

PH1522 How Should One Live?

Team-Taught Course
Sample (Partial) Syllabus for Spring 2026

Department of Philosophy
University of Aberdeen

Course Coordinator & Lecturer (3/10 weeks): Dr Eilidh Beaton

Course Description

What does it mean to live a good life? How do we determine what is good or bad, right or wrong? Are some ways of living better or worse for us?

In this introductory ethics course, we will look at some central philosophical approaches to answering these questions. Traditions we may engage with include virtue ethics, Chinese ethics, deontology, consequentialism, and feminist ethics. These approaches make radically different recommendations about how to live, from developing a good character, to roaming freely and being open to alternative perspectives, to following fundamental moral rules, to bringing about good overall outcomes, to acting responsibly in relations of interdependence with others. Assessing the merits and shortcomings of these divergent accounts will be one of our key tasks in this course.

Along the way, we will read the original work of some of the most important scholars in the history of moral philosophy, such as Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Kant, and Mill. We may also explore some engaging contemporary texts, like influential work in feminist ethics.

Throughout the course, students will be encouraged to think deeply, discuss complex ethical topics openly and charitably, and explore their own views about how to live a good life.

Partial Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Required Reading
Week 7	Kant Part 1	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals</i> . Section I.
Week 8	Kant Part 2	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> . Section II, 4:420-4:434.
Week 9	Utilitarianism	John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapter 2 – What Utilitarianism Is.

Further Reading

Kant

Primary Sources

- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, all sections.
- Immanuel Kant, "On a supposed right to lie because of Philanthropic Concerns". Available [here](#).

Secondary Sources

- Charles Mills, 'Kant's Untermenschen', in *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy* ed. by Andrew Valls (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 169-193. See especially section 2, 'Kant's Racial Views and Their Implications'.
- Robert Johnson and Adam Cureton, 'Kant's Moral Philosophy', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2025 edition) ed. by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman.
- Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: A commentary* (Oxford: OUP, 2011)
- Paul Guyer (ed.), *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: Critical Essays* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998)
- Thomas E. Hill (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)
- Halla Kim, *Kant and the Foundations of Morality* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

Utilitarianism

Primary Sources

- Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* – see especially chapters 1, 3, 4.
- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, whole book.

Secondary Sources

- Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas'. Available [here](#).
- Julia Driver, 'The History of Utilitarianism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022 edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, available [here](#).
- Alan Ryan, *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (London: MacMillan, 1970).
- John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- David Lyons (ed), *Mill's Utilitarianism: Critical Essays* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).