

STUDY MATERIALS: Twentieth Century Ethics

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Introduction

This course is intended to be a general introduction to the main topics and the most significant developments in 20th-century broadly analytic, Anglophone ethics. Unlike most of the other courses offered by the International Catholic University, this course

does not specifically focus on issues central to Catholic discussions, although many of the figures discussed in these lectures, notably Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre, are among the most important Catholic philosophers in the twentieth century. In focusing on *analytic, Anglophone* ethics, we have deliberately chosen to ignore other important traditions in 20th century ethics, in particular, Thomism, Marxism, pragmatism and various strands of continental thought. In some cases, say Thomism, we have largely ignored them because they are covered separately and in depth in other courses offered by the International Catholic University. In other cases, we were forced by the exigencies of space to touch upon them at most lightly. There are powerful positive reasons, however, derived from reflection on the cultural role of ethics in the 20th century to focus, as we have, on analytic, Anglophone ethics. It has been this particular tradition that had dominated moral philosophy in the universities of the United States and the United Kingdom for most of this century. There is also a clear point of origination of this tradition in G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, published in 1903, and a clear line of development within this tradition from that originating point to the present day. In certain respects, also, it has seemed to many that this tradition was beginning to lose some of its unity and energy with certain developments in the last decade of the 20th century. If we should be seeing the decline of this tradition at this time, it may turn out that the whole history of the tradition, in its purest form, will be encompassed in the 20th century. Of course, we must wait to see what the future holds both for ethical consciousness as well as for the academic study of ethics, before we can predict with confidence the demise of this tradition.

This course is presented in twelve video lectures available from the International Catholic University. We have also included here additional materials to enhance the course:

1. Readings keyed to each of the lectures. For those taking this course for credit within the International Catholic University, required readings are listed here. Additional readings are also suggested for those who want to pursue particular matters at greater length. There are two books required for those taking the course for credit. *Twentieth Century Ethics*, an anthology of articles on the matters under discussion in this course, and *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre's masterful 1982 contribution to this tradition.
2. Study questions on the material in the course. A number of questions are keyed to each of the lectures. These questions are intended to provoke further thought on the part of readers, and they may also be used as essay questions for those taking the course for credit.

Lesson 1: Introduction and 19th-Century Ethics

Required Reading

James Rachels, "Introduction: Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 1-9.

Suggested Readings

On the Nature of Ethics:

William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

David McNaughton, *Moral Vision: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York, NY: Blackwell Publishing, 1988).

Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

On 19th century moral philosophy:

Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), chapters 14-17.

Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), ch. 2-4.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between descriptive ethics, metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics?
2. Explain why many ethicists felt, at the close of the 19th century, that the integrity and independence of their subject was under threat from developments in other academic disciplines.

Lesson 2: G. E. Moore and Intuitionism

Required Reading

G. E. Moore, "The Subject-Matter of Ethics" in Cahn and Haber, eds., *20th Century Ethical Theory*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 12-32.

H. A. Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", in Cahn and Haber, eds., *20th Century Ethical Theory* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 37-47.

W. D. Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?" in Cahn and Haber, eds., *20th Century Ethical Theory*(Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 87-105.

Suggested Reading:

C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London, UK: Kegan Paul, 1930).

Stephen Darwall, "Moore to Stevenson," in *Ethics in the History of Western Philosophy*, ed. R. J. Cavalier (New York, NY: St. Martins Press, 1989).

William Frankena, "Naturalistic Fallacy," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 129-138.

Casimir Lewy, "G. E. Moore on the Naturalistic Fallacy," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 400-407.

David McNaughton, "Intuitionism," in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, ed. H. LaFollette (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000).

G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1903), especially ch. 1 and 2.

W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1930), especially ch. 1 and 2.

P. F. Strawson, "Ethical Intuitionism," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 189-196.

Study Questions:

1. What is the naturalistic fallacy? How is the open question argument supposed to show that it is, indeed, a fallacy
2. What is the method of isolation? What is its purpose?

3. Explain the principle of organic unity, and give one example of your own which could plausibly be thought to illustrate the principle.

Lesson 3: Emotivism and Non-Cognitivism

Required Reading

A. J. Ayer, "A Critique of Ethics," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 108-115.

C. L. Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 116-128.

Suggested Reading

A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1952).

_____, *Part of my life: The Memoirs of a Philosopher* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, Javonovich, 1977).

_____, *More of my life* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Brand Blanshard, "The New Subjectivism in Ethics," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 183-188.

R. M. Hare, "A Moral Argument," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 386-399.

C. L. Stevenson, "The Nature of Ethical Disagreement," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 139-144.

Study Questions

1. What is the distinction between descriptive meaning and emotive meaning?
2. Explain the two major objections against intuitionism and how emotivism attempted to address these issues.

3. Charles Stevenson says of the account of the meaning of good given by G. E. Moore that non-natural properties are simply the shadow cast by emotive meaning. What might he mean by that? Do you think it is a fair comment on Moore's view?

Lesson 4: Recovering the World

Required Readings

Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 365-377.

John Searle, "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 408-417.

Suggested Readings

Philippa Foot, "Moral Arguments," Oct. 58; 67: 502-513; Reprinted in *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2002).

_____, "Goodness and Choice," 1961; Suppl 35: 45-60; Reprinted in *Virtues and Vice and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2002).

Alan Gewirth, "The Is-Ought Problem Resolved," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 500-518.

Study Questions

1. Explain Foot's distinction between internal and external relations to the object of our mental states. Give an example of an attitude that has an internal relation to its object.
2. A man says to you "I am proud of the Atlantic Ocean." You ask him, "What do you mean?" and he answers, "I created the ocean". Since he is delusional, he genuinely believes this statement. Does this example refute Foot's claim that many attitudes, such as pride, bear an internal relation to their objects? Why or why not?

3. Is Searle's argument of how to derive an ought from an is sound? Why or why not?
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Lesson 5: Metaethics and Normative Theory

Required Readings

David Solomon, "Normative Ethical Theories" in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, ed. Warren T. Reich, vol. 2 (New York: NY: MacMillan Library Reference USA, 1995).

Study Questions

1. What is the distinction between descriptive meaning and emotive meaning?
 2. Explain the two major objections against intuitionism and how emotivism attempted to address these issues.
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Lesson 6: John Rawls: Reviving Kant

Required Reading

John Rawls, "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 212-224.

_____, "Justice as Fairness," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 332-350.

Suggested Reading

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), ch. 1-3.

Study Questions

1. What is the distinction between descriptive meaning and emotive meaning?

2. Explain the two major objections against intuitionism and how emotivism attempted to address these issues.
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Lesson 7: The New Consequentialism

Required Readings

Richard B. Brandt, "Some Merits of One Form of Rule-Utilitarianism," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 418-436.

Derek Parfit, "Later Selves and Moral Principles," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 476-496.

J. J. C. Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 307-315.

Suggested Readings

Samuel Scheffler, "Morality's Demands and Their Limits," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 667-672.

Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 457-475.

Study Questions

1. What is Rawls's conception of the priority of the right to the good?
2. What are some of the central objections to classical utilitarianism, and how have contemporary utilitarians responded to these arguments? Do you think these responses are successful? Why or why not?

Lesson 8: Rediscovering Virtue

Required Readings

Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 351-364.

Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 583-593.

David Solomon, "Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988): 428-441.

Study Questions

1. According to Anscombe, why does the moral ought make no sense in modern philosophy?
2. Why, according to Anscombe, should we abandon moral philosophy at the present time, and when can we engage in it again?

Lesson 9: After Virtue

Required Readings

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), ch. 1-6, 9-14.

David Solomon, "MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy," in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, Mark C. Murphy, ed. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003):114-151.

Suggested Readings

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999).

Study Questions

1. What are the three main features of contemporary moral disagreement identified by MacIntyre?
 2. Who are the three characters identified by MacIntyre that characterize our culture as emotivist, and how are these characters supposed to prove that our culture is emotivist?
 3. Why, according to MacIntyre, was the Enlightenment Project bound to fail?
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Lesson 10: Anti-Theory

Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *Reading Rorty*, ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 634-646.

Suggested Readings

Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 531-540.

Study Questions

1. What are the characteristic claims of anti-theorists?
2. How does Williams's view converge with and diverge from MacIntyre's?

Lesson 11: The Applied Ethics Revolution

Required Readings

David Solomon, "Domestic Disarray and Imperial Ambition" in *Global Bioethics: The Collapse of Consensus*, ed. Tristram H. Engelhardt, Jr. (Salem, MA: Scrivener Press, 2006), pp. 335-361.

Suggested Readings

Carl Elliott, "A General Antitheory for Bioethics," in *Bioethics, Culture and Identity: A Philosophical Disease*, ch. 8 (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999) 141-164.

Renee C. Fox, "The Entry of U.S. Bioethics into the 1990s: A Sociological Analysis," in *A Matter of Principles*, eds. Edwin R. DuBose, Ronald P. Hamel, Laurence J. O'Connell (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).

Study Questions

1. Summarize the nature of applied ethics and its main features.
2. In what way is applied ethics similar to religion? Do you think ethical disagreements are ultimately irresolvable?

Lesson 12: Whither Ethics?

Required Readings

Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History."

Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), ch. 3.

Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2001).

Suggested Readings

John Paul II, "Evangelium Vitae."

John Paul II, "Veritatis Splendor."

Study Question

What are three of the most important threats to liberalism? Describe the main features of each threat and explain how they threaten liberalism.