

**Name of Course: ETHICS**  
**Semester: Fall 2017**

**Lecturer:** Tim Crane, Teaching Assistant: Yuliya Kanygina

**Time:** Wednesdays, 11.00 — 12.40

**Course Level and Value:** MA, 1 year and 2 year Compulsory for 2 Year MA students in their 1st year; 2 Credits

**Tim Crane's Office Hours:** Wednesday 2-4pm; Friday 2-4pm

### **Brief introduction to the course**

This course will introduce three main features of moral philosophy: (i) the central themes of *metaethics* — the study of the metaphysics and epistemology of ethical thought or discourse; (ii) the idea that morality is based on reason and that it is based on sentiment; (iii) the main ethical theories which dominate contemporary philosophy: consequentialism (including utilitarianism), Kantianism (or deontology), and virtue ethics. These are theories in what is known as *normative ethics*: theories about what we ought to do, or how we should live.

### **The goal of the course**

The goal of the course is to teach students the main elements of some central debates in moral philosophy.

### **Learning outcomes**

By the end of this course, students who have done the required work will:

- understand the metaethical positions of realism, relativism, subjectivism;
- understand the views about the foundations of morality in reason, or in sentiment;
- understand the main types of normative ethical theories: consequentialist theories, deontological theories, and virtue theories.

### **Course requirements**

All students must attend the classes and are required to produce a short (800 word) paper for week four, which must be presented to the class.

### **Assessment**

Two-year Philosophy MA students will be graded according by an in-class written final exam, taken as part of the Theoretical and Practical Philosophy exam scheduled for the end of spring term. All other students taking the class for credit must submit a 2,500 word final paper on a topic agreed in advance with the instructor. The grade for the class will be the grade earned for the final paper, though in exceptional cases extra credit may be awarded for participation throughout the term.

The final paper will be due on: **Monday, January 8, 2015**

## **Week by week breakdown with readings**

Readings marked \* are compulsory; other reading is optional.

### **Week 1 (20 September) Introductory session: what is morality? What is moral philosophy?**

This class will introduce some of the motivations behind, and sources of, the problems of moral philosophy. The class discussion will be led by Yuliya Kanygina, after an introductory video by Tim Crane.

\*Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 59 (1958-9). Also in Foot (ed.) *Theories of Ethics*, and Foot, *Virtues and Vices*.

### **Week 2 (27 September) Moral truth and moral realism**

Is there such a thing as moral truth? Could moral truth be objective?

\*J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977), chapter 1, "The Subjectivity of Values".

Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 25, no. 2 (1996): 87–139.

### **Week 3 (4 October) Relativism**

Is morality relative? Relative to what? Are there genuinely distinct and incompatible ethical systems?

\*Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," *The Philosophical Review* 84, no. 1 (January 1975): 3–22.

Bernard Williams, "The Truth in Relativism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 75, (1974-75): 215–228.

### **Week 4 (11 October) Discussion of relativism, subjectivism and realism**

All students are required to prepare short answers to some questions about relativism which will be distributed in Week 3. The aim of this discussion will be to gain understanding and clarity about the basic ideas of relativism, subjectivism, objectivism and realism. The class will be taken by Yuliya Kanygina.

### **Week 5 (18 October) Facts, non-factualism, expressivism**

Are there moral facts? Does moral discourse state the facts, or is its role to express other attitudes?

\*Simon Blackburn, "How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist" in *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 166–181.

Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell 1993) Chapter 2

### **Week 6 (25 October) Reasons and motivation**

Can morality be founded on reason? What are reasons? How can reason move us?

\*Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101–113.

Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives", *The Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (July 1972): 305–316.

### **Week 7 (1 November) Sentimentalism**

Can morality be founded on sentiment or feeling? Is this compatible with realism about morality?

\*David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, book II, part 3, §iii; book III, part 1, §§ i-ii; *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, section ix, part 2. (Any edition)

John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1998), 131–149.

### **Week 8 (8 November) Utilitarianism**

Traditional 'hedonic' utilitarianism is the view that the right actions are those that maximise pleasure and minimise pain. Another contemporary form of the doctrine says that right actions should aim to satisfy people's preferences.

\*JJC Smart 'An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics' in JJC Smart and Bernard Williams *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (CUP 1973) §§1-6.

Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *Utilitarianism: a Very Short Introduction* (OUP 2017) Chapters 1-4.

### **Week 9 (15 November) Consequentialism in general**

Consequentialism is the view that actions should be evaluated morally on the basis of their consequences. Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism.

\*Philippa Foot "Utilitarianism and the Virtues" *Mind* 94 (1985) 196–209.

James Lenman, "Consequentialism and Cluelessness," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (2000): 342–370.

### **Week 10 (22 November) Morality and rights**

How should consequentialism (and other theories) deal with the objection that people have rights?

\*Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defence of Abortion" *Phil & Public Affairs* 1 (1971).

Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect"

*Oxford Review*, 5: 28–41, reprinted in *Virtues and Vices* (OUP 1977).

### **Week 11 (29 November) Deontology**

Deontological theories of ethics treat the moral in terms of duties or obligations.

\*Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J Gregor (CUP 1997) section I.

Christine Korsgaard, Introduction to Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J Gregor (CUP 1997).

### **Week 12 (6 December) Virtue**

Can morality be understood fundamentally in terms of the idea of a virtue?

Should moral assessment be primarily the assessment of people or agents, as opposed to actions?

\*Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 419–439

Myles Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good" in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (University of California Press 1980) 69–92.