can utilitarians recognize rights?