

Education for Justice (E4J)
University Module Series: Integrity & Ethics

Module 3

Ethics and Society*

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Introduction

This Module explores the importance of ethics to society and the relationship between these two concepts. It is designed to be used by lecturers to help their students understand the concept of society – sometimes defined as humankind as a whole, sometimes in relation to a particular place – and to investigate the ways in which ethical approaches can be applied to increase our understanding of society, and ultimately our attempts to improve it. It also aims to illustrate that ethics is part of the fabric of any dimension of society. Particular attention is given to social contract theory and the work of John Rawls, with specific reference to the concepts of justice and fairness.

The Module is a resource for lecturers. It provides an outline for a three-hour class but can be used for shorter or longer sessions, or extended into a full-fledged course (see: Guidelines to develop a stand-alone course).

* Developed under UNODC's Education for Justice (E4J) initiative, a component of the Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration, this Module forms part of the E4J University Module Series on Integrity and Ethics and is accompanied by a Teaching Guide. The full range of E4J materials includes university modules on Anti-Corruption, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Cybercrime, Firearms, Organized Crime, Trafficking in Persons/Smuggling of Migrants, Counter-Terrorism, as well as Integrity and Ethics. All E4J university modules provide suggestions for in-class exercises, student assessments, slides, and other teaching tools that lecturers can adapt to their contexts, and integrate into existing university courses and programmes. All E4J university modules engage with existing academic research and debates, and may contain information, opinions and statements from a variety of sources, including press reports and independent experts. All E4J university modules, and the terms and conditions of their use, can be found on the [E4J website](https://www.unodc.org/e4j/).

Learning outcomes

- Define the concept of society.
- Understand the relationship between ethics and society.
- Describe different theoretical approaches that inform this issue, with specific reference to social contract theory.
- Articulate and defend a preferred position on the relationship between ethics and society while appreciating its limitations.

Key Issues

Does society need ethics? Can we envision a society without ethics? These questions address the very important relationship *between* ethics and society, and are informed by more fundamental questions such as the following:

- Is ethics inherent in human beings and therefore embedded within society (which would imply that the laws of nature are universal and eternal, and can be discovered by reason)?
- Is ethics a human construct and therefore dependent on its creators (and by implication subject to both societal context and constant change)?
- Is the study of ethics and its role in society important for humans?

The concept of “society” is one of the most pervasive of all, and this Module investigates different definitions of society. One of the many [dictionary](#) definitions of society is that it is “a community, nation, or broad grouping of people having common traditions, institutions, and collective activities and interests” (Merriam-Webster). Although we sometimes refer to the global society, there are many different societies that are defined in different ways (sometimes controversially) based on geographical, cultural and other boundaries. One of the most popular ways to dissect society conceptually is to make the distinction between three sectors: the public sector (government), private sector (business enterprises) and civil society (non-profit organizations). Although the concept of ethics can also be questioned, the point of departure in this Module is to acknowledge and recap the main ethical theories without asking the meta-question: Is there such a thing as ethics?

This Module focuses mostly on the Western concepts of society and ethics, but also acknowledges the relevance of non-Western perspectives, such as Eastern, African or Latin American philosophies. Lecturers who wish to explore Eastern philosophy in more detail are referred to an introductory discussion of by James Fieser (2017). As opposed to the more secular approach of Western philosophy, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism offer alternative approaches to and explanations for the concept of society. Although it is difficult to generalize, these approaches tend to be more closely associated with religious traditions. Moreover, similarly to early Greek philosophy, they often do not clearly distinguish between personal, social and political elements. The [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) describes the tradition of Chinese ethical thought as follows:

[It] is centrally concerned with questions about how one ought to live: what goes into a worthwhile life, how to weigh duties toward family versus duties toward strangers, whether human nature is predisposed to be morally good or bad, how one ought to relate to the non-human world, the extent to which one ought to become involved in reforming the larger social and political structures of one's society, and how one ought to conduct oneself when in a position of influence or power. (Wong, 2017)

As is often the case with a Western perspective, Greece is a good place to start a discussion of the concept of society (Frisby and Sayer, 1986). The Greeks did not have a separate word for society, but referred to society in combination with references to community and association (*koinonia*). This word was used both within the political as well as a household context and already contains an ethical dimension since a relationship with the concept of justice is implied. Of course, the fact that only those who were not slaves were deemed qualified to discuss these matters also illustrates some interesting ethical dimensions about freedom which were not apparent at the time.

Fast forward a few hundred years, and due mostly to the influence of Christianity, the Greeks' unified concept of society was discontinued. The work of Thomas Aquinas, for example, makes a distinction between what belongs on earth (*civitas terrena*) and what belongs with God (*civitas Dei*), with concomitant responsibilities to obey secular as well as divine laws (Frisby and Sayer, 1986, p. 16).

All the main ethical theories can be applied to different actions within or dimensions of society. Some of the most popular and well-known normative theories are utilitarianism, where ethical decisions are made based on an assessment of the likely consequences of an action; deontology, where decisions are made based on rights and duties; ethics of care, where morality depends on care for the wellbeing of others; and virtue ethics, where the focus is not on assessing the action, but rather the individual involved. These theories are discussed in further detail in [Module 1](#) and [Module 9](#) of the present module series.

Within the secular tradition, the idea of a social contract is critical to understanding the concept of society. In essence, a social contract comprises the voluntary agreement of individuals for society to be regulated in a way that would benefit both society and individuals, based on the ethical dimensions of justice and fairness. The social contract has been defined as follows: "people live together in society in accordance with an agreement that establishes moral and political rules of behavior. Some people believe that if we live according to a social contract, we can live morally by our own choice and not because a divine being requires it" (Ethics Unwrapped, 2018).

A brief summary of the concept of the social contract is provided by the [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#): it traces the history of the term, starting with the Greek philosophers to Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Rawls (D'Agostino, 2017). The table below provides extracts from the Stanford Encyclopedia's discussion of a few of these philosophers.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Thomas Hobbes</u></p> <p>The 17th Century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes is now widely regarded as one of a handful of truly great political philosophers, whose masterwork Leviathan rivals in significance the political writings of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, and Rawls. Hobbes is famous for his early and elaborate development of what has come to be known as “social contract theory”, the method of justifying political principles or arrangements by appeal to the agreement that would be made among suitably situated rational, free, and equal persons. He is infamous for having used the social contract method to arrive at the astonishing conclusion that we ought to submit to the authority of an absolute - undivided and unlimited - sovereign power (Lloyd, 2014).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>John Locke</u></p> <p>John Locke (1632–1704) is among the most influential political philosophers of the modern period. In the Two Treatises of Government, he defended the claim that men are by nature free and equal against claims that God had made all people naturally subject to a monarch. He argued that people have rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and property, that have a foundation independent of the laws of any particular society. Locke used the claim that men are naturally free and equal as part of the justification for understanding legitimate political government as the result of a social contract where people in the state of nature conditionally transfer some of their rights to the government in order to better ensure the stable, comfortable enjoyment of their lives, liberty, and property. Since governments exist by the consent of the people in order to protect the rights of the people and promote the public good, governments that fail to do so can be resisted and replaced with new governments. Locke is thus also important for his defense of the right of revolution (Tuckness, 2016).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Jean-Jacques Rousseau</u></p> <p>Jean-Jacques Rousseau remains an important figure in the history of philosophy, both because of his contributions to political philosophy and moral psychology and because of his influence on later thinkers. Rousseau’s own view of philosophy and philosophers was firmly negative, seeing philosophers as the post-hoc rationalizers of self-interest, as apologists for various forms of tyranny, and as playing a role in the alienation of the modern individual from humanity’s natural impulse to compassion. The concern that dominates Rousseau’s work is to find a way of preserving human freedom in a world where human beings are increasingly dependent on one another for the satisfaction of their needs (Bertram, 2017).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Immanuel Kant</u></p> <p>Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is the central figure in modern philosophy. He synthesized early modern rationalism and empiricism, set the terms for much of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy, and continues to exercise a significant influence today in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and other fields. The fundamental idea of Kant's “critical philosophy” - especially in his three Critiques: the Critique of Pure Reason (1781, 1787), the Critique of Practical Reason (1788), and the Critique of the Power of Judgment (1790) - is human autonomy. He argues that the human understanding is the source of the general laws of nature that structure all our experience; and that human reason gives itself the moral law, which is our basis for belief in God, freedom, and immortality (Rohlf, 2016).</p>

Table 1: Extracts from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

[John Rawls](#) (1921 – 2002) was an American political philosopher whose most famous contribution was his theory of justice as fairness (Wenar, 2017). The work of Rawls is addressed in Exercise 3 of this Module. In the following quote he discusses one of the most critical ethical characteristics of society – the tension between the common interest and the individual’s interest:

Society ... is typically marked by a conflict as well as by an identity of

interest. There is an identity of interest since social cooperation makes possible a better life for all than any would have if each were to live solely by his own efforts. There is a conflict of interests since persons are not indifferent as to how the greater benefits produced by their collaboration are distributed, for in order to pursue their ends they each prefer a larger to a lesser share. (Rawls, 1971, p. 4)

Of course, philosophy does not offer the only entry point for discussions about society. In fact, an entire academic discipline – sociology – focuses on the scientific study of structures, processes and relationships within society. Sociology can be linked to the concepts of integrity and ethics in different ways. Even if the purpose of sociology is defined narrowly as an “objective” study of aspects of society, many of those aspects (e.g. class structure or societal deviance) have strong ethical dimensions. In addition, the less neutral definition of sociology would imply a normative dimension, i.e. that the purpose of sociology is to *improve* society through scientific study.

One of the most influential figures in the establishment of the sociological tradition is [Max Weber](#) (1864 – 1920). Weber was a German sociologist and political economist who wrote extensively about capitalism, and his work has often been juxtaposed with the work of Karl Marx (Kim, 2017). The following view on capitalism comes from his introduction to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*:

The impulse to acquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money, has in itself nothing to do with capitalism. This impulse exists and has existed among waiters, physicians, coachmen, artists, prostitutes, dishonest officials, soldiers, nobles, crusaders, gamblers, and beggars. One may say that it has been common to all sorts and conditions of men at all times and in all countries of the earth, wherever the objective possibility of it is or has been given. It should be taught in the kindergarten of cultural history that this naïve idea of capitalism must be given up once and for all. Unlimited greed for gain is not in the least identical with capitalism, and is still less its spirit. Capitalism may even be identical with the restraint, or at least a rational tempering, of this irrational impulse. But capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise. For it must be so: in a wholly capitalistic order of society, an individual capitalistic enterprise which did not take advantage of its opportunities for profitmaking would be doomed to extinction (Weber, 2001, pp. xxxi-xxxii).

Weber introduced the distinction between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility in a famous lecture, [Politics as a Vocation](#), which he delivered to radical students in Germany in 1918. In the lecture, Weber describes two different world views. The ethics of conviction presents the world of good intentions, sometimes exemplified by people acting on the basis of religious beliefs. For example, a Christian does what is right and leaves the outcomes to God. But the ethics of responsibility looks beyond conviction and intention, and takes the consequences of action (or

inaction) into account. According to Weber, humans should resist evil with force, otherwise they will be responsible for its getting out of hand. Although Weber's frame of reference was the Christian tradition, it could be argued that the same tension between conviction and responsibility would also apply in other religious traditions.

It is the second approach (ethics of responsibility) that implies ethical responsibilities in terms of how we understand our position in society. Discussions about ethics and society include many specialized applications of ethics: business ethics and corporate responsibility, media ethics and medical ethics, to mention a few. Questions about how to respond to fake news, social inequality, drone warfare, artificial intelligence, political refugees, religious intolerance or climate change all have substantial links to society. This Module does not address any of the applied areas in detail, but focuses on the higher level issue of the relationship between ethics and society, with specific reference to the concepts of justice, fairness and trust. Fukuyama states that "a nation's well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society" (1996, p. 7). Some of these topics will be addressed in more detail in other modules of the E4J Integrity and Ethics Module Series, for example religious intolerance in [Module 5](#) (Ethics, Diversity and Pluralism) and fake news in [Module 10](#) (Media Ethics).

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Exercises

This section contains suggestions for in-class and pre-class educational exercises, while a post-class assignment for assessing student understanding of the Module is suggested in a separate section.

The exercises in this section are most appropriate for classes of up to 50 students, where students can be easily organized into small groups in which they discuss cases or conduct activities before group representatives provide feedback to the entire class. Although it is possible to have the same small group structure in large classes comprising a few hundred students, it is more challenging and the lecturer might wish to adapt facilitation techniques to ensure sufficient time for group discussions as well as providing feedback to the entire class. The easiest way to deal with the requirement for small group discussion in a large class is to ask students to discuss the issues with the four or five students sitting close to them. Given time limitations, not all groups will be able to provide feedback in each exercise. It is recommended that the lecturer makes random selections and tries to ensure that all groups get the opportunity to provide feedback at least once during the session. If time permits, the lecturer could facilitate a discussion in plenary after each group has provided feedback.

All exercises in this section are appropriate for both graduate and undergraduate students. However, as students' prior knowledge and exposure to these issues vary

widely, decisions about appropriateness of exercises should be based on their educational and social context. The lecturer is encouraged to relate and connect each exercise to the key issues of the Module.

Exercise 1: Today's News

Students are encouraged to bring a daily newspaper to class or to access any news-related web site. They are given five minutes for individual preparation – the task is to explore the front page or headlines and to identify three to five stories with a clear ethical component. After five minutes, small groups are formed (existing syndicate groups, if applicable) to discuss and share examples (10 minutes). Each group is required to select one example to present to the class as a whole (15 minutes).

➤ Lecturer guidelines

- Have one example ready to illustrate what is required (articles about legislation to protect consumers or the environment and measures to accommodate refugees or to promote anti-corruption are a few examples that could be useful).
- Demonstrate clearly what the ethical component is in the example and instruct groups to look for similar relationships when they select examples to share with the class.
- When groups present to the class, the lecturer should use a flip-chart or board to capture the main issues.

Exercise 2: The Everyday Ethicist

Watch the following talk: [The Significance of Ethics and Ethics Education in Daily Life](#). This is a TEDx talk in which Michael Burroughs discusses different kinds of ethical issues we face in our daily life. Because we all have to make ethical decisions on a daily basis he describes the concept of “everyday ethicists”.

Students are paired in groups of two and three to discuss the video and in particular the following questions: What is the relationship between ethics and society? What is the origin of our own ethical standards and the ethical standards of society? The lecturer should invite some students to provide feedback.

➤ Lecturer guidelines

- Have one example ready to illustrate what is required (for example, ask students whether they believe that they would have had the same ethical standards if they had been born in a different part of the world).
- Refer to one or more of the ethical theories discussed in [Module 1](#), and refer to the material addressed in the Core Issues section of this Module.
- When groups present to the class, the lecturer should use a flip-chart or board to capture the main issues.

Exercise 3: Expedition to Mars¹

This exercise comprises a simulation of John Rawls' Veil of Ignorance thought experiment. It includes the following components (the time allocation is a guideline only and can be adapted by the lecturer according to the circumstances):

- Initial information provided to students via presentation and handout, as well as video (10 minutes)
- Small groups discuss and come up with recommendations (20 minutes)
- Presentations by small groups on recommendations (10 minutes)
- Students vote on best recommendation (5 minutes)
- Individual membership of roles revealed (5 minutes)
- Students meet in groups defined by roles (20 minutes)
- Presentations by five different roles (20 minutes)
- Debrief by facilitator (10 minutes)

The lecturer starts this session with the one or both of the following videos to set the scene:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMTLBhoCM8k>. This clip provides an animated overview of the technology that might enable the colonization of Mars, as well as the typical activities that might characterize a Martian colony.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnY23KEkZPY>. This clip shows SpaceX CEO Elon Musk unveiling his plan for colonizing Mars. It was delivered in 2016 at the 67th International Astronautical Congress in Guadalajara, Mexico. The purpose of using the video is to show to students that this case study is no longer simply science fiction, but could soon be a reality.

Each student receives the following message in the form of a printed handout:

Dear Student:

Congratulations! You have been selected to be a member of the first human colony that will be established on Mars. You will stay on Mars for five years and then return to Earth. You have been pre-assigned to one of the following roles, but you will only be informed what this role is at a later stage: builder, administrator, entertainer, scientist or caterer. No transfers will be allowed from one role to another – you will have to fulfil this role for the duration of your stay. **You will receive your allocated role only once you reach your destination.**

The roles are defined as follows:

- The **builders** have to build a house for each member of the colony. They will have to work 14 hours a day for the first year in order to complete all the houses (basic temporary shelter is available while construction takes place). For the final four years they only need to do minor maintenance and are not expected to work more than two hours per day. Builders will comprise 60% of the members of the colony.
- The **administrators** will be responsible for law and order and the general administration of the colony. They will have sole authority to resolve all disputes and to decide on appropriate punishment in the case of transgression of rules. They will be

¹ This exercise was developed by Prof Daniel Malan of the University of Stellenbosch Business School, South Africa.

expected to work eight hours per day for the duration of the five years. Administrators will comprise 10% of the members of the colony.

- The **entertainers** will be responsible for all social and educational events in the colony. They will have to arrange regular events such as plays, musical events, art classes, discussion groups, etc. The entertainers will be expected to work four hours per day for the duration of the five years, but mostly in the evenings. Entertainers will comprise 10% of the members of the colony.
- **Scientists** will only be responsible for scientific research, which is the core objective of the entire expedition. They need to develop interventions to improve the quality of life of all members of the Mars community, but they are also conducting highly confidential research which they are not allowed to share with anyone. Scientists can determine their own working hours and will comprise only 5% of the colony.
- The **caterers** are responsible for feeding the whole colony. This involves planting crops, harvesting, and preparing food. They will need to work eight hours per day for the duration of the five years. Caterers will comprise 15% of the members of the colony.

As mentioned, you will receive your allocated role only once you reach your destination. Your task as a group is to agree on a few rules of engagement (a social contract) for your colony **before your arrival**. You have to reach agreement on the following issues:

- How will you determine the order in which completed houses will be allocated? Who will move in first and who will move in last?
- Should the houses all be the same or should they be different? For example, will the first houses be smaller than the later houses, in order to reward the people who have to wait longer? Will your status be taken into account in terms of the house that you will receive?
- You have to determine the salaries that will be paid to all members of the colony. You have an average of \$10,000 per month per person to spend, but you can determine how much each position will earn, and whether you want to create a mechanism whereby bonuses will be paid. Money will be paid into earth accounts, since no money is required on Mars.

Afterwards, students are presented with the following summary (or an alternative presentation) of the concept of the Veil of Ignorance, accessible at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/original-position/>:

The original position is a central feature of John Rawls's social contract account of justice, "justice as fairness," set forth in *A Theory of Justice* ... It is designed to be a fair and impartial point of view that is to be adopted in our reasoning about fundamental principles of justice. In taking up this point of view, we are to imagine ourselves in the position of free and equal persons who jointly agree upon and commit themselves to principles of social and political justice. The main distinguishing feature of the original position is "the veil of ignorance": to insure impartiality of judgment, the parties are deprived of all knowledge of their personal characteristics and social and historical circumstances. They do know of certain fundamental interests they all have, plus general facts about psychology, economics, biology, and other social and natural sciences. The parties in the original position are presented with a list of the main

conceptions of justice drawn from the tradition of social and political philosophy, and are assigned the task of choosing from among these alternatives the conception of justice that best advances their interests in establishing conditions that enable them to effectively pursue their final ends and fundamental interests. Rawls contends that the most rational choice for the parties in the original position are two principles of justice: The first guarantees the equal basic rights and liberties needed to secure the fundamental interests of free and equal citizens and to pursue a wide range of conceptions of the good. The second principle provides fair equality of educational and employment opportunities enabling all to fairly compete for powers and positions of office; and it secures for all a guaranteed minimum of all-purpose means (including income and wealth) individuals need to pursue their interests and to maintain their self-respect as free and equal persons.

➤ Lecturer guidelines

Depending on the time available, the lecturer can decide to make the two videos compulsory preparatory work. Use the first part of the class to give clear instructions, and – whenever small groups are engaged in discussion – move from group to group to answer any questions they might have. The general flow of the session is as follows:

- The groups should come up with recommendations on the three issues: order of the houses, size of the houses and salaries. Inevitably the discussions on salaries will dominate. The lecturer can provide a spreadsheet template to facilitate discussion, where different salaries can be tested – remember that the average has to be \$10,000 per person; therefore differences between the roles will have an impact in proportion to the size of the group. For example, it is much easier to accommodate a very high salary for the scientists than it would be for the builders.
- The lecturer should capture the feedback from the groups in a table in order to facilitate the voting process. It is advised to vote on each aspect separately, e.g. one group can receive the most votes for their view on the houses while another can win the salary vote. The final “social contract” should be displayed to the class before the roles are revealed.
- There are different ways in which the roles can be revealed, and this would depend on the size of the class. If hard copy handouts of the instructions are handed out to a small class, an individual code can be added at the bottom of each copy. The lecturer can then indicate the meaning of the code, e.g. 1 = builders, 2 = administrators, and so on. Alternatively, the lecturer can determine other ways to do the allocation, e.g. if your birthday is in January you are a builder, or if your surname starts with an A, B or C you are an administrator, and so on. The actual proportions of the roles in class do not have to reflect the percentages as they are described in the handout.
- When students meet in groups defined by roles, they should be instructed to discuss the fairness of the allocation. For example, it is likely that the builders – when they meet as a group – will not be satisfied with their salaries compared to some of the other roles. All the groups (defined by role) should prepare a

short presentation in which they assess their own position and make some recommendations on changes. The idea is not to enter into debate about actual changes to the original social contract, but simply to experience the difference between discussing something when you do not know your role, and then to discuss the same issues once you know what your role will be.

- The lecturer wraps up the session with a brief explanation of the original description by Rawls, and then explains to students that they have just had a personal experience of one of the most famous thought experiments in philosophy.

Exercise 4: What do I owe society?

The lecturer explains to the students that the university environment forms part of society. The different sectors of society and the roles that they play are discussed: e.g. the public sector is involved through funding and regulation of university and degree requirements, the private sector is involved through the production and sale of text books and other support material or through the creation of infrastructure, and the students themselves – especially once qualified and working in a professional environment – will be in a position to make a contribution to society. The lecturer then introduces the question: What do I owe society? The question can be discussed in two distinct ways:

- Given the investment that society has made to educate me, how should I behave while I am a student? Is it acceptable to get involved in activities such as buying or selling exam papers or written assignments, or plagiarism?
- What do I owe society once I graduate? Should I consider societal needs when I make a decision on where I want to work?

➤ Lecturer guidelines

- Depending on the time available, the lecturer can ask students to discuss in small groups first, or simply solicit individual responses from the floor.
- Be prepared to let the students engage in debate. While there may be broad consensus on undesirable behavior such as plagiarism, the degree to which societal needs should influence career choices will be controversial.

Possible class structure

This section contains recommendations for a teaching sequence and timing intended to achieve learning outcomes through a three-hour class. The lecturer may wish to disregard or shorten some of the segments below in order to give more time to other elements, including introduction, icebreakers, conclusion or short breaks. The structure could also be adapted for shorter or longer classes, given that the class durations vary across countries.

Society and ethics (35 minutes)

- The students engage in Exercise 1: they are given five minutes for individual preparation – the task is to explore the front page of a newspaper or online headlines of a news site and to identify three to five stories with a clear ethical

component. After five minutes small groups are formed to discuss and share examples (10 minutes). Each group is required to select one example to present to the class as a whole (15 minutes).

Presentation on the importance of ethics to society (30 minutes)

- The lecturer presents on the definition of society as well as the main ethical theories.
- Depending on whether the students have completed Module 1, this session could be shortened.
- Exercise 2 is completed: Students are paired in groups of two and three to discuss the video and in particular the following questions: What is the relationship between ethics and society? What is the origin of our own ethical standards and the ethical standards of society?

Expedition to Mars exercise (90 minutes)

This exercise comprises a simulation of John Rawls' Veil of Ignorance thought experiment. It includes the following components (timing can be adjusted if required):

- Initial information provided to students via presentation and handout (10 minutes)
- Small groups discuss and come up with recommendations (20 minutes)
- Presentations by small groups on recommendations (10 minutes)
- Students vote on best recommendation (5 minutes)
- Individual membership of roles revealed (5 minutes)
- Students meet in groups defined by roles (20 minutes)
- Presentations by five different roles (20 minutes)
- Debrief by facilitator (10 minutes)

See more detailed guidelines in Exercise 3 of this Module.

Plenary discussion (25 minutes)

- The lecturer facilitates a detailed Q&A session with students in which the main theoretical issues as well as practical applications are summarized.
- Specific links to other modules of the E4J Module Series on Integrity and Ethics should also be pointed out.

Core reading

This section provides a list of (mostly) open access materials that the lecturer could ask the students to read before taking a class based on this Module.

The Significance of Ethics and Ethics Education in Daily Life https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8juebyo_Z4 » This is a TEDx talk in which Dr Michael Burroughs discusses different kinds of ethical issues we face in our daily life. Because we all have to make ethical decisions on a daily basis he describes the concept of “everyday ethicists”.

Contemporary Approaches to the Social Contract <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism-contemporary/> » In this discussion by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the following components of the social contract

concept are discussed: the role of the social contract, the parties that are involved, agreement between parties, the object of agreement and the content of the agreement.

Civil Society, United Nations <http://www.un.org/en/sections/resources-different-audiences/civil-society/index.html> » A brief discussion of the concept of civil society, and how this sector is served by the United Nations.

Advanced reading

The following readings are recommended for students interested in exploring the topics of this Module in more detail, and for lecturers teaching the Module:

Blackburn, Simon (2009). *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
» A readable and short introduction to different topics, including his views on threats to ethics, a discussion on ideas like pleasure and happiness as well as some foundational ethical ideas, for example Kant's categorical imperative

Blackburn, Simon (2016). *What Do We Really Know?* London: Quercus. » A continued exploration of ethics; important chapters within the context of this Module are Chapter 7, "Is there such a thing as society?" and Chapter 10, "Why be good?"

Fukuyama, Francis (1996). *Trust: the Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press Paperbacks.

Handy, Charles (1995). *The Empty Raincoat: Making Sense of the Future*. Arrow Business Books. » Ways to make sense of discussions about the future.

McIntosh, Malcolm (2018). *In Search of the Good Society*. Abingdon: Routledge. » Practical advice from a corporate responsibility perspective.

Norman, Richard (1998). *The Moral Philosophers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. » An extremely accessible overview of both ancient and modern moral philosophers. Final chapter, "The ethical world", especially recommended.

Rachels, James (2014). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 8th edition. McGraw-Hill.
» Explores justice and fairness in more detail, and also writes about the moral community. See especially Chapter 13.5, "The moral community" and Chapter 13.6, "Justice and fairness".

Rawls, John (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. » Challenging but important.

Sandel, Michael (2010). *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* New York: Penguin.

Sandel, Michael (2004). *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. » Sandel's books provide an important contribution to our understanding of justice. For a more accessible contribution, his [TED talk](#) is available online.

Williams, Bernard (2006). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis. » Some challenging philosophical arguments. Available from https://butterflyweeds.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/bernard_williams_ethics_and_the_limits_of_philosbookos-org.pdf.

Student assessment

This section provides a suggestion for a post-class assignment for the purpose of assessing student understanding of the Module. Suggestions for pre-class or in-class assignments are provided in the Exercises section.

To assess the students' understanding of the Module, the following post-class assignment is proposed, to be completed within two weeks after the Module:

Select any media article that addresses the relationship between ethics and society. Examples might include fake news, social inequality, drone warfare, artificial intelligence, refugees, religious intolerance, climate change, or *any* topic that would be deemed appropriate and relevant within the specific context. Describe the example in your own words and clearly demonstrate what the relevant issues are. Select an ethical theory (e.g. utilitarianism or deontology) and apply this theory to the issue in order to identify a preferred way to guide decision making and possibly regulation. Maximum length: 1,500 words.

Additional teaching tools

This section includes links to relevant teaching aides such as PowerPoint slides and video material, that could help the lecturer teach the issues covered by the Module. Lecturers can adapt the slides and other resources to their needs.

PowerPoint Presentation

- [Module 3 Presentation on Ethics and Society](#)

Video material

- [The Significance of Ethics and Ethics Education in Daily Life.](#)
- [The McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society at Stanford University.](#)
- A short video of the Centre and its resources is available [here](#).

Guidelines to develop a stand-alone course

This Module provides an outline for a three-hour class, but there is potential to develop its topics further into a stand-alone course. The scope of such a course will be determined by the specific needs of each context, but a possible structure is presented here as a suggestion, using Simon Blackburn's *What Do We Really Know?* (2016) as a reference point.

Session	Topic	Brief description
1	Is there such a thing as society?	Based on Blackburn's chapter that addresses the individual and the group and the relationship between them
2	Am I free?	Based on Blackburn's chapter of choice and responsibility
3	Is there such a thing as ethics?	A meta-ethical discussion about the existence of ethics and morality, based on Norman's chapter "The Ethical World"
4	Natural law	An overview of the concept of natural law and the Blackburn chapter on "What is Human Nature?"
5	Ethics theory	An overview of core ethical theories: consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics
6	Nasty, brutish and short	An overview of the contribution of Thomas Hobbes
7	The Social Contract	An overview of the contribution of John Rawls
8	Trust	Based on the work of Francis Fukuyama, with reference to the concepts of social virtues and prosperity
9	Why be good?	A concluding session based on Blackburn's chapter on annoying behavior and annoying questions