PART II PAPER 03: ETHICS

SYLLABUS

- **Theories of the good**: Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*, goodness and axiology, well-being.
- **Metaethics**: realism, metaphysical foundations of ethics, moral epistemology.
- **Kant's ethics and Kantian ethics**: duty and motive, the categorical imperative, morality and freedom, autonomy.
- **Topics in moral psychology**: trust, ethics of knowing, responsibility.

COURSE OUTLINE

This paper covers a wide range of topics in moral philosophy, concerning normative ethics, metaethics, the history of ethics and moral psychology.

The first section, **Theories of the Good**, addresses normative ethical questions about the nature of the good and human well-being. These are approached both through contemporary debates and Henry Sidgwick’s classic *The Methods of Ethics*.

The second section, **Metaethics**, addresses questions about the metaphysical foundations of ethics and the epistemology of ethics.

The third section, **Kant’s Ethics and Kantian Ethics** offers the opportunity of undertaking an in-depth study of Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and to chart its impact on contemporary ethical debates.

The fourth section, **Moral Psychology**, addresses ethical questions concerning our epistemic lives, the nature of trust, and the responsibility that underwrites praise and blame.

There are more detailed guides to the content of each section interspersed with the reading lists below.

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites.

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Course Objectives

Students taking this paper will be expected to:

1. Acquire a detailed knowledge of central arguments in the texts studied.
2. Acquire an understanding of how different topics of the syllabus fit together.
3. Engage in close criticism of arguments studied.
4. Develop their powers of philosophical analysis and argument, through study of the readings set for the topics chosen.
5. Develop their ability to think independently about philosophical problems and arguments studied.

Preliminary Reading

KANT, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.


SIDGWICK, Henry, *The Methods of Ethics*. 7th ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), Bk. 1, chs. 1 & 9; Bk. 2, chs. 2 & 3; Bk. 3, chs. 11, 13 & 14; Bk. 4, chs. 1-3.


READING LIST

*Material marked with an asterisk* is important

THEORIES OF THE GOOD

**Sidgwick’s Methods of Ethics**

Henry Sidgwick’s *The Method of Ethics* was the most important single work in the classical utilitarian tradition. It is a long book, and you will need to be selective about which parts you concentrate on, using the secondary literature as your guide. In it, you will find Sidgwick anticipates several issues that feature in the Goodness and Axiology, and Well-Being sections.

*SIDGWICK, Henry, *The Methods of Ethics*. 7th ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), Bk. 1, chs. 1 & 9; Bk. 2, chs. 2 & 3; Bk. 3, chs. 11, 13 & 14; Bk. 4, chs. 1-3.*


Goodness and Axiology

A key issue concerning goodness is what goodness is. Philosophers often distinguish what is intrinsically good and what is instrumentally good. Are they correct to do so? What is intrinsic value?


MOORE, G.E., Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), ch. 7 'Intrinsic value'. The Clarendon, 2005 reprint is also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1093/0199272018.003.0009

"Fitting attitudes accounts" of value explain goodness as what it would be appropriate for us to have certain attitudes towards:

'SCANLON, T.M., What We Owe to Each Other (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), ch. 2 'Values'.


EWING, A.C., The Definition of Good (London: Macmillan, 1974), ch. 5 'An analysis of good in terms of ought'.


Another key issue concerning goodness is how we should rank things as better or worse. Consequentialists say we should bring about the best outcome. But is the relevant ranking of outcomes the same for everyone? Or should we relativise these rankings to each agent?


When deciding how to rank outcomes, how should we trade off the number of people in each outcome and the amount of welfare each individual enjoys? Are these impersonal rankings the best way to decide which future people to create?

*PARFIT, Derek, Reasons and Persons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), chs. 16, 17 & 19. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1093/019824908X.003.0016


When we rank things as better or worse, are these rankings always determinate? As well as the relation of "equally good" do we need to introduce another relation of "being on a par"?


Well-being

To get a sense of the shape of the overall debate about what welfare is, have a look at some general discussions:


GRIFFIN, James, Well-Being: Its Meaning Measurement and Moral Importance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), chs. 5 'Are there incommensurable values?'. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1093/0198248431.003.0006

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When we rank things as better or worse, are these rankings always determinate? As well as the relation of "equally good" do we need to introduce another relation of "being on a par"?
Objective list theories hold that there are some things that are objectively good and bad for us, independently of our attitudes towards them and the pleasure that we derive from them.


Hedonist theories explain welfare as pleasure: either understood in terms of a feeling or an attitude.


Desire-satisfaction theories explain welfare as the object of certain idealised attitudes that we should have.


METAETHICS

Metaphysical Foundations of Ethics

For two excellent summaries of the 20th-century debate in metaethics, see:


Helpful summaries of contemporary themes can be found in the following introductory texts:


Many of the classic readings are in the following anthology:


Naturalistic versions of realism hold that there are normative facts, and that these are identical to, reducible to, or constituted by natural facts.

BRINK, David, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 7 'A posteriori objections to moral realism'. Also available online at: [http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511624612.008](http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511624612.008)


Non-naturalistic versions of realism hold that there are normative facts but these are different in kind from, and irreducible to, natural facts.


‘The party promise’. Also available online at: [http://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199218837.003.0004](http://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199218837.003.0004)


‘The argument from the deliberative indispensability of irreducibly normative truths’. Also available online at: [http://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199579969.003.0003](http://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199579969.003.0003)


‘Metaphysics’. Also available online at: [http://lib.mylibrary.com/?id=316017](http://lib.mylibrary.com/?id=316017)


Constructivists and response-dependence theorists hold that normative facts are stance-dependent in the sense that these facts are the result of a certain form of rational deliberation or are the objects of our idealised evaluative attitudes.


KORSGAARD, Christine, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 3 'The authority of reflection'. Also available online at [http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554476](http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554476)


Contemporary theories of expressivists retain emotivists’ central idea that normative judgments express conative or evaluative attitudes. However, they often also wish to allow there to be a sense in which normative judgments can be true or false, and often adopt a ‘quasi-realist’ of moral metaphysics. As expressivists converge on the traditional claims of cognitivists about normative judgments, and of realists about normative facts, is it possible to still distinguish these positions in the debate?


Error theorists hold that there are no moral facts and that moral claims would only be true if there were such facts. How should we think about morality if we accepted the error theory? Could we continue to embrace morality as a form of fiction?


Moral Epistemology

A central issue in moral epistemology is whether there can be such a thing as moral knowledge, and whether it is like or unlike scientific knowledge. An important theme in this debate is the role of ‘thick’ – simultaneously descriptive and evaluative – concepts in moral cognition.

Evolutionary theory, psychology theory and neuroscience have provided us with greater understanding of where our moral beliefs come from. Should these discoveries lead us to revise some or all of our moral beliefs?

Why do people disagree about morality? Does moral disagreement show that there are no moral experts? Is there anything wrong with following someone else's moral testimony?


KANT'S ETHICS AND KANTIAN ETHICS: GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

General and Background


VELLEMAN, J. David, 'A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics', in P. Guyer, ed., *Self to Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 16-44. Also available online at: [http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511498862.002](http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511498862.002)
Duty and Motive

Kant begins the Groundwork with an analysis of what morally worthy motivation consists in, concluding that it is the motive to act from duty. Is his argument for this conclusion compelling? Can his view leave space for benevolent action motivated by affection, for example?


KORSGAARD, Christine, 'Kant's Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of Groundwork I', in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 43-76. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139174503.003


The Categorical Imperative

Kant famously held that the categorical imperative was the supreme principle of morality. What makes an imperative a categorical imperative? What is the content of the categorical imperative? How does Kant's formulations of the categorical imperative relate to each other? Are all, or any, of these formulations viable candidates as a general foundation for morality?


*O'NEILL, Onora, 'Consistency in Action', in her *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 81-104. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173773.006

*O'NEILL, Onora, 'Universal Laws and Ends in Themselves', in her *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 126-44. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173773.008


KORSGAARD, Christine, 'Kant's Formula of Humanity', in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 106-32. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139174503.005

KORSGAARD, Christine, 'Kant's Formula of Universal Law', in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 77-105. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139174503.004


WOOD, Allen W., *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chs. 3-5. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173254.002

Morbility and Freedom and autonomy

Kant defends the claim that a free will and a will subject to the moral law are one and the same. What does he mean by this claim? What relationship is there between morality and autonomy?

*KANT, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by M.J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), sect. 3. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511809576

*O'NEILL, Onora, 'Reason and Autonomy in Grundlegung III', in her *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 51-65. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173773.004

ALLISON, Henry, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 12 'The deduction in Grundlegung III'. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139172295.014


KORSGAARD, Christine, 'Morality as Freedom', in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 159-87. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139174503.007

TOPICS IN MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Trust

What is trust? Is it based in purely rational considerations? How does it differ from reliance? Is it essentially a personal relationship, or can it be applied to Governments and organizations too?


Responsibility

What makes us responsible for our actions? What should we be praised and blamed for? What factors excuse people from blame?


SCANLON, T.M., Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), ch. 4 'Blame'. Also available online at: www.dawsonera.com


Are we responsible for implicit beliefs about others? If we have implicit biases towards others, what obligations do we have in light of them?


http://www.jstor.org/stable/3655647


What duties do we have when it comes to forming beliefs and other doxastic attitudes? In what ways do people suffer injustice as knowers? Can people be silenced as sources of testimony?

*FRICKER, Miranda, Epistemic Injustice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chs. 1 & 7. Also available online at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/978019237907.001.0001


We welcome your suggestions for further readings that will improve and diversify our reading lists, to reflect the best recent research, and important work by members of under-represented groups. Please email your suggestions to phillib@hermes.cam.ac.uk including the relevant part and paper number. For information on how we handle your personal data when you submit a suggestion please see https://www.information-compliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/data-protection/general-data.