

## **5AANB006 Ethics II: Contemporary Ethical Philosophy**

### **Academic year 2013/13 – Semester 1**

### **Basic information**

*Credits:* 15

*Module Tutor:* Dr Maria Alvarez (maria.alvarez@kcl.ac.uk)

*Office:* 703; tel. ex. 2383

*Consultation time Semester 1:* tbc

*Lecture time and venue:* consult your timetable at:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/philosophy/study/handbook/teaching/timetables.aspx>

*Seminar time and venue:* Consult your timetable (as above)

### **Module description**

The module will introduce students to various contemporary problems in moral philosophy, the ethical theories that address them and the historical and intellectual origins of these theories. The course will examine continuing debates about moral rationality, focusing on the relation between ethics, reason and the will, with special attention to the nature of moral reasons, the possible sources of motivation to act morally, and to the relationship between the will and moral responsibility.

Through the study of this module, students will acquire:

(i) an advanced understanding of the central claims, arguments, problems and solutions to be found in contemporary discussions of these topics.

In addition, the module will help students to

(iii) develop their abilities to interpret, synthesise and criticise complex texts and positions;

(iv) present and critically assess ideas in a clear and rigorous way;

(v) undertake, with appropriate guidance, independent work, including identifying and using appropriate resources.

### **Teaching Arrangements**

1 hour weekly lecture and 1 hour weekly seminar

## Assessment methods and deadlines

- **Formative assessment:** 2 essays X 1500 words each to be submitted to your essay tutor by 16.00 on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November (1<sup>st</sup> essay) and Friday 20 December 2012 (2<sup>nd</sup> essay).

Formative essays must be completed by the deadline in order to receive feedback. This feedback is crucial for your summative assessment. Feedback will be given by your tutor by Friday 07 December 2012 and Friday 18 January 2013 respectively.

- **Summative assessment** 2 essays X 2000 words each *to be submitted electronically* via KEATS by noon **Friday May 16, 2014.**

NB The summative essays will normally be a reworking of the formative essays, taking account of the tutor's comments. However, although this is not recommended, students may, if they wish, submit essays on topics different from the topic of their formative essays for summative assessment.

## Lecture Schedule

**Week 1** (30<sup>th</sup> September): Introduction: Ethics, Reasons and the Will

- What is ethics? What is the connection between reasons, the will and ethics?

Reading:

- Williams, B. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Routledge (1993), esp. ch.1.

(Part I – Ethics and Reasons)

**Week 2** (7<sup>th</sup> October): What are Reasons?

- What are reasons and why do they matter to ethics?

Reading:

- Dancy, J. 'Reasons for Action' in his *Practical Reality*, (OUP, 2000), Ch.1
- Alvarez, M., 'How Many Kinds of Reasons?', *Philosophical Explorations* 12 (2): 181-193.

**Week 3** (14<sup>th</sup> October): Moral Facts

-Are there Moral Facts? If so, can we know them? How?

Reading: (tbc)

**Week 4** (21<sup>st</sup> October): Reasons and Motivation

- What is the 'force' of saying that someone has a reason to do something? When is this true?

Reading:

- Williams, B., 'Internal and External Reasons' in his *Making Sense of Humanity*; (also, helpful his 'External Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame').
- Hooker, B., 'Williams' Argument Against External Reasons', *Analysis* 47, No. 1 (1987), 42-44.

**Week 5** (28<sup>th</sup> October): Morality and Rationality

- Is morality a matter of rationality?

- McDowell, J., 'Might There Be External Reasons?', in Altham & Ross (eds.), *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, (1994).
- Foot, P., 'Rationality and Goodness', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplementary Volume*, (2004) 54: 1-13.

READING WEEK 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> November – NO LECTURES OR SEMINARS

**Week 6** (11<sup>th</sup> November): The Moral 'Ought'

- Are there specifically *moral* reasons? If so, is there a distinctive moral 'ought'?

Reading:

- Anscombe, G. E. M., 1958. 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy* 33: 1-19.
- Crisp, R., 'Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplementary Volume*, (2004) 54: 75-93.

(Part II Ethics and the Will)

**Week 7** (18<sup>th</sup> November): Moral Responsibility

- What are the conditions for moral responsibility?

Reading:

- Strawson, P., 'Freedom and Resentment', in his *Freedom and Resentment & Other Essays*, (1974), ch1.
- Hart, H. L. A. 'Postscript: Responsibility and Retribution' in his *Punishment and Responsibility*, OUP, 1968.

**Week 8** (25<sup>th</sup> November): Responsibility and Control

- What kind of control is required for moral responsibility?

Reading:

- Frankfurt, H., 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility', *The Journal of Philosophy*, (1969), 66: 829-839.
- Alvarez, M., 'Actions, Thought Experiments, and the 'Principle of Alternate Possibilities'', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2009), 87 (1):61 – 81.

**Week 9** (2<sup>nd</sup> December): Moral Responsibility and Autonomy

- What kind of freedom of the will is required for moral responsibility?

Reading:

- Frankfurt, H., 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', *The Journal of Philosophy*, (1971), 68: 5-20.
- Williams, B., 'Moral Incapacity' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, (1993) 93:59-70.

**Week 10** (10<sup>th</sup> December): Moral Responsibility and Luck

- How, if at all, does luck affect moral responsibility? And if it does, what kinds of luck affect moral responsibility?

Reading:

- Williams, B., 'Moral Luck' in his *Moral Luck*, 1981 (CUP), ch.2.
- Nagel, E., 'Moral Luck' in his *Mortal Questions*, (CUP), ch.3.

## Suggested Essay Questions

The questions below each topic can be used as essay questions but please make sure you agree these questions with your essay tutor or with me. Here are others:

- Are you necessarily irrational if you are not motivated to do what you believe you ought to do?
- What, if any, is the relationships between practical reasoning and moral reasoning?
- Does moral responsibility that we have alternative possibilities? Why?
- Can we be blamed for things that are beyond our control? Why?

## Further Reading

**There is no textbook for this module but some of the books mentioned in the weekly topics may give useful background. In addition, further reading for each topic will be given weekly. Please check the lecture handouts posted on KEATS for details.**