

Morality

PHIL1017

Philosophical Study Skills: Reading, Understanding and Essay Writing (aka Tutorials)

Spring Term 2015

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About the course:

This is a ten-week course for first-year undergraduates. We will be discussing foundational issues in moral philosophy. In weeks 2-9, one student from each group will write a 2,000-word essay on that week's topic. The essay will be shared with the rest of the group in advance of the class (no later than the night before the class) and it will be the focus of the discussion during the class. The meeting in week 1 is an organisational meeting and in the meeting in week 10, each student will present their ideas for the summative essay for the module that is due on the first day of the summer term. Primary reading for the course will be set weekly (see the weekly plan below).

WEEK 2 AMORALISM

Key terms:

amoralism; the self-interest theory; the mutual interest theory; altruism; kin altruism; group altruism; reciprocal altruism; morality as a human invention

Compulsory Reading:

- pp. 1-13 of Bernard Williams' *Morality*, including Preface
- pp. 1-36 of Jonathan Wolff's *Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (manuscript)

Optional Reading:

- pp. 15-29 of David Wiggins' *Ethics: Twelve Lectures on the Philosophy of Morality*

Q1. Describe the amoralist view that Williams is concerned with and explain and assess how Williams proceeds with the task of refuting it.

Q2. What is the argument from self-interest? How does Wolff respond to it?

WEEK 3 SUBJECTIVISM

Key terms:

subjectivism; objectivism; the fact-value distinction; moral nihilism; logical positivism; cognitivism; non-cognitivism; emotivism; universal prescriptivism; error theory

Compulsory Reading:

- pp. 14-37 of Bernard Williams' *Morality*, including the interlude
- pp. 37-52 of Jonathan Wolff's *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*

Optional Reading:

- pp. 120-131 of Bernard Williams' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*
- pp. 17-18 of J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*

Q3. Explain and assess the responses to the subjectivist in Williams and Wolff.

WEEK 4 RELATIVISM

Key terms:

moral relativism; universalism; instant relativism; relational relativism; *real* and *notional* confrontations; the relativism of distance; two-level moral relativism

Compulsory Reading:

- pp. 156-73 of Bernard Williams' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, and pp. 20-25 of *Morality*.
- pp. 53-67 of Jonathan Wolff's *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*

Optional Reading:

- pp. 36-38 of J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*

Q4. Can the thesis of moral relativism be coherently stated?

WEEK 5 GOOD

Key terms:

goodness as a non-natural property; attributive adjective; predicative adjective; the open question argument

Compulsory Reading:

- pp. 38-54 of Bernard Williams' *Morality*.
- pp. 49-63 of J.L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*

Optional Reading:

- Peter Geach, "Good and Evil," *Analysis*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Dec., 1956): pp. 33-42

Q5. Does 'good' have a general meaning, which applies in all contexts?

WEEK 6 UTILITARIANISM

Key terms:

utilitarianism; rule utilitarianism; commensurability of value; negative responsibility; principle-based reasoning; contextual reasoning; theory of the good; theory of the right; the problem of inter-personal comparisons of utility;

Compulsory Reading:

- pp. 82-98 of Bernard Williams' *Morality*.
- pp. 90-128 of Jonathan Wolff's *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*.

Q6. Explain and assess Bentham's and Mill's arguments for utilitarianism.

WEEK 7 WHAT IS WRONG WITH SLAVERY?

Compulsory Reading:

- R. M. Hare, "What is Wrong with Slavery," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Winter, 1979), pp. 103-121.

Q7. Explain and assess Hare's defence of utilitarianism against the claim that, "utilitarianism must be an objectionable creed because it could in certain circumstances condone or even commend slavery".

WEEK 8 THE DOCTRINE OF DOUBLE EFFECT

Compulsory Reading:

- Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect," *Oxford Review*, No. 5
- G.E.M Anscombe, "Who Is Wronged?" --Philippa Foot on Double Effect: One Point," *Oxford Review*, No. 5 (immediately following Foot's essay)

Q8. Consider Foot's examples and explain how far you agree with her conclusion that, "the distinction between direct and oblique intention plays only a quite subsidiary role in determining what we say in these cases, while the distinction between avoiding injury and bringing aid is very important indeed"?

WEEK 9 MODERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Compulsory Reading:

- G.E.M Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy*, Vol. 33, No. 124 (Jan., 1958), pp. 1-19

Q. How far do you agree with Anscombe's claim that, "the concepts of *moral* obligation and *moral* duty and of what is *morally* right and wrong, and the moral sense of "ought", ought to be jettisoned"?