

MA Seminar
Ethics
Second mini-term outline

The plan for the second mini-term of this Autumn 2001 Semester is along the lines that we voted for. The suggesting reading for each topic is derived mainly from the Ethics Reading List. Further reading can be got from that list. The items marked with an asterisk are especially important.

Week 1: Truth and Objectivity

On this complex and difficult topic, it is suggested that when you are doing the reading, you focus most closely on issues surrounding the questions at the end of the reading list; the suggested reading is tailored to that end. Wiggins and McDowell are both hard going, but you should persevere: what they have to say is important.

*Plato Euthyphro.

*Mackie J.L. (1977) *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. London: Penguin. Chapter 1. Also in Sayre-McCord G., ed., *Essays on Moral Realism*.

*McDowell J. (1985) *Values and Secondary Qualities* @, in *Morality and Objectivity: a Tribute to J.L. Mackie*, London: Routledge, pages 110-129. I think this is reprinted in his new collection, *Mind, Value and Reality*.

*Blackburn S. (1995) *The Flight to Reality* @, in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, eds Hursthouse, Lawrence and Quinn, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.

McDowell J. (1988) *Projection and Truth in Ethics* @, Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas. I think this is reprinted in his new collection, *Mind, Value and Reality*.

Hume D. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Clarendon. '1 and Appendix I.

Hume D. *A Standard Of Taste* @, in his *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*.

Wiggins D. (1987) *A Sensible Subjectivism* @, Essay V in his *Needs, Values, Truth*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Blackburn S. (1988) *How to be an ethical anti-realist* @, *Midwest Studies Vol XII*, reprinted in his *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, Oxford: OUP, 1993.

Nagel T. (1997) *The Last Word*. Oxford: OUP. Especially read Chapters 1, 2, and 6.

Questions:

1. Are values part of the fabric of the world, or are they projected by us on to the world?
2. Are there any useful analogies to be drawn between values and secondary qualities?

Week 2: Reasons and motivation

This week, think about what reasons are, and how reasons, as such, could motivate us to act.

*Williams B.A.O. (1980) *Internal and External Reasons* @, in his *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: CUP, 1981, pages 101-113.

- *Williams B.A.O. Read the short and concise section in the >Yellow Book= about ethical motivation.
- *McDowell J. (1995) AMight there be external reasons?@, in World, Mind and Ethics, eds. Altham J. and Harrison R., Cambridge: CUP, 1995, and Williams' reply.
- *Korsgaard C. (1986) ASkepticism About Practical Reasoning@ Journal of Philosophy 83, pages 5-25, reprinted in her Creating the Kingdom of Ends, Cambridge: CUP, 1996 as Chapter 11.
- Korsgaard C. (1997) AThe Normativity of Practical Reason@, Chapter 8 in Ethics and Practical Reason, edited by Cullity G. and Gaut B. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Foot P. (1972) AReasons for Action and Desire@, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, suppl. vol. 46, pages 189-201.
- Parfit, D. (1997) AReasons and motivation@, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, suppl. Vol. 71, pages 99-130.
- Scanlon T. (1998) What we Owe to Each Other. Harvard. Especially Chapter 1 and the Appendix.
- Dancy, J. (2000) Practical Reality. Oxford: OUP. On the distinction between justifying and explaining reasons.

Questions:

1. How can reasons both be a guide to action, and motivate?
2. AIf internalism about reasons is true, then morality cannot be objectively binding on all rational agents.@ Discuss.
3. Does motivational externalism weaken the authority of morality?

Week 3: Ethical Relativism

- *Williams B. (1972) Morality. Cambridge: CUP. Pages 17-27. Reprinted in Meiland J.W. and Krausz M., eds., Relativism, Cognitive and Moral.
- *Harman G. (1975) AMoral Relativism Defended@, Philosophical Review 84, pages 3-22, reprinted in Meiland J.W. and Krausz M., eds., Relativism, Cognitive and Moral, Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982. A useful collection.
- *Williams B.A.O. (1981) AThe Truth in Relativism@, in his Moral Luck. Cambridge: CUP. Reprinted in Meiland J.W. and Krausz M., eds., Relativism, Cognitive and Moral.
- *Foot P. (1979) AMoral Relativism@, Lindley Lecture, reprinted in Meiland J.W. and Krausz M., eds., Relativism, Cognitive and Moral.
- Foot P. (1970) AMorality and Art@, Proceedings of the British Academy 56, pages 131-144, reprinted in Philosophy as it is, Burnyeat and Honderich eds., London: Penguin, 1978.
- Williams B.A.O. (1985) Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy. London: Fontana. Chapter 9.
- Altham J. (1995) AReflection and Confidence@, in World Mind and Ethics, Altham J., and Harrison R., eds. Cambridge: CUP, 1995. Also read Williams= reply.

Questions:

1. Is there any reason why it might not be possible to formulate a credible version of ethical relativism?
2. AWhat is ethically wrong for us often isn=t wrong in other cultures. Therefore ethical relativism must be true.@ Assess this argument.
3. AWhen in Rome, do as the Romans do.@ Does this maxim hold so far as ethical practice is concerned?

Week 4: Free will

This week we are concerned with the traditional problem of free will.

*Kant I. Critique of Pure Reason, the Third Antimony, A445/B473 ff; pages 409 ff of the N. Kemp-Smith translation, Macmillan, 1929.

Kant I. Critique of Practical Reason. Translated by Lewis White Beck, New York: Macmillan, 1956.

Allison H. (1990) Kant's Theory of Freedom. Cambridge: CUP. Part I.

*Frankfurt H. (1971) AFreedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person@, Journal of Philosophy 68, pages 5-20, reprinted in Watson G., ed. (1982).

*Strawson P., AFreedom and Resentment@, in his book of the same title; also in Watson G., ed., (1982) and in Fischer and Ravizza eds (1993).

*Nietzsche F. Twilight of the Idols: AThe Four Great Errors@; Beyond Good and Evil, "9-23. Gay Science, '345, '347. Human, All Too Human, "18, 39, 70, 99, 105-107, 133-135. Daybreak, "115-131. Genealogy of Morals, Essay 1, '13.

Wiggins D. (1973) ATowards a Reasonable Libertarianism@, in Essays on Freedom of Action, ed.

Honderich T., London: Routledge, and reprinted in his Needs, Values, Truth, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

Williams B.A.O. (1985) AHow free does the will need to be?@, Lindley Lecture, reprinted as Chapter 1 of his Making Sense of Humanity, Cambridge: CUP, 1995.

Questions:

1. What is Kant's notion of freedom, and are we free in this sense?
2. What would follow if we did not have free will?
3. 'We cannot stop treating people as responsible for their actions and for their choices, so whether they are, in fact, responsible is irrelevant.' Discuss.

Week 5: Character and weakness of the will

*Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics, Book I, Chapter 13; Book II, Chapter 4; Book III, Chapter 2 and Chapters 10-12; Book VI, Chapter 2; Book VII, Chapters 1-10.

*Austin J. (1961) AA Plea for Excuses@, in his Philosophical Papers, Oxford: Clarendon, pages 123-152.

*Burnyeat M. (1980) AAristotle on Learning to be Good@, in Rorty A., ed., (1980) Essays on Aristotle's Ethics, California: University of California Press, pages 69-92.

*Sherman N. (1989) The Fabric of Character. Oxford: Clarendon. Chapter 3: AThe Choices of a Character@.

Broadie S. (1991) Ethics With Aristotle. Oxford: OUP. Chapter 5: AIncontinence@.

Wiggins D. (1987) AWeakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire@, Essay VII in his Needs, Values, Truth. Also in Rorty A., ed., (1980).

McDowell J. (1979) AVirtue and Reason@, The Monist 62, pages 331-350.

Charlton W. (1988) Weakness of the Will: A Philosophical Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell. A very useful book: read what you find relevant to your interest.

Questions:

1. To what extent, if any, are we responsible for our own character?
2. Thinking that weakness of the will presents a conceptual problem reveals an unduly optimistic view of human rationality. @ Discuss.
3. At least the weak-willed person has the right motivations, even if he or she does not act according to those motivations. @ Discuss.

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