

“Philosophy [...] has no call to create a world of ‘reality’ *de novo*, nor to delve into secrets of Being hidden from common sense and science.... Philosophy as a critical organ becomes in fact a messenger, a liaison officer, making reciprocally intelligible voices speaking provincial tongues, and thereby enlarging as well as rectifying the meanings with which they are charged.” (John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*)

Philosophical ethics does not dictate to us what we should do and how we should live. Rather it questions the notions of what is good and right by which we have always oriented ourselves more or less consciously. It strives to unearth the contents and the presuppositions and consequences of our moral ideas such as guilt, responsibility, freedom, reason, human dignity and open them for scrutiny and thereby to make it possible for us to use them responsibly — for the way we understand and implement moral ideas has consequences that themselves must also be ethically examined. Thus we study the ideas and goals of recent moral reform movements and the problems of moralism.

We take a multi-pronged approach. The focus of teaching lies especially in working through the philosophical tradition of modernity to the present day, which we use on the one hand as the normative foundation of criticism by examining contemporary practices through the recourse to positions in modern ethics; while on the other hand we also critically examine the philosophy of modernity itself in view of its suitability for an ethics of everyday life. In this critique we do not just test theories for internal consistency and coherence but also ask whether they provide real orientation and an adequately differentiated view of lived moral problems. This critique also requires external normative points of view, which we attain partly from our engagement with ancient and non-European traditions of moral thought. In addition we study the possibilities of ethical reflection that have been developed in the various fields of art, in particularly cinema, with an eye to the ethics of everyday life. Thus the Chair for Ethics and Aesthetics is set up even in its methods for collaboration with other fields in the humanities and cultural sciences. We understand our philosophical activity in John Dewey’s sense as a constructive reflection and mediation between the sciences and the arts.