Course Outline

The course introduces students to a selection of the main problems in moral and political philosophy. The topics studied are divided into five main subject areas:

**Introduction to Metaethics:** This part of the course introduces students to some of the central questions in metaethics. One topic centres on the so called ‘fact/value distinction’. Is there, indeed, such a distinction? If so, what is it? Is it possible to make inferences from descriptive or non-moral claims to evaluative, normative, or moral claims? Can moral properties be identified with natural properties? A second topic is concerned with whether moral judgments are objective or subjective. Can we know what is morally right and wrong? Or is there nothing to be known because moral judgments merely express emotions or preferences? Are there facts about what is good or valuable, and if there are do they obtain independently of human thought or feeling?

**Moral Psychology:** The second area of the syllabus is focused on questions concerning moral decision-making and moral motivation. Can people act altruistically or is there always a selfish element in motivation? What sorts of motivation does morality require? What sorts of justification can be given in favour of moral motivation? What roles do affective and cognitive attitudes play in moral judgment and moral motivation?

**Introduction to Normative Ethics:** This part of the course is concerned with the question what the right thing to do is. Does morality require us to maximise pleasure and minimise pain? Must we act only in ways that are universalizable? Is it permissible to kill one so that five others may live? What is virtue? Students will be introduced to three central approaches to normative ethics: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics.

**Political Obligation:** A central, if not the central problem for political philosophy is that of how to justify the authority of the state. Should we obey the law just because it is the law? When, if ever, is it justified to break the law or to overthrow the state? How should we respond to the anarchist claim that no actual, or even possible, political authority is legitimate?

**Equality of Opportunity:** It is intuitive to think that our society is just only if we each have an equal opportunity to receive key benefits available in our society. But what does equality of opportunity mean in this context? And which benefits should we be concerned with? Is equality of opportunity compatible with private education? With affirmative action? With financial reward for natural talents? With family life?

As well as looking forward to topics covered in the IB and Part II Ethics papers, the study of IA Ethics and Political Philosophy looks forward to some of the themes studied in the Political Philosophy papers in Parts IB and II.

**Prerequisites**

None

**Objectives**

Students taking this paper will be expected to:

1. Acquire a detailed knowledge of some of the central arguments in the chosen readings.
2. Acquire an understanding of how the different topics studied relate to each other.
3. Engage in close criticism with the arguments studied.
4. Develop their own powers of philosophical analysis and argument, through study of the chosen topics.

**Preliminary Reading**


READING LIST

Material marked with an asterisk* is important

METAETHICS

Fact and Value


HUEMER, Michael, Ethical Intuitionism (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), ch. 4 'Reductionism'. Also available online at: www.dawsonera.com.


SOBER, Elliott, From a Biological Point of View (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ch. 5 'Prospects for an evolutionary ethics'. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511624940.006.

Objectivity and Subjectivity


*MACKIE, J.L., Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong (London: Penguin, 1977), ch. 1 'The Subjectivity of Values'. Also available on Moodle.

*SCHROEDER, Mark, Noncognitivism in Ethics (London: Routledge, 2010), chs. 1-3.

AYER, A.J., Language, Truth and Logic (London: Gollancz, 1936), ch. 6 'Critique of Ethics and Theology'. Also available on Moodle.

NORMATIVE ETHICS

Consequentialism

*RAWS, John, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), ch. 5 'Classical utilitarianism'. Also available online at: www.dawsonera.com.


BLACKBURN, Simon, Ruling Passions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), ch. 3 'Naturalizing norms'.

BRINK, David, Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 2 'Moral realism and moral inquiry'. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511624612.003.


LILLEHAMMER, Hallvard, Companions in Guilt: Arguments for Ethical Objectivity (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), ch. 5 'Values and secondary qualities'. Also available online at: www.dawsonera.com.


MILL, John Stuart, Utilitarianism, ch. 5 'On the connection between justice and utility'. The CUP edition is available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139923927.005


Deontology


NAGEL, Thomas, The View from Nowhere (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ch. 9 'Ethics'.


Virtue Ethics


MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Egoism and altruism

*BLACKBURN, Simon, Ruling Passions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), ch. 5 'Looking out for yourself'. Also available on Moodle.

*WILLIAMS, Bernard, Problems of the Self (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), ch. 15 'Egoism and altruism'. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511621253.017.


BUTLER, Joseph, Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel and a Dissertation Upon the Nature of Virtue, Sermons I, II, III & XI. Also available online at: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3150. [Classic text]


Empathy


Cognitive and Affective Attitudes


**POLITICAL OBLIGATION AND AUTHORITY**

**General**


**Classical Social Contract Theory**


**Natural Duty and Fair Play Theory**


**Anarchism**


**EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

**Varieties of Equality of Opportunity: Justification and Controversy**


**Discrimination and Affirmative Action**

