



# PHL 341

## Action, Virtue and Character

S2 External 2014

*Philosophy*

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## General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Unit Convenor

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W6A Room 734

By appointment

Credit points

3

Prerequisites

39cp or admission to GDipArts

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

This unit explores important contemporary debates in ethics, focusing in particular on the application and role of ethical theory in lived moral life. We begin with a consideration of influential challenges to consequentialism, which claim that it is self-defeating, leads to moral schizophrenia, and is incompatible with important moral goods like integrity and friendship. We then consider virtue ethics, focusing on its characterisation of human flourishing, its capacity to be action-guiding, and the implications of the dirty hands problem posed when virtuous agents confront tragic moral dilemmas. Finally we consider challenges to the very notion of moral character. Scepticism about the existence of character arises from findings in social psychology which appear to indicate that features of a person's situation play a larger role in determining the morality of their action than does their moral (or immoral) character. We consider the empirical findings, the nature and implications of ethical situationism, and philosophical attempts to defend the notion of character against the situationist challenge.

## Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

## Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

The ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of the normative theories and meta-

ethical issues considered.

The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.

Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.

Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Enhancement of independent research and writing skills.

## Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Due
<a href="#"><u>Participation</u></a>	20%	Continuous
<a href="#"><u>Critical Review</u></a>	25%	To be scheduled.
<a href="#"><u>Peer review exercise</u></a>	20%	5pm 27 Oct & 5pm 3 Nov
<a href="#"><u>Essay</u></a>	35%	Fri 7 November, 5pm

### Participation

Due: **Continuous**

Weighting: **20%**

**Internal:** Attendance at 75% of seminars (frequency); and contribution to discussion (quality).

**External:** Comment throughout semester on at least 75% of the topics/questions posted on the iLearn Discussion Board each week. Must be posted within one week of the relevant lecture in order to count towards mark.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- The ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of the normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.

## Critical Review

Due: **To be scheduled.**

Weighting: **25%**

Internal: 10-12 min (1200 words max) critical review to be presented in the class seminar, on a topic, reading and date to be scheduled in negotiation with Convenor. Written version to be submitted same day.

External: Critical review (1200 words max) to be posted online on a topic, reading and date to be scheduled in negotiation with Convenor.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- The ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of the normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.

## Peer review exercise

Due: **5pm 27 Oct & 5pm 3 Nov**

Weighting: **20%**

Each student must complete a peer review of a fellow student's essay draft. A review rubric for this purpose will be supplied in class.

**The rubric must be signed by the reviewer and the recipient as having fulfilled the following requirements:**

- (i) The **draft essay** was received by the peer reviewer by no later than **5pm Monday October 27**.
- (ii) The peer reviewer returned the **peer review rubric** by no later than **5pm Monday 3 November**.

Failure to meet conditions (i) or (ii) will result in a mark of zero for this assessment task, for the author/reviewer as appropriate. This means: If the draft was not submitted to the reviewer by 5pm Monday 27 October, the author receives a mark of zero. If the review rubric was not returned to the author by 5pm Monday 3 November, the reviewer receives a mark of zero.

**The signed review rubric must be submitted by *BOTH the essay author and the essay reviewer*, attached to her/his essay and submitted via the Turnitin Submission Link on the**

**unit iLearn site, by the essay due date (5pm Friday 7 Nov).** This means that each person's essay will have TWO review rubrics attached to their essay: the rubric they completed and the rubric they received. Students must indicate in the space provided on the Rubric, how they took account of their reviewer's feedback.

Students should not review essays on the same topic as their own essay. Duplication of another student's work/ideas is NOT permitted, and will be readily detectable. Author/reviewer partners will be assigned in negotiation with the Unit Convenor to meet the above requirement.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Enhancement of independent research and writing skills.

## Essay

Due: **Fri 7 November, 5pm**

Weighting: **35%**

Write a 2500 word essay (+/- 10%) in response to one of the topics provided. The essay must include *extended* critical discussion and *detailed* application of at least one additional source of your own choosing (i.e. not one of the required unit readings).

On successful completion you will be able to:

- The ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of the normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Enhancement of independent research and writing skills.

## Delivery and Resources

Teaching in this unit will be by seminar format. **Internal students** attend one two-hour interactive seminar per week. Students are expected to remain up-to-date with reading and come prepared for discussion. Seminars will be fully recorded. **External students** are expected to participate online via the iLearn Discussion Board on a weekly basis, responding to both set questions and seminar content. *External students must complete their online contributions **within one week of***

each seminar topic.

## Unit Schedule

### SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND REQUIRED READINGS

Note: all required readings listed below are in the Unit Reader. Where more than two readings are listed, priority is to be given to the article(s) marked '\*'.

#### PART 1 (WEEKS 1–4): CONSEQUENTIALISM AND ITS CRITICS

##### **SEMINAR 1 (Aug 4): Course overview; Introduction to consequentialist and utilitarian ethical theory.**

*Reading:*

\*Philip Pettit, 'Consequentialism' in Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics*. (Oxford:Blackwell, 1993): pp. 230–240.

\*Samuel Scheffler, Excerpt from 'Introduction', In Samuel Scheffler (ed.) *Consequentialism and Its Critics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): pp. 1-5.

Thomas Nagel, excerpts from *The View From Nowhere*. (New York: OUP, 1986): 152-3; 164-6.

##### **SEMINAR 2 (Aug 11): Is consequentialism self-defeating?**

*Reading:*

\*Peter Railton, excerpt 1 from 'Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1984): pp. 134-171.

\*Henry Sidgwick, excerpts from *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition, (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962): pp. 405-7; 411-17.

##### **SEMINAR 3 (Aug 18): The 'integrity' objection to consequentialism**

*Reading:*

\*Bernard Williams, 'Consequentialism and Integrity' In Samuel Scheffler (ed.) *Consequentialism and Its Critics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): pp. 20-50.

\*Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 79, No. 8 (August, 1982): 419-439.

David O. Brink, excerpts from 'Utilitarian Morality and the Personal Point of View' *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 83, No. 8 (August 1986): pp. 417-38.

## **SEMINAR 4 (Aug 25): The ‘alienation’ and ‘friendship’ objections to consequentialism**

### *Reading:*

\*William Godwin, ‘The Archbishop and the Chambermaid’. In Peter Singer (ed.) *Ethics* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1994): 312-313.

\*Michael Stocker, excerpt from ‘The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories’, *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 73, No. 14, On Motives and Morals (August 12, 1976): pp. 453-466.

\*Peter Railton, excerpt 2 from ‘Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1984): pp. 134-171. *Further Reading:*

Dean Cocking and Justin Oakley, ‘Indirect Consequentialism, Friendship, and the Problem of Alienation’, *Ethics*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (October 1995): pp. 86-111.

Elinor Mason, ‘Do consequentialists have one thought too many?’ *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, vol, 2, (1999): 243-261

## **PART 2 (WEEKS 5-8): VIRTUE ETHICS AND ITS CRITICS**

### **SEMINAR 5 (Sept 1): Introducing virtue ethics**

#### *Reading:*

\*Aristotle, excerpts from *The Nicomachean Ethics*. J.L. Ackrill, trans. (London: Faber & Faber, 1973.)

\*Philippa Foot, ‘Virtues and Vices.’ In Stephen Darwall (ed), *Virtue Ethics*. (Oxford: BlackwellPublishing, 2003): pp. 105-120.

### **SEMINAR 6 (Sept 8):Challenges to virtue ethics: Can virtue ethics be action-guiding? PLUS: Honing philosophy essay-writing skills**

#### *Reading:*

\*James Rachels, ‘The Ethics of Virtue’. In James Rachels *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup>edition (Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 1999): pp. 175-193.

\*Robert B. Louden, ‘On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics’. In Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (eds) *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): pp. 201-216.

### **SEMINAR 7 (Sept 15): Virtue ethics responds**

#### *Reading:*

\*Rosalind Hursthouse, ‘Virtue Theory and Abortion’. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 1991): pp. 223-246.

\*Rosalind Hursthouse, 'Normative Virtue Ethics'. In Roger Crisp (ed) *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): pp. 19-36.

**\*\*\*\*\* MID-SEMESTER BREAK: Mon 22 Sept – Fri 3 Oct**

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**NOTE: No Seminar on Mon 6 October (Labour Day public holiday)**

### **SEMINAR 8 (OCT 13): Virtue ethics and the challenge of tragic dilemmas**

*Reading:*

\*Rosalind Hursthouse, 'Irresolvable and Tragic Dilemmas', chp 3 from *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001).

\*Liezl Van Zyl, 'Can Virtuous People Emerge from Tragic Dilemmas Having Acted Well?', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* vol. 24, No. 1 (2007): 50-61.

### **PART 3 (WEEKS 10-12): VIRTUE, CHARACTER AND CHARACTER-SKEPTICISM**

#### **SEMINAR 9 (Oct 20): Philosophical character skepticism and 'situationist' ethics**

*Reading:*

\*Gilbert Harman, 'Moral Psychology Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol 99 (1999): 315-331.

\*John M. Doris, 'Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics', *Nous* Vol. 32 No. 4 (1998): 504-530.

Gilbert Harman, 'The Nonexistence of Character Traits', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* vol. 100 (1999-2000): 223-226.

Stanley Milgram, 'Behavioral Study of Obedience', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* Vol. 67, No. 4 (1963): 371-378.

John M. Darley and C. Daniel Batson, "'From Jerusalem to Jericho": A study of situational and dispositional variables in helping behavior', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 27 No. 1 (1973): 100-108.

#### **SEMINAR 10 (Oct 27): Defending character.**

*Reading:*

\*Joel J. Kupperman, 'The Indispensability of Character', *Philosophy* Vol. 76, No. 296 (April 2001): 239-250.



\*Robert C. Solomon, 'What's Character Got To Do With It?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LXXI No. 3 (November 2005): 648-655.

**WEEK 12 (Nov 3) Non-teaching week:** No seminar this week. Consultation, essay preparation and essay reviews.

**\*\*\*ESSAY PEER REVIEWS DUE BY MON 3 NOVEMBER** (at the latest)

**\*\*\*ESSAYS DUE: 5PM FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER.**

**\*\*\*\* SEMESTER ENDS \*\*\*\***

## **Policies and Procedures**

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy [http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic\\_honesty/policy.html](http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html)

Assessment Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Grievance Management Policy [http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance\\_management/policy.html](http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance_management/policy.html)

Disruption to Studies Policy [http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption\\_studies/policy.html](http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html) *The Disruption to Studies Policy is effective from March 3 2014 and replaces the Special Consideration Policy.*

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

## **Student Code of Conduct**

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: [https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student\\_conduct/](https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/)

## **Student Support**

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

## Learning Skills

Learning Skills ([mq.edu.au/learningskills](http://mq.edu.au/learningskills)) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module for Students](#)
- [Ask a Learning Adviser](#)

## Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

## Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at [ask.mq.edu.au](http://ask.mq.edu.au)

## IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

## Graduate Capabilities

### Capable of Professional and Personal Judgement and Initiative

We want our graduates to have emotional intelligence and sound interpersonal skills and to demonstrate discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgement. They will exercise initiative as needed. They will be capable of risk assessment, and be able to handle ambiguity and complexity, enabling them to be adaptable in diverse and changing environments.

This graduate capability is supported by:

### Learning outcomes

- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.

## Assessment tasks

- Participation
- Critical Review
- Peer review exercise

## Commitment to Continuous Learning

Our graduates will have enquiring minds and a literate curiosity which will lead them to pursue knowledge for its own sake. They will continue to pursue learning in their careers and as they participate in the world. They will be capable of reflecting on their experiences and relationships with others and the environment, learning from them, and growing - personally, professionally and socially.

This graduate capability is supported by:

### Learning outcome

- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.

## Assessment tasks

- Participation
- Peer review exercise

## Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

This graduate capability is supported by:

### Learning outcomes

- The ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of the normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis

of views, arguments and counter-arguments.

- Enhancement of independent research and writing skills.

## Assessment tasks

- Participation
- Critical Review
- Peer review exercise
- Essay

## Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

We want our graduates to be capable of reasoning, questioning and analysing, and to integrate and synthesise learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments; to be able to critique constraints, assumptions and limitations; to be able to think independently and systemically in relation to scholarly activity, in the workplace, and in the world. We want them to have a level of scientific and information technology literacy.

This graduate capability is supported by:

## Learning outcomes

- The ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of the normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Enhancement of independent research and writing skills.

## Assessment tasks

- Participation
- Critical Review
- Peer review exercise
- Essay

## Problem Solving and Research Capability

Our graduates should be capable of researching; of analysing, and interpreting and assessing data and information in various forms; of drawing connections across fields of knowledge; and they should be able to relate their knowledge to complex situations at work or in the world, in order to diagnose and solve problems. We want them to have the confidence to take the initiative

in doing so, within an awareness of their own limitations.

This graduate capability is supported by:

### **Learning outcomes**

- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Enhancement of independent research and writing skills.

### **Assessment tasks**

- Critical Review
- Essay

## **Creative and Innovative**

Our graduates will also be capable of creative thinking and of creating knowledge. They will be imaginative and open to experience and capable of innovation at work and in the community. We want them to be engaged in applying their critical, creative thinking.

This graduate capability is supported by:

### **Learning outcomes**

- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.

### **Assessment task**

- Critical Review

## **Effective Communication**

We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication technologies as appropriate.

This graduate capability is supported by:

## **Learning outcomes**

- Development and application of the skills involved in philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Enhancement of independent research and writing skills.

## **Assessment tasks**

- Participation
- Critical Review
- Peer review exercise
- Essay

## **Engaged and Ethical Local and Global citizens**

As local citizens our graduates will be aware of indigenous perspectives and of the nation's historical context. They will be engaged with the challenges of contemporary society and with knowledge and ideas. We want our graduates to have respect for diversity, to be open-minded, sensitive to others and inclusive, and to be open to other cultures and perspectives: they should have a level of cultural literacy. Our graduates should be aware of disadvantage and social justice, and be willing to participate to help create a wiser and better society.

This graduate capability is supported by:

## **Learning outcomes**

- The ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of the normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Development of an independent critical perspective, through consideration and analysis of views, arguments and counter-arguments.

## **Assessment tasks**

- Participation
- Critical Review
- Peer review exercise
- Essay

## Socially and Environmentally Active and Responsible

We want our graduates to be aware of and have respect for self and others; to be able to work with others as a leader and a team player; to have a sense of connectedness with others and country; and to have a sense of mutual obligation. Our graduates should be informed and active participants in moving society towards sustainability.

This graduate capability is supported by:

### Learning outcome

- The ability to critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.

### Assessment task

- Participation

## Changes from Previous Offering

Transition towards 'flipped classroom' via introduction of two-hour seminars instead of two-hour lectures. Introduction of peer review exercise to deepen student understanding of assessment criteria, processes and requirements. Reduction to one longer essay rather than two shorter essays (in line with wider faculty practice).

## Changes since First Published

Date	Description
04/08/2014	Change to peer review deadline.