



DIVISION OF SOCIETY, CULTURE, MEDIA AND PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 341
CONTEMPORARY ETHICS

Semester 2, 2008

UNIT INFORMATION & READING LIST

**MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
DIVISION OF SCMP
PHIL341 UNIT OUTLINE**

Year and Semester: 2008, Semester 2.

Unit convenor: Dr Mianna Lotz

Students in this unit should read this unit outline carefully at the start of semester. It contains important information about the unit, and it is your responsibility to be familiar with all of the content herein. If anything is unclear, please consult Dr Lotz.

ABOUT THIS UNIT

This unit examines key issues and debates in normative ethics and moral psychology. The unit is designed to extend students' understanding of two of the most influential normative ethical theories – Consequentialism/Utilitarianism and Virtue Ethics – while also engendering familiarity with central recent debates in moral psychology concerning the nature of moral motivation and moral character.

The unit is divided into three parts:

Part 1: Normative Ethical Theories and Their Critics: Consequentialism

We begin with a consideration of important and influential challenges to Consequentialist/Utilitarian ethical theory, on the grounds that it is self-defeating and/or cannot accommodate important moral concerns such as integrity and friendship. We evaluate attempts to defend and modify consequentialism and utilitarianism in the light of such criticisms.

Part 2: Normative Ethical Theories and Their Critics: Virtue Ethics

We then consider Virtue Ethics and evaluate its capacity to answer some of its most significant challenges. In particular we consider the charge that in its concern with good and bad character rather than with right and wrong action, virtue theory is not action-guiding and therefore does not present a normative alternative to utilitarianism or deontological theories. We also consider the implications of tragic or irresolvable moral dilemmas for conceptions of virtue and the virtuous agent.

Part 3: The Question of Character

In the final section we consider one of the most influential challenges to virtue ethics and the notion of moral character. The challenge takes as its evidence certain empirical research findings in the field of social psychology. Skepticism about the notion of character arises from findings that appear to indicate that highly particular features of an agent's situation play a larger role in determining action than an account of character would either suggest or accommodate. This has given rise to the 'situationist' approach to ethics. We consider the empirical findings, the nature and implications of ethical situationism, and philosophical attempts to defend the notion of moral character against the skeptical challenge.

TEACHING STAFF

Convenor and Lecturer: Dr Mianna Lotz
Room 734, W6A,
Tel: 9850 8804
Email: Mianna.Lotz@scmp.mq.edu.au
Consultation hours: Wednesday 2–3pm; Thursdays 3–4pm. Other times by appointment.

CLASSES

Students are required to attend two lectures (1 hour duration each) plus one tutorial (1 hour duration) per week.

Lectures:	Tuesdays	3–4pm	X5B 039
	Wednesdays	10–11am	C5A 307
Tutorials:	Wednesdays	12–1pm	W5A 203

*Note: Tutorials commence in the **second** week of semester.*

Special Note: *There will be **no lecture on Tuesday, 5 August**. The first lecture is Wednesday 6 August.*

The timetable for classes can be found on the University website at: <http://www.timetables.mq.edu.au>

IMPORTANT NOTE: Satisfactory attendance at tutorials and lectures is a compulsory requirement in this unit. **Students who fail to attend at least 75% of tutorials and lectures will not be eligible to pass the unit.**

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS

The required reading for this unit is contained in the course reader: *PHIL341 Contemporary Ethics*, available at the Co-op Bookstore on campus.

The readings contained in the Reader are **compulsory** reading for this unit. You will be expected to keep up with the readings throughout semester, and tutorial discussion will presume prior familiarity with the relevant readings.

An additional list of Supplementary Readings will be provided for this unit at the start of semester.

EXPECTED WORKLOAD

This unit is worth 4 credit points. It is assumed that 1 credit point equals 3 hours work per week on average, across the whole semester (including non-teaching weeks), including classes. That means that for this unit you are expected to put in on average *12 hours work per week* across the whole semester (including the 3 hours of classes per week).

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The objectives of this unit are to develop the following discipline-based skills and capacities:

- A sound understanding of the normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered
- An ability to comprehend, analyse and critically evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature
- Development of reasoning skills and skills in philosophical argument
- Development of the ability to form an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views and arguments presented in the unit.

GENERIC SKILLS

In addition to the unit-specific learning objectives, academic programs at Macquarie seek to develop students' generic skills in a range of areas. An aim of this unit is for students to develop their skills in the following:

1. *Comprehension skills*: skills involved in *understanding* complex ideas and arguments and reading, *understanding*, and *analysing* complex texts.
2. *Critical thinking skills*: skills involved in *analysing*, *evaluating*, and *criticising* views and arguments.
3. *Problem-solving skills*: skills that enable us to solve *practical* and *theoretical* problems through the application of theories and knowledge.
4. *Communication skills*: skills involved in *expressing* and *presenting* ideas clearly and logically, both orally (in tutorial discussions and presentations) and in writing (in essays).
5. *Creative-thinking skills*: skills involved in developing new ideas or perspectives and constructing arguments.
6. *Research skills*: skills that enable us to find out about and understand a new field of knowledge.

TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY

PHIL341 is taught through lectures and tutorials. Opportunities will be provided throughout the unit for interactive discussion, in both lectures and tutorials.

There are weekly reading requirements that must be completed prior to lectures and tutorials. Students are expected to attend tutorials prepared to discuss the topics covered in the lectures and readings. Students are also expected to participate actively in lectures.

A week-by-week list of topics to be covered in lectures can be found at the end of this Outline.

ASSESSMENT

Important Note: All assessment components in this unit are compulsory. Students who have not completed all of the assessments will not be eligible to pass the unit.

Assessment for the unit is made up of 5 components: two essays, two class presentations and a participation mark. **THERE IS NO EXAM FOR THIS UNIT.**

(i) Two essays 2,500-3,000 words each 35% each

- The essays are designed to develop your ability to engage with the philosophical issues and questions in detail. Essay writing develops and tests your ability to express, analyse and organise key ideas clearly and systematically, and to develop an argument in a sustained way. Essay topics will be distributed at least 3 weeks prior to each due date.

Essay Due Dates:

First Essay Due: Friday October 3, 4pm

Second Essay Due: Friday November 28, 4pm

(ii) Two class presentations 10% each

- As a compulsory requirement for passing this unit, each student will give two class presentations, covering two different parts of the course. The presentations will be given during lecture time, and will be 5-10 minutes in duration. The presentation should consist of a critical discussion of one of the required readings, and will take place at the appropriate time as determined by the course content and lecturer. Students are expected not merely to summarise the views and arguments in the reading, but to engage *critically* with them, identifying strengths and weaknesses and raising questions. Presentations should be written up and submitted on the presentation day. Students will be free to select which readings they present, but must do so in consultation with Dr Lotz. Time-slots will be allocated on a first-come-first-serve basis, and only one presentation will take place per lecture. *Important note:* Once your class presentation request has been confirmed, you are committed to giving the presentation, and can only change topic with the approval of Dr Lotz. Presentations can commence in Week 2.

(iii) Participation 10%

- You will be assessed on *both* your tutorial and lecture attendance (frequency) *and* your contribution to discussion in tutorials (quality). As part of fulfilling this participation requirement you will be expected to attend tutorials with at least ONE question on a topic raised by each of the required readings for the week.
Reminder: Satisfactory attendance at tutorials and lectures is a **compulsory** requirement in this unit. Unless supported by medical documentation or the equivalent, students who fail to attend at least 75% of tutorials and lectures will not be eligible to pass the unit.

Submission of essays:

Please submit your essays through the **SCMP office** on Level 1, Building W6A. All essays must be attached to a signed Philosophy Cover Sheet. No essays will be accepted via email.

Extensions must be requested **before** the due date. Essays submitted after the due date, or after the extension date, will lose 1 mark for each day late, including weekends. (Please note that deadlines in other subjects, and foreseeable workload pressures, will not be regarded as grounds for the granting of extensions.)

The first essay will be returned, with comments, in tutorials approximately 3 weeks after the due date. The second essay will be available for students to collect from the SCMP office, Level 1, Building W6A, from December 12th, 2008.

FINAL GRADES AND UNIVERSITY POLICY ON GRADING

Academic Senate has a set of guidelines on the distribution of grades across the range from fail to high distinction. Your final result will include one of these grades plus a standardised numerical grade (SNG).

On occasion your raw mark for a unit (i.e., the total of your marks for each assessment item) may not be the same as the SNG that you receive. Under the Senate guidelines, results may be scaled to ensure that there is a degree of comparability across the university, so that units with the same past performances of their students should achieve similar results.

It is important that you realise that the policy does not require that a minimum number of students be to be failed in any unit. In fact it does something like the opposite, in requiring examiners to explain their actions if more than 20% of students fail in a unit.

The process of scaling does not change the order of marks among students. A student who receives a higher raw mark than another will also receive a higher final scaled mark. For an explanation of the policy see <http://www.mq.edu.au/senate/MQUonly/Issues/Guidelines2003.doc> or <http://www.mq.edu.au/senate/MQUonly/Issues/detailedguidelines.doc>.

Your overall grade for this course will be worked out by adding up all your marks, scaling according to the University guidelines for grading, and translating these into a grade (High Distinction, Distinction, Credit, Pass etc.). The table below lists the range of scaled marks aligned to each grade.

	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Scaled marks</i>
HD	High Distinction	85-100
D	Distinction	75-84
Cr	Credit	65-74
P	Pass	50-64
PC	Pass Conceded	45-49
F	Fail	0-44

PLAGIARISM

The University defines plagiarism in its rules: "Plagiarism involves using the work of another person and presenting it as one's own." Plagiarism is a serious breach of the University's rules and carries significant penalties. You must read the University's practices and procedures on plagiarism. These can be found in the *Handbook of Undergraduate Studies* or on the web at: <http://www.student.mq.edu.au/plagiarism/>

The policies and procedures explain what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, the procedures that will be taken in cases of suspected plagiarism, and the penalties if you are found guilty. Penalties may include a deduction of marks, failure in the unit, and/or referral to the University Discipline Committee. N.B. SEARCH ENGINES MAY BE USED TO CHECK ANY ESSAY SUSPECTED OF PLAGIARISM FROM WEBSITES.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Macquarie University provides a range of Academic Student Support Services. Details of these services can be accessed at <http://www.student.mq.edu.au>.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND REQUIRED READINGS

Note: all required readings listed below are in the Unit Reader. Where more than two readings are listed, priority is to be given to the article(s) marked ''.*

PART 1 (WEEKS 1–5): Consequentialism and its critics

[NB: No lecture on Tuesday 5 Aug]

WEEK 1 (Aug 6): Course introduction/overview. Introducing consequentialist and utilitarian ethical theory

Reading:

* Philip Pettit, 'Consequentialism' in Peter Singer (ed), *A Companion to Ethics*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993): pp. 230–240.

* Samuel Scheffler, Excerpt from 'Introduction', In Samuel Scheffler (ed.) *Consequentialism and Its Critics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): pp. 1-5.

Thomas Nagel, excerpts from *The View From Nowhere*. (New York: OUP, 1986): 152-3; 164-6.

***** **Note: No tutorials in Week 1** *****

WEEK 2 (Aug 12 & 13): Is consequentialism self-defeating?

Reading:

* Peter Railton, excerpt 1 from 'Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1984): pp. 134-171.

* Henry Sidgwick, excerpts from *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition, (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962): pp. 405-7; 411-17.

WEEK 3 (Aug 19 & 20): The 'integrity' objection to consequentialism

Reading:

* Bernard Williams, 'Consequentialism and Integrity' In Samuel Scheffler (ed.) *Consequentialism and Its Critics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): pp. 20-50.

* Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 79, No. 8 (August, 1982): 419-439.

David O. Brink, excerpts from 'Utilitarian Morality and the Personal Point of View' *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 83, No. 8 (August 1986): pp. 417-38.

WEEK 4 (Aug 26 & 27): The ‘alienation’ and ‘friendship objections to consequentialism

Reading:

- * William Godwin, ‘The Archbishop and the Chambermaid’. In Peter Singer (ed.) *Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 312-313.
- * Michael Stocker, excerpt from ‘The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories’, *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 73, No. 14, On Motives and Morals (August 12, 1976): pp. 453-466.
- * Peter Railton, excerpt 2 from ‘Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1984): pp. 134-171.

WEEK 5 (Sept 2 & 3): Can the consequentialist be a good friend?

Reading:

- * Dean Cocking and Justin Oakley, ‘Indirect Consequentialism, Friendship, and the Problem of Alienation’, *Ethics*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (October 1995): pp. 86-111.
- * Elinor Mason, ‘Do consequentialists have one thought too many?’ *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, vol, 2, (1999): 243-261.

PART 2 (WEEKS 6-9): Virtue ethics and its critics

WEEK 6 (Sept 9 & 10): Introducing virtue ethics

Reading:

- * Aristotle, excerpts from *The Nicomachean Ethics*. J.L. Ackrill, trans. (London: Faber & Faber, 1973.)
- * Philippa Foot, ‘Virtues and Vices.’ In Stephen Darwall (ed), *Virtue Ethics*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): pp. 105-120.

WEEK 7 (Sept 16 & 17):

Challenges to virtue ethics: Can virtue ethics be action-guiding?

PLUS: Honing philosophy essay-writing skills

Reading:

- * James Rachels, ‘The Ethics of Virtue’. In James Rachels *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3rd edition (Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 1999): pp. 175-193.
- * Robert B. Louden, ‘On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics’. In Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (eds) *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): pp. 201-216.

*******MONDAY 22 SEPTEMBER – FRIDAY 3 OCTOBER: MID-SEMESTER BREAK *******

Essay 1 due: Friday October 3, 4pm

WEEK 8 (Oct 7 & 8): Virtue ethics responds

Reading:

- * Rosalind Hursthouse, ‘Virtue Theory and Abortion’. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* Vol. 20, No. 3. (Summer 1991): pp. 223-246.
- * Rosalind Hursthouse, ‘Normative Virtue Ethics’. In Roger Crisp (ed) *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): pp. 19-36.

WEEK 9 (OCT 14 & 15): Virtue ethics and the challenge of tragic dilemmas

Reading:

* Rosalind Hursthouse, 'Irresolvable and Tragic Dilemmas', chp 3 from *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001).

* Liezl Van Zyl, 'Can Virtuous People Emerge from Tragic Dilemmas Having Acted Well?', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* vol. 24, No. 1 (2007): 50-61.

PART 3 (WEEKS 10-13): Virtue, character and character-skepticism

WEEK 10 (Oct 21 & 22): Virtue ethics and character: Is there such a thing as 'character'?

Findings from social psychology

Reading:

* Gilbert Harman, 'Moral Psychology Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol 99 (1999): 315-331.

Stanley Milgram, 'Behavioral Study of Obedience', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* Vol. 67, No. 4 (1963): 371-378.

John M. Darley and C. Daniel Batson, "'From Jerusalem to Jericho": A study of situational and dispositional variables in helping behavior', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 27 No. 1 (1973): 100-108.

WEEK 11 (Oct 28 & 29): Philosophical character skepticism and 'situationist' ethics:

Reading:

* John M. Doris, 'Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics', *Nous* Vol. 32 No. 4 (1998): 504-530.

* Gilbert Harman, 'The Nonexistence of Character Traits', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* vol. 100 (1999-2000): 223-226.

WEEK 12 (Nov 4 & 5): Philosophers defending character.

Reading:

* Joel J. Kupperman, 'The Indispensability of Character', *Philosophy* Vol. 76, No. 296 (April 2001): 239-250.

* Robert C. Solomon, 'What's Character Got To Do With It?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LXXI No. 3 (November 2005): 648-655.

WEEK 13 (Nov 11 & 12): Implications, conclusions, review and reflections

Reading:

* Own notes, readings and essay plans/drafts

***** CLASSES END *****

Essay 2 due: On or before Friday November 28, 4pm