

University of St Andrews

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

## **PY1011 MORAL AND POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES**

MODULE GUIDE Semester 1 2015-16

### **Module Coordinator and lecturer:**

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### **Co-lecturers:**

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### **Module description:**

Philosophy has often been said to begin with the question 'how ought we to live?' This module introduces students to fundamental questions and problems in moral philosophy (How should we live? What ought we to do? What is it to be a good human being?) and in political philosophy (How should we live together?). It provides an accessible and comprehensive introduction to the philosophical significance of some of the most pressing moral and political problems of today, as well as a guide to the rival theoretical approaches used to reflect upon these issues. In moral philosophy we will look at both applied ethics (exploring particular moral issues, such as our obligations to those in severe need, and our treatment of non-human animals) and normative ethics (exploring theoretical approaches to tackling such issues, for example utilitarian, Kantian and virtue ethics). In political philosophy, we will explore central concepts such as liberty, equality, and democracy, and consider the extent to which we should give up some of our freedom in exchange for the protection of the state.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this module, students should have gained a good critical understanding of the complexities of the moral and political questions addressed, and of various approaches that have been taken in moral and political theorising. Students will be able to analyse and evaluate critical discussion of these issues in recent and contemporary literature; to formulate and articulate their own views on these issues, and provide a rational defence of these views in written work and in discussion. To these ends, the requirements of the module are: attendance at all classes, completion of required reading and preparation for both lectures and seminars, including participation in seminar discussions, and completion of all formal assessment.

**Lectures:** 5:00 pm, Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, in the Buchanan Lecture Theatre.  
\*Note that some weeks Friday 5.00 pm lectures are scheduled.

**Tutorials:** One tutorial per week, starting in week 2. Sign up to a group via the MMS system (sign-up will open immediately after the first lecture).

**Assessment:** Continuous assessment = 50% [see below for details]  
2-hour examination = 50%

NB: you must pass both of the above elements, in order to pass the module overall.

**Reassessment** (for fails with grades 4.0 or above): 3-hour examination = 100%

**Marking and grading** is on the University 20-point scale. For a full description of marking bands and grade classification, see the Philosophy Undergraduate Handbook, online at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/philosophy/current/ugrad/>

**Module Requirements:**

- Adequate reading, regular attendance at tutorials and lectures, submission of coursework, and completion of the exam are compulsory requirements of this module.
- Those with three or more unauthorised absences from tutorial meetings will fail the module with a grade of 0X, which does not permit re-assessment.
- Students are required to submit all coursework and to pass *both* assessment elements of the module (continuous assessment and the examination) in order to pass the module as a whole. Failure in one of these elements will lead to failure of the module overall.
- Reassessment will be permitted for those who fail the module with an overall grade of 4.0 or greater. Any fails of 3.9 or below will not be entitled to reassessment.

**Recommended Texts:**

There is no single course text for this module; most readings that are required for lectures and tutorials are available in electronic form, or in hard copy, from the library.

There is an **online reading list** [ORL] for this module that contains links to/information for the required texts, and to many of the other texts you'll be encouraged to read, as further optional reading suggestions. Pay attention to the *lecture and tutorial schedule* below to see what you need to read, when.

Texts referred to often in the schedule include Hugh LaFollette's *Ethics in Practice*, and Russ Shafer-Landau's *Ethical Theory*, both of which are accessible as e-books via the library. Another text to which you'll need to have ready access is James Rachels' *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* – unfortunately, there is no electronic access to this book so you may wish to purchase it. The library has some copies (of various editions), and we have requested that some of these be put on short loan. Again, see the online reading list.

Another online source that is often referred to here is the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/> [hereafter, *SEP*]. You can search within the encyclopedia yourself for the relevant entries recommended here.

## LECTURE and TUTORIAL SCHEDULE, with readings:

- Week 1**            **Intro to moral thinking, and some life & death problems**
- 14/9                L1: Introduction to ethics and moral thinking [L]  
                          Reading: Hugh LaFollette, Introductory matter, pp. 1-15 in his  
                          *Ethics in Practice* [available as an e-book – see ORL]
- 15/9                L2: Moral thinking about killing: abortion [L]  
                          Reading: Mary Anne Warren, ‘On the Moral and Legal Status of  
                          Abortion’, in LaFollette, *Ethics in Practice* [e-book]
- 17/9                L3: Global poverty: are we obliged to help those in severe need? [L]  
                          Reading: Peter Singer, ‘Famine, Affluence and Morality’, in  
                          LaFollette, *Ethics in Practice*, also in Shafer-Landau, *Ethical  
                          Theory* [both available as e-books – see ORL]

No tutorials in week 1.

Tutorial task for week 2: Write a 500-word critical summary of Singer, ‘Famine, Affluence and Morality’ and take this along to your tutorial to discuss.

- Week 2**            **What motivates morality?**
- 21/9                L4: Does morality come from God? From ‘natural law’? [L]  
                          Reading: James Rachels, ‘Does Morality Depend on Religion?’ in  
                          his *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*
- 22/9                L5: Egoism and morality [L]  
                          Reading: James Rachels, ‘Ethical Egoism’ in his *The Elements of  
                          Moral Philosophy*
- 24/9                L6: Me & others: is morality a social contract? [L]  
                          Readings: James Rachels, ‘The Idea of a Social Contract’ in his *The  
                          Elements of Moral Philosophy*; also John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*  
                          – read the extract in LaFollette, also in Shafer-Landau [e-books].

Tutorial task for week 3: write some critical notes on Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (extract), and some reflections on the idea that morality is grounded in the need for cooperation with others – do you think this is an adequate explanation of morality? Take your notes along to your tutorial to discuss.

- Week 3**            **Utilitarianism**
- 28/9                L7: Intro to Utilitarianism: is morality about maximising goodness? [TP]  
                          Readings: James Rachels, ‘The Utilitarian Approach’ and ‘The  
                          Debate over Utilitarianism’ in his *The Elements of Moral  
                          Philosophy*  
                          Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, ‘Consequentialism’ in *SEP* (optional)
- 29/9                L8: Mill’s Hedonistic Utilitarianism [TP]  
                          Readings: J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 2 & 4 [see ORL]  
                          Roger Crisp, ‘Hedonism Reconsidered’ [see ORL]
- 1/10                L9: Mill cont./Problems for Utilitarianism [TP]  
                          Readings: Brad Hooker, ‘The Demandingness Objection’ [see  
                          ORL, or copy in MMS folder]  
                          J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and  
                          Against* (optional) [ORL]

Tutorial task for week 4: write up notes outlining what you take to be the most serious objection to hedonistic utilitarianism, and the best possible response to that objection. Take your notes along to your tutorial.

**Week 4: Kant's ethics**

**[NB: lectures are on Mon, Thurs, Fri this week]**

- 5/10 L10: Introduction: is morality derived from autonomy? [TP]  
Readings: James Rachels, 'Are there absolute moral rules?' in his *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*  
Robert Johnson, 'Kant's Moral Philosophy' in *SEP* (optional)
- 6/10 **NO LECTURE: Man Booker Author talk taking place today at 5.30pm, Byre**
- 8/10 L11: Groundwork: primary text [TP]  
Readings: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Preface and Sections 1 & 2) [see ORL]
- 9/10 L12: Groundwork: criticisms [TP]  
Readings: C. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, Chapter 5 [ORL]  
Shelly Kagan, 'Kantianism for Consequentialists' in I. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* edited and translated by Allen W. Wood (optional) [see ORL]

Tutorial task for week 5: write up notes outlining what you take to be the most promising formulation of Kant's ethics, and the most serious objection to it. Take these notes along to your tutorial.

**Week 5: How far do our moral obligations extend?/Virtue ethics**

- 12/10 L13: Obligations to non-human animals [L]  
Reading: Peter Singer, 'All Animals Are Equal' in LaFollette, also in Shafer-Landau [e-books, ORL]
- 13/10 L14: Obligations to future generations [L]  
Readings: Derek Parfit, 'The Non-Identity Problem', Chapter 16 of his *Reasons and Persons* [see MMS/ORL]; and  
Joel Feinberg, 'The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations' in Shafer-Landau [e-book, ORL]
- 15/10 L15: Intro to Aristotle and Ancient Greek Virtue Ethics [TP]  
Readings: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [version edited by Crisp - available as an e-book, see ORL]: read Introduction, Book 1, Ch. 7; 2.1-6; 6.1; 6.12-13; 10.7-8  
Rosalind Hursthouse, 'Virtue Ethics' in *SEP* (optional)

Tutorial task for week 6: write notes on the following discussion questions, based on your reading and lectures this week: *do we have moral obligations towards non-human animals? On what basis? Why should we care, morally, about people who will exist in the future?* Be prepared to discuss these questions in class.

**Week 6: Virtue Ethics**

- 19/10 L16: Virtue ethics – contemporary versions [TP]  
Readings: Rosalind Hursthouse, 'Normative Virtue Ethics', in Roger Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live?* [available as an e-book, see ORL]  
Roger Crisp, 'A Third Method of Ethics?' (optional) [see ORL]

- 20/10 L17: Virtue ethics – problems [TP]  
 Readings: Thomas Hurka, 'Against Virtue Ethics', Chapter 8 of his *Virtue, Vice, and Value* [available as an e-book, see ORL]  
 John Doris, 'Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics' (optional) [see ORL]
- 22/10 L18: Character, Deed, Outcome: which matters most? [LJ]  
 Readings: none

Tutorial task for week 7: write up notes outlining what you take to be the most promising formulation of virtue ethics, and whether it is more plausible than consequentialism and (Kantian) deontology.

**Week 7: The State's Role in Protecting Liberty**

- 26/10 L19: A Brief History of pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century Western Thought on The Issue  
 Readings: none
- 27/10 L20: The Harm Principle  
 Readings: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch. 1;  
 Joel Feinberg, 'Obscene Words and the Law' [see ORL]
- 29/10 L21: The Distinction between Positive and Negative Liberty  
 Reading: Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty* [e-book, see ORL]

Tutorial task for week 8: What would Feinberg would say about the various kinds of harassing, abusive or offensive messages that get posted on social media—specifically, whether government may properly regulate such posts? Write up your view on what Feinberg would say and whether it's sensible.

**Week 8: The Balance Between Protecting Liberty and Promoting the Good [NB: lectures are on Tues, Thurs, Fri this week]**

- 2/11 **NO LECTURE THIS MONDAY – Friday lecture instead**
- 3/11 L22: Perfectionism  
 Reading: Joseph Raz, 'Autonomy, Toleration, and the Harm Principle' [see ORL]
- 5/11 L23: Paternalism  
 Reading: Sarah Conly, *Against Autonomy*, Ch. 1. [e-book, see ORL]
- 6/11 L24: Multiculturalism  
 Reading: Susan Moller Okin, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' [see ORL]

Tutorial task for week 9: Think about and write up some notes on the following issue, taking into consideration what Raz and Okin would say about it: Should western nations allow the wearing of burkas in public?

**Week 9: The Balance Between Protecting Liberty and Promoting Equality**

- 9/11 L25: Libertarianism  
 Reading: Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 149-82 [see ORL]
- 10/11 L26: Marxism  
 Reading: G.A. Cohen, 'The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom' [see ORL]
- 12/11 L27: The Distinction Between Desert and Entitlement

Reading: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed., §3, pp. 130-1 [in LaFollette/Shafer-Landau] and §48 [see ORL for this section]

Tutorial task for week 10: Think about Nozick's Wilt Chamberlain example. Nozick believes that contracts have a special moral status, such that people have a natural absolute right to what they contract for. Rawls, by contrast, thinks that it's up to society to decide whether to put in place a legal system that gives people an absolute right to what they contract for. Write up some thoughts on who has the upper hand in this debate.

**Week 10: Democracy**

- 16/11 L28: The Role of a Constitution in a Democracy  
Reading: Jeremy Waldron, 'A Rights-Based Critique of Constitutional Rights' [see ORL]
- 17/11 L29: The Equality of Citizens in the Eyes of the Law  
Reading: Iris Marion Young, 'Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship' [see ORL]
- 19/11 L30: Preferences, Values, and Rule by the Majority  
Reading: Cass Sunstein, 'Preferences and Politics' [see ORL]

Tutorial task for week 11: Here's an objection to Sunstein:  
"Yes, there may be all sorts of problems with allowing policy to be determined by people's preferences. But since the alternative is allowing policy to be determined by the preferences or values of politicians alone, we should go ahead and appeal to people's preferences despite the drawbacks of doing so."  
Write up your thoughts on whether this is a good objection.

**Week 11: Round-up and Review**

- 23/11 L31: Round-up of political themes/issues [BS]  
24/11 L32: Round-up of moral themes/issues [LJ]  
26/11 L33: Final thoughts and exam guidance [LJ]

**Week 12: Revision Week – no lectures or tutorials**

**About Tutorials:**

As the schedule above shows, tutorials begin in week 2 and will take place weekly. The tutorial sign-up will be via MMS. Select a group according to your availability.

**What are tutorials for?**

Tutorials are small-group classes that provide an opportunity for you to discuss the issues raised in your lectures and reading, and to make sure you've fully understood them. Studying philosophy is as much about *learning to philosophise* – actively engaging in discussion and argument – as it is about absorbing factual material. It is in the tutorials that you will actually be *doing philosophy*. Tutors will guide and facilitate the discussion, and may arrange for students to present summaries or lead the tutorial. It is essential that you complete the preparatory tasks outlined above in the schedule, and take your notes along with you to the tutorial class. Be ready to discuss – exchanging ideas with others is how philosophy is done.

## Continuous Assessment (Coursework)

Coursework counts for 50% of your overall grade for this module. This is further broken down into 2 essays of 25% weighting each:

- Essay 1 is due for submission on **Friday 16 October** (end of week 5)
- Essay 2 is due for submission on **Friday 13 November** (end of week 9)

Each essay should be submitted via MMS by 23:59 on the date given above.

Essay topics:

Essay 1: write an essay of no more than 1500 words on ONE of the following questions:

1. Is the abortion of a first-trimester foetus, for reasons not concerning the health of the mother or the foetus, morally permissible? Why, or why not?
2. Critically assess Peter Singer's view regarding our moral obligations to the global poor.
3. Outline one common objection to utilitarianism. Do utilitarians have an adequate reply to that objection?

Essay 2: write an essay of no more than 1500 words on ONE of the following questions:

4. Why does Kant think that properly moral actions must be motivated by duty, not by inclination? Is he right?
5. Berlin said that Mill was wrong about the nature and importance of negative liberty. Explain these criticisms, offer a proposal as to how Mill should respond to those criticisms, and then assess whether the proposed response is sufficient to disarm the criticism.
6. Suppose that there is a Muslim subculture that has reached a consensus belief that Islam requires women to dress modestly, and that dressing modestly requires wearing a burqa. Now suppose that the country in which this subculture is situated proposes to ban burqa-wearing. What would Raz say about the ethics of this law, what would Okin say about it, and what *should* one say about it?

Important guidance:

Note that it is your responsibility to submit your work on time, and to submit a legible, non-corrupted document. Failure to submit on time will mean your mark incurs lateness penalties. Instructions for submission of essays, as well as advice on writing philosophy essays, and details of lateness penalties, can be found in the *Philosophy Handbook for Undergraduates*

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/philosophy/docs/1516/undergraduate.pdf>

Coursework is marked anonymously, and submitted work should be identified only by your matriculation number. **Do not** put your name anywhere on your coursework.

On the first page of your coursework, you should include: your matriculation number, the module name and number, your tutor's name, the title of the essay/exercise, and the following statement:

'I hereby declare that the attached piece of written work is my own work and that I have not reproduced, without acknowledgement, the work of another'.

You must attach a bibliography of all your sources to each essay; in addition, all quotations from and paraphrase from other sources must be clearly acknowledged. See the *Philosophy Handbook for Undergraduates* for guidance.

Failure to properly acknowledge sources could lead to you being charged with plagiarism – this is a serious academic offence that is punished accordingly. It is entirely your responsibility to ensure you follow good academic practice, and in particular to avoid academic misconduct (plagiarism). See University guidelines at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/students/rules/academicpractice/>

You must provide a word-count at the end of every essay. Do not exceed the stated word limit – penalties will be applied for work exceeding the word limit in accordance with penalty scheme A (1 mark per day, or part thereof). See <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/penalties.pdf>. The word-lengths specified for each essay include everything *except* the bibliography (i.e., the word-count includes footnotes, quotes, etc.)

Assessed coursework will normally be returned – electronically, via MMS – within three weeks of submission.

Remember, you must gain a pass in the 50% coursework element in order to pass the module overall.

## **Exam**

The remaining 50% of the module grade will come from the mark you receive for the exam. The exam will take place during the December exam diet (timetable to be announced by the Exams Office). You will be required to answer three questions, in 2 hours. Further advice regarding exam preparation will be given in the final lecture of the semester.

Remember: no matter how well you've done in the coursework element, you must also gain a pass in the exam in order to pass the module overall.