

103 Ethics Sample Reading List

Written for Oxford Undergraduates

Luke J. Davies

1 Course Overview

The current description of this paper in undergraduate Course Handbooks is as follows:

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to come to grips with some questions which exercise many people, philosophers and non-philosophers alike. How should we decide what is best to do, and how best to lead our lives? Are our value judgments on these and other matters objective or do they merely reflect our subjective preferences and viewpoints? Are we in fact free to make these choices, or have our decisions already been determined by antecedent features of our environment and genetic endowment? In considering these issues you will examine a variety of ethical concepts, such as those of justice, rights, equality, virtue, and happiness, which are widely used in moral and political argument. There is also opportunity to discuss some applied ethical issues. Knowledge of major historical thinkers, e.g. Aristotle and Hume and Kant, will be encouraged, but not required in the examination.

Here is the relevant extract from the University's official Examination Regulations:

Candidates will be given an opportunity to show some first-hand knowledge of some principal historical writings on this subject, including those of Aristotle, Hume, and Kant, but will not be required to do so. Questions will normally be set on the following topics:

1. The Metaphysics of Ethics: including the nature of morality and moral properties, the truth-aptness of moral judgements, moral knowledge and moral relativism.
2. Value and Normativity: including good and right, reasons, rationality, motivation, moral dilemmas.
3. Self-interest, Altruism, and Amoralism.
4. Ethical Theories: including consequentialism, utilitarianism, and contractualism.
5. Specific Moral Concepts: including happiness, well-being, rights, virtue, fairness, equality, and desert.
6. Moral Psychology: including conscience, guilt and shame, freedom and responsibility.

7. Applied Ethics, including medical ethics.

The topics we will cover have been selected in the light of the above, and examination questions over the last five years. It is worth looking at past papers, to have a sense of the kinds of questions that have been asked. It is also important to read the examiners' reports for the ethics paper and to look at the faculty reading list. Past papers, examiners' reports, and the faculty reading list are all available on WebLearn. You should note that topics in applied ethics are now covered under the paper 128 Practical Ethics.

2 Tutorial Structure

We will have eight 1-hour tutorials, one tutorial per week. For each tutorial, you will be expected to produce an essay on the topic question(s) for that week.

The details for the tutorials and essays are as follows:

Tutorial Time and Location: TBA

Word Limit: 1500-2000 words. Please double-space.

Deadline: Each essay is due 24 hours before the tutorial is scheduled.

Email: luke.davies@philosophy.ox.ac.uk. Please send your papers in .doc format.

These tutorials will cover the following topics:

Week 1. Hume and Kant on moral motivation

Week 2. Kant on universalisability

Week 3. Aristotle and virtue ethics

Week 4. Contractualism

Week 5. Happiness and well-being

Week 6. Equality

Week 7. Realism

Week 8. Relativism

This tutorial series is designed to maximise the coverage of material relevant to the course description. Consequently, while you may find we do not cover some topics directly, you should be able to apply your knowledge of what we have learnt to those topics.

3 Reading List and Essay Questions

This reading list begins with some general introductory readings, including some excellent online resources. For each week, I have included a question, required reading, recommended reading, and also additional reading. The required reading is marked with a double-star (**) and recommended readings are marked with a

single star (*). It is good practice to read the required reading a few times before each tutorial, and to do as much recommended reading as time permits. **You are not expected to read everything on the reading list.** Remember that doing good philosophy is hard, and takes time. Time management will thus be very important.

It is also good practice to become well acquainted with the introductory readings, particularly the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy articles. For each topic, it may be worth reading the required texts first, then going through the introductory texts to orientate the recommended texts in the larger debate, then returning to the required texts to solidify your knowledge. You may then decide to supplement your reading with the recommended readings. The required reading will have been chosen based on its centrality to the topic and to the essay question(s). Consequently, it is important to come to tutorials having read them.

Also note that there are several excellent online resources, including the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu>), the Philosophy Compass (<https://philosophy-compass.com>), and the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<https://www.rep.routledge.com>). Note that Wikipedia is unlikely to be an excellent online resource.

This reading list is not exhaustive, neither in terms of the readings for each topic nor the list of topics for the paper. Consequently, students are encouraged to seek further readings. For example, one should look at the bibliographies in the readings below. Nevertheless, it is certainly not expected that a student will have covered all the suggested reading for a particular topic for a weekly essay. At the bottom of this document, there are some helpful links for writing a good philosophy essay.

If you have questions or comments concerning this reading list, please send them to me.

Introductions

S. Blackburn, *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction**

J. Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals**

J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong**

J. and S. Rachels, *The Elements of Morality**

R. Norman, *The Moral Philosophers**

P. Singer, *Practical Ethics**

B. Williams, "Ethics", in A. Grayling (ed.), *Philosophy: A Guide through the Subject**

C. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*

S. Darwall, *Philosophical Ethics*

J. Deigh, *An Introduction to Ethics*
S. Kagan, *Normative Ethics*
R. Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*
H. Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics*
B. Williams, *Morality*
D. Wiggins, *Ethics*

Week 1: Hume and Kant on Moral Motivation

Question: Is Kant right to think pure practical reason can motivate us?

David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. 2, pt. 3, sect. 3; bk. 3, pt. 1; *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, app. I**

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (ch. I and) ch. II up to 4:420 (pages vary with edition).**

B. Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons', repr. in his *Moral Luck***

T. Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*, pp. 27–36.*

D. Wiggins, 'Categorical Requirements: Kant and Hume on the Idea of Duty', *Monist* 1991.*

P. Foot, 'Reasons for Action and Desires', *Proc. Arist. Soc. Supplement* 1972

D. Wiggins, *Ethics*, chs. 3–4

C. Korsgaard, 'Skepticism about Practical Reason', *Journal of Philosophy* 1986: 5–25; repr. in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*

R. Johnson, 'The Good Will and the Moral Worth of Acting from Duty', in T. Hill (ed.), *Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics*

C. Korsgaard, 'From Duty and for the sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on morally good action', in S. Engstrom and J. Whiting (ed.), *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics*

S. Wolf, 'Moral Saints', *Journal of Philosophy* 1982: 419-39

Week 2: Kant: Universalizability and the Categorical Imperative

Question: In what sense, if any, must the requirements of morality be universalizable?

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, to end of sect. 2**

O. O'Neill, 'Kantian Ethics', in P. Singer (ed.), *Companion to Ethics***

T. Hill, 'Kantian Normative Ethics', in D. Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory**

C. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, chs. 1, 3*

J. Mackie, *Ethics*, ch. 4

P. Winch, 'The Universalizability of Moral Judgements', *Monist* 1965: 196-214;
repr. in his *Ethics and Action*

B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 4

J. Mackie, 'The Three Stages of Universalization', in his *Persons and Values*

D. Wiggins, 'Universalizability, Impartiality, Truth', in his *Needs, Values, Truth* (3rd edn)

H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (7th edn), pp. xix, 209-10, 379-80

R. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, chs. 5-7

D. Locke, 'The Principle of Equal Interests', *Philosophical Review* 1981: 531-59.

Week 3: Aristotle and Virtue Ethics

Question: How central is the concept of virtue to ethics? How should we respond to the fact that different virtues appear to demand conflicting actions?

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 1, ch. 7; 2.1-6; 6.1; 6.12-13; 10.7-8**

P. Foot, 'Virtues and Vices', in her *Virtues and Vices*; repr. in R. Crisp and M. Slote (ed.), *Virtue Ethics***

J. McDowell, 'Virtue and Reason', *Monist* 1979: 331-50*

T. Hurka, 'Against Virtue Ethics', ch. 8 of his *Virtue, Vice, and Value**

J. Annas, 'Virtue Ethics', in D. Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*

R. Hursthouse, 'Virtue theory and abortion', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1991: 223-46

G. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy* 1958: 1-19

G. Harman, 'Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1999: 315-31

R. Audi, 'Acting from Virtue', *Mind* 1995: 449-71

C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, ch. 11

R. Johnson, 'Virtue and Right', *Ethics* 2003: 810-34

R. Crisp, 'A Third Method of Ethics?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2015: 257-73

Week 4: Contractualism

Question: Suppose that you can either save five innocent people or one innocent person, but you cannot save all six. Can a contractualist explain why you ought to save the five, all other things equal? Does she have to?

T. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, ch. 5**

E. Ashford, 'The Demandingness of Scanlon's Contractualism', *Ethics* 2003: 273-302.*

P. Stratton-Lake, 'Scanlon's Contractualism and the Redundancy Objection', *Analysis* 2003: 70-76*

J. Frick, 'Contractualism and Social Risk', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2015: 175–223*

W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, ch. 2

J. Dancy, 'An Ethic of Prima Facie Duties', in P. Singer (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Ethics*

P. Hieronymi, 'Of Metaethics and Motivation: The Appeal of Contractualism', in R.J. Wallace et al. (ed.), *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T.M. Scanlon*

W. Quinn, 'Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing', *Philosophical Review* 1989: 287-312; repr. in his *Morality and Action*

J.J. Thomson, 'Turning the Trolley', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2008: 359-74. 10

T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, ch. 9.

Week 5: Happiness and Well-being

Question: Is there some ultimate goal—happiness, eudaimonia, well-being—that we should be pursuing, and if so what does it amount to?

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 1; bk. 10, chs. 6–9.**

J. Griffin, *Well-Being*, pt. 1**

D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Appendix I*

T. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, ch. 3*

G. Fletcher, *The Philosophy of Well-being: An Introduction*, chs. 1–3

H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (7th edn), ch. 14

T. Hurka, *Perfectionism*, chs. 2, 7

D. Haybron, 'What Do We Want from a Theory of Happiness?', *Metaphilosophy* 2003: 305–29.

G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ch. 6

S. Kagan, 'The Limits of Well-being', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 1992: 169–89

L.W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, & Ethics*, ch. 6

Week 6: Equality

Question: Should we give priority to the worse off, even if they are doing very well?

D. Parfit, 'Equality and Priority', in A. Mason (ed.), *Equality*; also in R. Goodin and P. Pettit (ed.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology***

E. Anderson, 'What is the point of Equality?', *Ethics* 1999: 287-337.**

B. Williams, 'The Idea of Equality', in P. Laslett and W. Runciman (ed.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, vol. 2; repr. in his *Problems of the Self**

R. Arneson, 'Egalitarianism', in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy *

G.A. Cohen, 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice', *Ethics* 1989: 906-944*

J. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, ch. 9

J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (rev. edn), sects. 1-4, 11-12, 20, 24-6

S. Kagan, 'Equality and Desert', in L. Pojman & O. McLeod (ed.), *What Do We Deserve?*

L. Temkin, *Inequality*, ch. 10

R. Dworkin, 'What is Equality?', Parts I and II', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1981: 185-246, 283-345

T. Nagel, 'Equality', repr. in his *Mortal Questions*

B. Hooker, 'Fairness', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 2005: 329-52

S. Olsaretti, 'Debating Desert and Justice', intro. to her (ed.) *Desert and Justice*

Week 7: Moral Realism

Question: 'Goodness cannot be a natural property, as there is no plausible story about our coming to know which one it is.' Discuss.

J. Mackie, *Ethics*, ch. 1**

N. Sturgeon, 'Moral Explanations Defended', in J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory**

S. Street, 'A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of value', *Philosophical Studies* 2006: 109-166*

S. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, ch. 6*

P. Railton, 'Moral Factualism', in J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*

- A. Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*, ch. 1
 D. Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, ch. 1
 D. Wiggins, 'Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life', in his *Needs, Values, Truth*
 R. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, ch. 1

Week 8: Moral Relativism

Question: Is there such a thing as objective moral truth? What is strongest argument in favour of your answer.

- J. and S. Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism'***
 G. Harman, 'Moral Relativism Defended', *Philosophical Review* 1975: 3-22**
 P. Boghossian, 'Three Kinds of Relativism', in S. D. Hales (ed.), *A Companion to Relativism**
 B. Williams, 'The Truth in Relativism', repr. in his *Moral Luck**
- J. Dreier, 'Moral Relativism and Moral Nihilism', in D. Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*
 D. Wong, *Natural Moralities*, intro. and chs. 1-2
 M. Fricker, 'The Relativism of Blame and Williams's Relativism of Distance', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 2010: 151-77
 T. Scanlon, 'Fear of Relativism', in R. Hursthouse et al. (ed.), *Virtues and Reasons*
 J. Dreier, 'Internalism and Speaker Relativism', *Ethics* 1990: 6-26
 G. Harman, 'Moral Relativism is Moral Realism', *Philosophical Studies* 2015: 855-63.
 D. Phillips, 'How to be a Moral Relativist', *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 1997: 393-417.

4 Tips for Good Philosophy Essays

The best advice I have seen on how to write good philosophy essays is Jim Pryor's (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>). I highly recommend studying this guide, as well as returning to it frequently to refresh your memory.

In constructing this document, I have benefitted from the University of Oxford philosophy faculty's Ethics reading list, as well as the reading lists of Ralph Walker and James Kirkpatrick.