

Scheme of work: Moral philosophy

This scheme of work for AS/A-level Philosophy (7171/7172) is designed to help you plan your teaching.

Normative ethical theories

Introduction

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| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 1 | Outline the significance of this area of philosophy by highlighting our status as ethical beings.  Explore decision making. Offer students a range of ethical scenarios where there is not a clear right/wrong course of action.  Students should be able to explore their own ethical stance through this activity.  Outline to students the content of the unit and how it will be taught. |  | Ethics  Morality  Right/wrong | Activities focusing on:   * understanding the definitions of key distinctions * an awareness of a student’s own moral compass. | Through teacher questioning.  Participation in discussion.  Composition of and justification for decisions. |

Utilitarianism

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| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 2–4 | General statement of utility as a decision making guide.  Students to practice using this guide on five sample scenarios in order to reinforce the theory.  What is meant by ‘pleasure’? General class discussion.  Mill’s higher and lower pleasures: explanation of how they are distinct and discussion on what they might look like.  How can we calculate pleasure? Bentham’s utility calculus. Students to apply learning by calculating the pleasure achieved within example actions. Students to list the issues they encounter.  Different forms of utilitarianism: distinctions between act, rule and preference utilitarianism. Again, approach these distinctions through an example ethical situation where students can distinguish between the actions of an act, rule and preference utilitarianism.  Starter: students to bring to the forum the issues they have already encountered through applying the different versions of utilitarianism.  Move into full explanation and illustration of the issues of: whether pleasure is the only good, fairness and individual/ liberty rights, problems with calculation, issues around partiality and whether utilitarianism ignores moral integrity and intentions. | Mill, J S, *Utilitarianism*, chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5  Bentham, J, *Introduction to the principles of morals and legislation* | Utility  Higher pleasures  Lower pleasures  Utility calculus  Act utilitarianism  Rule utilitarianism  Preference utilitarianism  Hedonic | Activities focusing on:   * understanding the definitions of key terms and distinctions * scaffolding of understanding theory by applying theory to example * attempting to calculate pleasure * reflection on issues met by attempting to calculate pleasure. * identifying issues and giving examples to illustrate * the drawing and supporting of appropriate conclusions * understanding the definitions of key terms and distinctions. | Application of theory of utility to sample scenarios.  Participation in class discussion.  Practice definition questions.  Practice outline questions.  Teacher questioning.  Proficiency in application of measurement.  Practice definition questions (act, rule and preference).  Practice 12 mark questions.  Plan an essay-style question as a class. Students to complete for homework (25 marks). |

Kantian deontological ethics

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| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 5 | Outline deontology as a generic theory of decision making.  Outline Kantian deontological ethics, covering all aspects of the theory.  Explain through demonstration, the difference between a categorical and a hypothetical imperative. Build this into the explanation of the Kantian focus on the categorical. Use examples of ethical situations to illustrate the decision making process used by an ethical being following Kantian deontological ethics. | Kant, I, *Foundations of the metaphysics of morals* | Maxim  Deontology  Categorical imperative  Hypothetical imperative | Activities focusing on:   * understanding the definitions of key terms an concepts * using examples to illustrate understanding. | Practice definition questions.  Use of examples to demonstrate Kantian deontological ethics in practice. |
| 6 | This week will focus on the strengths of Kantian deontological ethics by highlighting the ways in which issues with utilitarianism are no longer issues for a Kantian.  This should reinforce what was learnt in week 5 around the theory itself. |  |  | Activities focusing on appreciating the relative merits of a theory. | Outline questions.  Group work and collaboration on organising responses. |
| 7–8 | Issues with Kantian deontological ethics.  After re-capping the central tenets of Kantian deontological ethics, students to work in groups to identify apparent issues, particularly with regards to a comparison of all forms of utilitarianism.  Explore the issue around the intuition that consequences of actions determine their moral value (independent of considerations of universalisability).  Explore the problem with the application of the principle.  Use examples to allow students to embed these issues within real situations.  Explore the possible value of certain motives (eg love, friendship, kindness).  Explore the issues which arise out of a person having clashing/competing duties.  Explore Foot’s notion of morality as a system of hypothetical, rather than categorical, imperatives. | *Foot, P, Morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives*,vol  81, issue 3, 305–316 | Consequence  Universalisability | Activities focusing on:   * discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position * discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position * using examples to demonstrate understanding. | 12-mark exam questions.  Students working together to generate ideas and articulate why issues arise with Kantian deontological ethics.  Planning an essay-style question as a class (25 marks). Students to complete for homework. |

Aristotelian virtue ethics

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| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 9–10 | Give a broad definition of virtue ethics and the development of a good character. What are students’ instincts here?  Consider some of the actions recommended by a utilitarian or a deontologist in recent weeks: would these actions lead to the development of ‘good character’?  Exposition of Aristotle’s virtue ethics, including ‘the good’: pleasure; the function argument and Eudaimonia.  Explore the role of education/habituation in developing a moral character.  Explanation of the distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions and the impact on moral responsibility.  Outline the doctrine of the mean and Aristotle’s account of vices and virtues.  Summarise all aspects of Aristotle’s virtue ethics. Create a summary resource which allows comparison between all three ethical theories studied.  Similarities and differences can therefore be drawn out as part of this activity.  In order to explore the strengths of this position, students should use the theory to ‘answer’ the issues raised against both utilitarianism and Kantian deontological ethics. This will enable students to create a clear dialogue on how we decide what it is morally right to do. | Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, books 1 (1–5, 7–10, 13), 2 (1–7), 3 (1–5), 5, 6 (1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13), 7 (12–13), 10 (1–8) | Virtue  Function  Eudaimonia  Habituation | Activities focusing on understanding the definitions of key terms an concepts. | Practice definition questions.  Teacher questioning.  Participation in class discussion. |
| 11 | Issues with Aristotle’s virtue ethics.  Can Aristotle’s virtue ethics give sufficiently clear guidance about how to act?  The issue of clashing/competing virtues.  The possibility of circularity involved in defining virtuous acts and virtuous people in terms of each other. |  | Circularity (of argument) | Activities focusing on:   * discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position * the drawing and supporting of appropriate conclusions. | Planning an essay-style question as a class. Students to complete for homework. |

Applied ethics

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| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 12 | This week, students will critically apply the three theories of utilitarianism, Kantian deontological ethics and Aristotle’s virtue ethics to real, issues that we face in our contemporary society.  Apply the theories to stealing and simulated killing.  Students should be offered real situations reflecting these issues. |  |  | Activities focusing on:   * discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position * the drawing and supporting of appropriate conclusions. | Practice exam question (all types of question: 3, 5, 12, 25 marks). |
| 13 | Students to continue to critically apply the three theories of utilitarianism, Kantian deontological ethics and Aristotle’s virtue ethics to real, issues that we face in our contemporary society.  Apply the theories to eating animals and telling lies.  Reflection: which of the theories do students believe offer the most help when making decisions on these real issues? Is the ‘most helpful’ theory therefore the most ‘ethically good’ theory? |  |  | Activities focusing on:   * discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position * the drawing and supporting of appropriate conclusions. | Practice exam question (all types of question: 3, 5, 12, 25 marks).  Planning an essay-style question as a class.  Students to complete for homework. |

Meta-ethics

Introduction

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| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 14 | Explore the meaning of language through looking at a range of statements, eg ‘get off!’, ‘I feel sad’, ‘I love you’, ‘can you help me?’ and discussing how these statements have meaning. Explore the differences between such statements.  How does ethical language have meaning? Before learning the details of competing theories, students should be enabled to explore their own reflections, using examples to illustrate their points. |  | Truth  Falsity  Verification (principle)  Propositional claim  Logical positivism  Assertion  Cognitivism vs non-cognitivism | Activities focusing on:   * recognising the many forms of meaning through language * formulating and articulating own ideas on how language has meaning. * the generation of examples to demonstrate understanding. | Participation in teacher questioning and class discussion.  Use of examples to illustrate own arguments. |

Moral realism

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| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 15 | Ethical language makes claims about reality which are true of false (fact stating).  Moral realism: the theory that ethical language makes claims about mind-independent reality that are true.  Ethical naturalism (eg utilitarianism).  Ethical non-naturalism (eg intuitionism). | *Mackie, J L, Ethics: inventing right and wrong*, chapter 1, sections 8 and 9  Moore, G E, *Principia Ethica* | Moral realism  Mind-independent  Ethical naturalism  Ethical non- naturalism  Mind-independent  Error theory | Activities focusing on:   * discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position * the drawing and supporting of appropriate conclusions. | Practice definition questions. |

Moral anti-realism

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| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 16 | Error theory: ethical language attempts to make claims about reality, but always fails (Mackie).  Emotivism: ethical language expresses emotions (Hume and Ayer).  Prescriptivism: ethical language makes recommendations about action (Hare). | Hume, D, *Treatise of human nature*, book III, part 1 (for emotivism)  Hare, R M, *The language of morals*, chapters 1, 5, 7, 10.2  Ayer, A J, *Language, truth and logic*, especially chapters 1 and 6  Ayer, A J, *The central questions of philosophy*, 22–29 | Emotivism  Prescriptivism | Activities focusing on:   * discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position * the drawing and supporting of appropriate conclusions. | Practice definition questions.  Practice 25-mark exam question on ethical language. |
| 17 | Given the volume of competing theories within this aspect of the unit, alongside the number of anthology references that students need to access, this week should be used as catch-up or (preferably) consolidation of the theories covered. |  |  | Activities focusing on:   * consolidation of knowledge * application of knowledge within an exam format. | Planning an essay-style question as a class. Students to complete for homework.  Could also use mock exam covering whole unit. |