Why be good?

DAMIEN STOREY | SPRING 2019 | VERSION 0.1

WHEN & WHERE: TBD
MY OFFICE: SOS 162
OFFICE HOURS: TBD (or email to arrange a meeting)
EMAIL: dstorey@ku.edu.tr

CONTENTS

Course particulars 2
- Course description 2
- Course overview 2
- Learning outcomes 2
- Student responsibilities 3
- Assessment methods 3
- Lecture prep tasks 3
- Course policies 4

Lecture outline 5
- Part 1: Three views of how we should act 5
- Part 2: Are we all, deep down, selfish? 5
- Part 3: Can ethical claims be true? 6
- Part 4: What reasons do we have to do what's right? 7
- Part 5: Who is happier: a moral or an immoral person? 7

Some essay & writing advice 8
- Writing philosophy 8
- Some basics of typography 9
- Referencing 10

COURSE PARTICULARS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why should we act ethically? If it is in our interest, and we can get away with it, is it not wiser to act unethically? The aim of this course is to try to answer these questions systematically, to see if a rigorous case can be made for acting ethically rather than unethically. Drawing on research on ethical behaviour from various disciplines—including philosophy, psychology, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience—we will examine the motivations behind ethical actions, the status of ethical 'truths', and the relationship (if any) between an ethical life and a happy life.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Part 1: Three views of how we should act. Before we look at *why* one should (or should not) act ethically, we begin with an overview of theories of what counts as ethical action.

Part 2: Are we all, deep down, selfish? Here we examine arguments for and against the idea that being selfish is just a fact of human nature, taking an especially close look at how unselfish behaviour might have evolved.

Part 3: Can ethical claims be true? Ethics is sometimes dismissed as just a 'social construct'; or as people mistaking their feelings for facts; or as a 'folk' understanding of human behaviour that disappears when examined more scientifically. Here we consider whether there is any truth to these claims.

Part 4: What reasons do we have to do what's right? What motivates ethical actions? Does a virtuous person do what's right because they see it as *in their interest* to do so; or because they *desire to be good people*; or because they are compelled by *a sense of duty?*

Part 5: Who is happier—a moral or an immoral person? There is something troubling about the possibility that a successful, happy life—a life that any rational person could envy—might also be a deeply vicious life. Here we'll look at the connection between morality and happiness. In particular we'll assess the view that being a good person is a necessary condition for happiness.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this course, students will:

- Have an introductory understanding of the main positions in normative ethics.
- Be able to engage critically and develop positions in a range of debates in metaethics.
- Have a better understanding of the relationship between scientific and 'folk' accounts of ethical behaviour.
- Be awakened from their dogmatic egoist and relativist slumbers.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

I keep the weekly reading light (sometimes as low as 10 pages) and in exchange I expect students to do *all* the required reading, and do it *carefully* (which might mean reading the material multiple times). In addition, students are expected to complete all assessments, attend all lectures, and take an active role in class: listening carefully, asking questions, and engaging in discussion with each other and me. If you find it difficult to engage in class, you can be active on the class forum (on Blackboard).

ASSESSMENT METHODS

The course is assessed by:

1. (40%) *Lecture prep tasks.* These are very short writing tasks you'll be asked to do prior to and/or in all lectures, beginning with the second (27 in total). These *must be handed to me in person (i.e. by you) in the lecture for which they are due.* (*Grading.* Two factors affect your mark: (a) six of your tasks, chosen at random, will be graded from F to A+ and your mark will be an average of the best five; (b) although only six are graded, you must complete at least 22 tasks; further missed tasks reduce your overall mark by 3% per missed task.)
2. (30%) *Essay.* Between 1500–2000 words, on a topic you choose after discussion with me. (*Grading.* Letter grade, F to A+.)
3. (30%) End-of-semester written exam. This will involve questions of various types—from multiple choice to written responses—that could be about any aspect of the course. (*Grading.* Letter grade, F to A+.)

Your grades will always be given to you as one of the following letter grades.

A+	——	Exceptional
A	4.00	Superior
A−	3.70	Above Average
B+	3.30	Above Average
B	3.00	Average
B−	2.70	Average
C+	2.30	Below Average
C	2.00	Below Average
C−	1.70	Borderline
D+	1.30	Deficient
D	1.00	Deficient
F	0.00	Failing

LECTURE PREP TASKS

Lecture prep tasks are a really important part of this lecture series. Time-wise, they are not very demanding: they are a constant work load, spread throughout the course, but never require you to write more than about a half a page in any week. Note that unless they are explicitly labelled 'in-class', tasks must be completed prior to the lecture and handed in at the beginning

of the lecture.

Importantly, you are graded on the *quality* of your work. For example, if your task is a reading summary, you do not get an A for *writing* the summary. You get an A if your summary displays intelligence, effort, and independence of thought; it should summarise the reading succinctly, yet with admirably accuracy and clarity, and do so in your own words. If you just write some quick paraphrases from the text in poor English, you will get at most a D.

COURSE POLICIES

Course material. All required reading will be on Blackboard (BB) at least a week prior to the relevant lecture. Optional reading will not usually be on BB, but the library exists. Except in exceptional circumstances, slides and handouts will not be on BB.

Late work. Late essays will lose marks at the rate of one full letter grade per week (e.g. a B– essay will get a C– if it is two days late and a D– if it is ten days late). Lecture prep tasks will be marked as failed if they are later than the lecture for which they are due and/or are not handed to me in person.

Extensions and exemptions. Extensions and exemptions are possible (though not guaranteed) only if two conditions are met: (a) they are for official medical reasons (with appropriate documentation) and (b) I am made aware of the request *before* the due date.

Assessments and grades. All students have the opportunity to attempt the same work load and their final grade reflects the academic merit of the work they produce. Students cannot achieve grades in any other way.

Referencing and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's work without acknowledgement—whether deliberate or accidental—such that someone might reasonably mistake it for your own work. The university's guidelines are here. Plagiarism is a *very* serious offence even if it is just a couple of lines and even if it is accidental: it is entirely *your* responsibility to learn what plagiarism is. If you're in any way unsure about plagiarism, please ask me.

I use the following strategy for dealing with plagiarism:

> **Plagiarism amnesty.** Throughout the semester, I compile a list of students who have plagiarised (so far, about 10% of students), but I return their work marked as if it were not plagiarised. In other words, no student will know they are on the list. After the final assessment is submitted, I hold an amnesty week in which students have the opportunity to confess; if a plagiarising student confesses, they are removed from the list and will only fail the relevant component. At the end of the week, I report all those remaining on the list to Academic Affairs and recommend that they receive the harshest penalty available.

LECTURE OUTLINE

PART 1: THREE VIEWS OF HOW WE SHOULD ACT

The greatest happiness of the greatest number—consequentialism
Week 1: Lecture 1

- Philip Pettit (1991) 'Consequentialism' in Peter Singer (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Ethics* (Blackwell: Oxford) [10 pages]
- *Task:* Read this syllabus carefully.

Doing our duty, defending our rights—deontology
Week 1: Lecture 2

- Paul Hurley, *Deontology*, in Hugh LaFollette (ed) *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics* [11 pages]
- *Task:* Reading summary, 250–500 words.

Good character before good actions—virtue ethics
Week 2: Lecture 3

- Julia Driver, 'Virtue Ethics', in Hugh LaFollette (ed) *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*
- *Task:* In-class reading summary, 250–500 words.

Debate: Consequentialism *vs.* Deontology *vs.* Virtue Ethics
Week 2: Lecture 4

- *Task:* Reasons for or against one of the three positions, 250–500 words.

PART 2: ARE WE ALL, DEEP DOWN, SELFISH?

How would you act if you could get away with anyting?
Week 3: Lecture 5 & 6

- Plato, *Republic*, book II, 359c–360d ('Gyges' ring allegory') [about 2 pages]
- *This American Life* (podcast), segment: 'Flight *vs.* Invisibility'
- *Task, lecture 5:* How would you act if there were no consequences? 250–500 words.
- *Task, lecture 6:* In-class.

Did we evolve to be selfish?
Week 4: Lecture 7 & 8

- *Radiolab* (podcast), episode: 'The Good Show'
- William FitzPatrick 'Morality and Evolutionary Biology' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, up to end of section 2.

- *And optionally, for the virtuous:* P. Kitchner (2006) 'Between Fragile Altruism and Morality: Evolution and the Emergence of Normative Guidance 'in G. Boniolo and G. De Anna (eds) *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology* (CUP: Cambridge) pp. 159–77
- *Task, lecture 7:* Reading summary, 250–500 words.
- *Task, lecture 8:* In-class.

Amoralists and psychopaths.
Week 5: Lecture 9

- Bernard Williams (1993) 'The Amoralist' in *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (CUP: Cambridge, 1993), pp. 3–12 [9 pages]
- *Task:* Reading summary, 250–500 words.

PART 3: CAN ETHICAL CLAIMS BE TRUE?

It's all just feelings!
Week 5: Lecture 10

- A. J. Ayer *Language, Truth, and Logic*, chapter 6, pp. 104–118 [A classic statement of 'emotivism']
- *Task:* Are moral statements simply expressions of emotions? 250–500 words.

It's all relative!
Week 6: Lecture 11 & 12

- David Enoch (2014) 'Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)' in Russ Shafer Landau (ed.), *The Ethical Life* 3rd ed. (Oxford: OUP)
- *Task, lecture 11:* Are you a relativist or objectivist about ethics? Write one argument in favour of your position. 250–500 words.
- *Task, lecture 12:* In-class.

Can moral claims be true in the same way that scientific claims are true?
Week 7: Lecture 13 & 14

- Jonathan Dancy (1998) 'Moral Realism' *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [about 10 pages]
- *Task, lecture 13:* Reading summary, 250–500 words.
- *Task, lecture 14:* In-class.

If it is explained by evolution, is our everyday understanding of ethics mistaken?
Week 8: Lecture 15 & 16

- Richard Joyce (2016) 'Evolution and Moral Naturalism' in K. J. Clark (ed), *The Blackwell Companion to Naturalism* (Blackwell: Oxford) 369–385.
- *And optionally, for the virtuous:* William FitzPatrick 'Morality and Evolutionary Biology' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

What about if it is explained by neuroscience?
Week 9: Lecture 17

- Radiolab (the podcast), episode: 'Morality'
- *And optionally, for the virtuous:* Sabine Roeser (2010) 'Intuitions, emotions and gut reactions in decisions about risks: towards a different interpretation of 'neuroethics'', *Journal of Risk Research*, 13:2, 175–190,

PART 4: WHAT REASONS DO WE HAVE TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT?

Are moral 'oughts' like laws without a lawgiver to enforce them?
Week 9: Lecture 18

- Elizabeth Anscombe 'Modern Moral Philosophy' *Philosophy* 33 (1958)

'We are not conscripts in the army of duty, but volunteers!'
Week 10: Lecture 19 & 20

- Philippa Foot, 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' *The Philosophical Review* 81 (1972) 305–316

If I don't *want* to act ethically, do I have an *reason* to act ethically?
Week 11: Lecture 21 & 22

- Errol Lord and David Plunkett (2017) 'Reasons internalism' in McPherson and Plunkett (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (Taylor and Francis), pp, 324–339

PART 5: WHO IS HAPPIER: A MORAL OR AN IMMORAL PERSON?

Is a truly moral life a desirable or undesirable life?
Week 12: Lecture 23 & 24

- Susan Wolf 'Moral Saints' *The Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982) 419–439

Can an immoralist be happy?
Week 13: Lecture 25 & 26

- Steven M. Cahn 'The Happy Immoralist' *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35 (2004) 1–20

A naturalist account of happiness.
Week 14: Lecture 27 & 28

- Rosalind Hursthouse 'Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism' in Hugh LaFollette (ed) *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics* [9 pages]

SOME ESSAY & WRITING ADVICE

WRITING PHILOSOPHY

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' writing. 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 to 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 and/or 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 it is not the only reason. Another reason is that 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. *Be sufficiently detailed*. The topics we'll look at are broad. One could reasonably spend years writing hundreds of pages about them—you have at most a few pages and a few weeks. 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 shows conclusively 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 strong 'success' verbs like refute or prove.

7. *Show 'independence of thought' rather than 'originality'*. You might think that philosophy encourages you to express your unique opinions, an opinion differing from those of the authors you'll read. But by itself, originality—the simply fact that an idea is new—has little value and it should not be your aim. After all, an idea can be both original and obviously false. What *has* value is independence of thought. If you agree with the conclusions of a certain author because you fully understand them, have thought critically about their arguments, and carefully assessed alternative possibilities, then you believe nothing original, but you are showing admirable independence of thought.

8. *Use quotes*. Especially in historical subjects, including quotes from 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 rarely useful; second, never use a quote as a way of *saying* something—rather, a quote should be presented as evidence *about which* you have something to say.

For more guides to essay writing, see Jim Pryor, Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Essay, and James Lenman, How to Write A Crap Philosophy Essay.

SOME BASICS OF TYPOGRAPHY

The following are a few typographic conventions worth learning.

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 you 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]articular 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.

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.

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

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 conservativism laid against Rawls' idea of reflective equilibrium is unsound (Scanlon, 2003, pp. 150–151).

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