

Making good decisions: moral theory and real-world methods
University of Oslo, February 2010

This week-long course of ten seminars will focus on the question “What is a good decision, and why?” We will use materials from ancient and contemporary ethics and moral theory to explore this question. We will look particularly at the question whether systematic moral theory can help us make good decisions, and if not, what might be the alternative to it.

One or two key readings are given for each of the ten seminars. A book which roughly tracks much of the content of the course is my own *Ethics and Experience* (London: Acumen 2009).

1. The prospect of a science of measurement: Plato’s *Protagoras*

Key readings:

Plato’s *Protagoras*

Martha Nussbaum, “The *Protagoras*: a science of practical reasoning”, in *The Fragility of Goodness*.

2. Aristotle: perception and imprecision in ethics

Key readings:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Books 1,2, 4, 6

Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, esp. Ch.4

Martha Nussbaum, “Non-scientific deliberation”, in *The Fragility of Goodness*

Myles Burnyeat, “Aristotle on learning to be good”, in A.E.Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*

3. Philosophical utilitarianism: from intuition to system

Key readings:

H.Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*

Philip Pettit, “Consequentialism”, in P.Singer, ed., *Blackwell Companion to Ethics*.

Bernard Williams, “The point of view of the universe”, in *Making Sense of Humanity*

4. The Kantian construction

Key readings:

Immanuel Kant, *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*

Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*

5. Combined views

Derek Parfit, *Climbing the Mountain* (available online)

6. Virtue ethics: theory or anti-theory?

Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*

Bernard Williams, “The primacy of dispositions”, in *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*

7. Particularism: the anti-theory theory?

Jonathan Dancy, *Ethics without Principles* (with my online review on Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews)

S.McKeever and M.Ridge, *Principled Ethics* (with Daniel Star's online review on Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews)

8. Intuitionism

Philip Stratton-Lake, ed., *Ethical Intuitionism* (especially the essays by McNaughton, Baldwin, Gaut, and Gibbard)

Bernard Williams, "What does intuitionism imply?", in *Making Sense of Humanity*

9. Moral perception

John McDowell, "Values and secondary properties" in *Mind, World, and Ethics*

Timothy Chappell, "Moral perception", *Philosophy* 2008

10. Closing discussion

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