



PHL 341

Action, Virtue and Character

S2 Online 2019

Dept of Philosophy

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Unit Convenor

Mianna Lotz

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Contact via mianna.lotz@mq.edu.au

By appointment

Credit points

3

Prerequisites

(39cp at 100 level or above) 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 attempting to be a good utilitarian 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 that is 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:

Explain and differentiate the range of normative theories and meta-ethical issues

considered.

Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.

Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.

Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Conduct independent research.

General Assessment Information

NOTE: It is expected that students will complete ALL ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS in this unit. You do not need to have passed each assessment to pass the unit, but it is expected that all assessments are attempted.

General Submission Procedure: Essays and presentations (if applicable) must be submitted via TurnItIn at the correct link provided on the Unit iLearn site.

Extensions: Extensions must be sought via the MQ Special Consideration application procedure, in advance of the due date. Extensions will only be granted for medical or equivalent reasons, supported by documentation (medical certificate or equivalent). Please note that workload in other units, and employment outside of university, will not be accepted as grounds for an extension.

LATE SUBMISSION POLICY: Unless a Special Consideration request has been submitted and approved, the following will apply:

(a) Late penalty – two (2) marks out of 100 will be deducted per day for assignments submitted after the due date;

(b) No assignment will be accepted more than seven (7) days (incl. weekends) after the original submission deadline. (c) No late submissions will be accepted for timed assessments – i.e. online test and examination.

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due
<u>Participation and Engagement</u>	25%	No	Continuous
<u>Critical Review</u>	25%	No	See topic schedule
<u>Evaluative Essay</u>	40%	No	11.59pm Fri 1 November
<u>Essay self-assessment</u>	10%	No	11.59pm Fri 1 November

Participation and Engagement

Due: **Continuous**

Weighting: **25%**

Internal: (i) Active and high quality participation in **8/10** seminars; **AND** (ii) Submission of **written contributions to four** sets of Discussion Questions, two from each half of semester. **Written submissions must be given to Dr Lotz in hard copy at the start of the seminar on the day of the relevant topic.** Individual feedback will not be given on written submissions. Instead, provided the submissions meet the requirements set out on the Task Outline for Participation, you will receive full marks of 5% for each of the four submissions. An additional 5% will be allocated for students who actively participate in all of the required seminars.

Online: (i) Post a **prepared contribution to four** sets of Discussion Questions on the online Discussion Forum (two from each half of semester) **AND** (ii) post **four comments** on other students' responses (two from each half of semester) on topics different from those you answered yourself. **Contributions must be posted by midnight of the night before the following week's seminar in order to count towards your Participation and Engagement mark.** Individual feedback will not be given on contributions or responses. Instead, provided the contributions meet the requirements set out on the Task Outline for Participation, you will receive full marks of 5% for each of the four posts. An additional 5% will be allocated for your four responses to other students' posts.

This task will be assessed according to the following criteria: Engagement (participation frequency meets requirement); Quality of contributions; Demonstration of familiarity with topic and readings. A marking rubric and detailed task outline for this task will be supplied on the iLearn homepage.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Explain and differentiate the range of normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Critical Review

Due: **See topic schedule**

Weighting: **25%**

Submit a critical review (800 words maximum) on one of the Required unit readings of your choice. **Due date:** midnight of the night **before** that week's seminar. **Submission:** via the relevant iLearn link under 'Assessment'.

Note for Internal students: It is expected that you will come to the relevant Seminar and speak for a few minutes about your critical point. This will not be assessed but is an expectation, and time will be allocated to hearing these points of critical analysis.

This task will be assessed according to the following criteria: Mechanics (length, structure, written expression); Comprehension (clear and accurate exposition of key points); Critical analysis (quality of analysis of strengths and weaknesses); and Sources (correct citation practices).

A marking rubric and detailed task outline for this task will be supplied on the iLearn homepage. Please refer to, and closely follow, the instructions set out in the Task Outline.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Evaluative Essay

Due: **11.59pm Fri 1 November**

Weighting: **40%**

Write an evaluative essay (1800 words maximum) 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).

This task will be assessed according to the following criteria: Mechanics (length, structure, written expression); Comprehension (clear exposition of key points); Argument (quality of critical analysis and evaluation); and Sources (relevance and proper citation practices). A marking rubric and detailed task outline for this task will be supplied on the iLearn homepage.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Explain and differentiate the range of normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Conduct independent research.

Essay self-assessment

Due: **11.59pm Fri 1 November**

Weighting: **10%**

Complete and submit (with your essay) a self-assessment of your essay, using the essay rubric and criteria. You must:

- (i) score your essay against each criteria, and
- (ii) write a short (1-2 paragraphs) general statement of what you regard to be the strengths and weaknesses in your essay, where you see room for improvement, and aspects or issues you had difficulty with.

NOTE: This must be submitted separately to your essay submission, via the 'Essay Self-Assessment' submission link on the iLearn page. Please use the essay marking rubric provided on iLearn under 'Assessment'.

This task will be assessed according to the following criteria: Quality, clarity and accuracy of self-assessment. The essay marking rubric and task outline for this task will be supplied on the iLearn homepage.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Delivery and Resources

Teaching in this unit will be by seminar format. **Internal students** attend one two-hour interactive seminar and an optional follow-up tutorial per week. Students are expected to remain up-to-date with reading and come prepared for discussion, as well as meeting the Participation and Engagement requirements detailed under 'Assessment'. Seminars will be fully recorded. **Online students** are expected to participate online via the iLearn Discussion Board on a weekly basis, responding to both set questions and seminar content to meet the Participation and Engagement requirements detailed under 'Assessment'. **Online students must complete their online responses to other students' posts within one week of each seminar topic.**

Please check Timetables for confirmation of days/times and venues.

REQUIRED READING: All required reading in this unit can be found in the *PHL341 Agency Virtue and Character 2019* unit reader, available via online order from the Co-Op Bookstore.

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 1): 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 8): 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 15): 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 22): 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 (Aug 29): 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: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): pp. 105-120.

SEMINAR 6 (Sept 5): Challenges to virtue ethics: Can virtue ethics be action-guiding?

Reading:

*James Rachels, 'The Ethics of Virtue'. In James Rachels *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3rd 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 12): 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 16 Sept – Fri 27 Sept (inclusive) *******

SEMINAR 8 (OCT 3): 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 9–12): VIRTUE, CHARACTER AND CHARACTER-SKEPTICISM

SEMINAR 9 (Oct 10): 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.

WEEK 10 (Oct 17): NO SEMINAR THIS WEEK.

SEMINAR 10 (Oct 24): Defending character PLUS essay writing tips.

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: Essay preparation and consultation week. No seminar this week. Consultation, essay preparation and submission.

*****ESSAYS AND ESSAY SELF-ASSESSMENTS DUE: 11.59pm FRIDAY 1 November*****

****** SEMESTER ENDS ******

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central \(https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central\)](https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

- [Academic Appeals Policy](#)
- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Academic Progression Policy](#)
- [Assessment Policy](#)
- [Fitness to Practice Procedure](#)
- [Grade Appeal Policy](#)
- [Complaint Management Procedure for Students and Members of the Public](#)
- [Special Consideration Policy](#) (**Note:** *The Special Consideration Policy is effective from 4 December 2017 and replaces the Disruption to Studies Policy.*)

Undergraduate students seeking more policy resources can visit the [Student Policy Gateway](https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/student-policy-gateway) (<https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/student-policy-gateway>). It is your one-stop-shop for the key policies you need to know about throughout your undergraduate student journey.

If you would like to see all the policies relevant to Learning and Teaching visit [Policy Central](http://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central) (<http://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/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/study/getting-started/student-conduct>

Results

Results published on platform other than [eStudent](#), (eg. iLearn, Coursera etc.) or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au or if you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

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) 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

If you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/information_technology/help/.

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

Graduate Capabilities

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

- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Assessment task

- Critical Review

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

- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Assessment tasks

- Participation and Engagement
- Essay self-assessment

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

- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Assessment task

- Participation and Engagement

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

- Explain and differentiate the range of normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant

literature.

- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Conduct independent research.

Assessment tasks

- Participation and Engagement
- Critical Review
- Evaluative Essay
- Essay self-assessment

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

- Explain and differentiate the range of normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Conduct independent research.

Assessment tasks

- Participation and Engagement
- Critical Review
- Evaluative Essay
- Essay self-assessment

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

- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Conduct independent research.

Assessment task

- Evaluative Essay

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

- Effectively apply the skills involved in clear philosophical reasoning and argument.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.
- Conduct independent research.

Assessment tasks

- Participation and Engagement
- Evaluative Essay
- Essay self-assessment

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

- Explain and differentiate the range of normative theories and meta-ethical issues considered.
- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.
- Articulate and defend an independent critical perspective, achieved through close critical consideration and analysis of competing views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Assessment tasks

- Participation and Engagement
- Evaluative 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

- Critically analyze and evaluate theories and arguments presented in the relevant literature.

Assessment task

- Participation and Engagement

Changes from Previous Offering

Assessment restructured to provide opportunity to use earlier assessment (Critical Review) as preparation for longer essay.