This paper covers a wide range of topics in moral philosophy, including metaethics, normative ethics, and moral psychology. These topics are approached from both historical and contemporary perspectives.

The first section, Helping and Harming, is concerned with normative questions about the nature and scope of our moral obligations. How demanding are our obligations to help people in need? When helping people, are we required to help more people rather than fewer? Can contractualism ground our moral obligations? What principles govern our moral practices of making promises and giving consent?

The second section, Early Modern Moral Philosophy, concerns a critical metaethical debate in the history of ethics. We look at three positions in this debate. Very roughly, voluntarists held that moral obligations are grounded in the commands of a superior, moral rationalists held that moral judgment is analogous to belief about mathematics, while moral sentimentalists held that our faculty of moral judgment is analogous to our aesthetic sense.

The third section of the paper, Moral Psychology, focuses on motivation, character and practical reasoning. Does moral motivation require that we deliberate about what reasons we have? Is being virtuous a matter of having certain character traits and dispositions? What does psychology tell us about character traits and how we acquire them? Are our reasons for action grounded in our desires and motivations? What is practical reasoning?

Preliminary Reading


READING LIST

*Material marked with an asterisk is important

HELPS AND HARMING

Topics in this section look at foundational normative questions, both from a consequentialist as well as a deontological perspective.

Beneficience I: Demands and Limits

How demanding are our obligations to others? This topic explores questions as to how demanding morality is, whether we are required to do more than our fair share and whether our personal projects can provide limits on how much morality can require of us.

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites, but the course builds on material that has been covered in Part IA. Those who have not already taken the Part IA Ethics and Political Philosophy course are strongly advised to study some of the recommended reading for that course.

Objectives

Students taking this paper will be expected to:

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


Beneficence II: Aggregation

Some moral choices involve tradeoffs between the claims of many and the claims of few. This section looks at difference answers to how we should resolve such tradeoffs.


Normative Powers I: Consent

By consenting to an action, we make it permissible for another party to perform it. This section examines what morally valid consent is and why it matters. Amongst others, it examines which conditions must be met for consent to be ‘informed’.


MANSON, Neil, and Onora O’NEILL, Rethinking Informed Consent in Bioethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 4 ‘How to rethink informed consent’. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511184600.005


WERTHEIMER, Alan, *Consent to Sexual Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chs. 6 & 7. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511610011

Promising is an important part of our moral practice. But why are we morally obligated to keep promises? According to one influential approach, it's because promises raise the other party's expectations. According to another one, it's because promising is a practice that is beneficial to us. A third influential account, locates promissory obligations in our normative powers.


http://www.jstor.org/stable/3655658


Contractualism

According to contractualism, whether an act is permissible depends on whether it is compatible with a set of principles that no one could reasonably reject. Thus, contractualists try to derive the content of morality from the notion of an agreement of those who are part of the moral domain. The following provides an introduction to Scanlon's contractualism and its most important criticisms.


*SCANLON, T.M., What We Owe to Each Other (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), Introduction & ch. 5 'The structure of contractualism'.


EARLY MODERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

General and Background

The following works will help to get an overview of early modern metaethics, and in particular to survey the debate between the rationalists and sentimentalists.


Voluntarism

Voluntarists explained moral obligations in terms of the will of a superior. It was criticised by rationalist opponents and fell out of favour as a result of these criticisms. It is an important part of the historical and intellectual context for the debate between the rationalists and sentimentalists.


Rationalism

Rationalists claim that there are objective moral truths, that we are obligated to follow these truths, that we know about these truths through our faculty of reason, and that reason by itself can motivate us to act. Many construe morality as analogous to mathematics. An important motivation is the thought that morality is eternal and immutable and that morally worthy action is guided by moral beliefs.

*CLARKE, Samuel, Selections from a Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion. Available on Moodle.*


Sentimentalism

Sentimentalists typically claim that moral distinctions rely on our faculty of moral sentiment, which does not represent a mind-independent moral reality. Many construe morality as analogous to beauty. A key motivation for their view was their claim that desire or emotion was necessary for motivation.


MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Moral Motivation

What is it to act from a moral motive? The central disagreement here is between judgment internalists and externalists on whether moral judgments are intrinsically motivating. Judgment internalists say yes. Externalists say no: to be motivated to do what's right also takes the right kind of desire.
A central moral concept is virtue. This section examines the nature of virtue. One central debate concerns the question to what extent virtues are unified. Another one concerns whether recent work in social psychology shows that there are no virtues in agents like us, as there are no stable character traits.


### Practical Reasoning

What is it that we are doing when we engage in practical reasoning? The answer to this question depends in part on what reasons are. Are they grounded in our desires or in some "external" facts?


