

The Moral Philosophy Seminar remains at the centre of the Leadership Programme. But what is it for?

Let's start with a few things the Moral Philosophy Seminar isn't about. It's not about turning our scholars into philosophers, getting them to think certain things, or changing their views.

The world doesn't need our scholars to be philosophers. The world needs them to be great doctors, lawyers, and diplomats – and there are probably too many philosophers already.

Getting the scholars to see a deep moral truth is way too ambitious. Most professional philosophers can't do that, and they get to think about these issues for much longer.

Suppose half of the scholars were pro-democracy at the start of the year and half were against it. If they've all changed their minds at the end of the year, that's also not obviously a success.



What the Moral Philosophy Seminar is really for is getting scholars to think about what matters most deeply. More importantly, it's about helping them to do this for themselves going forward.

That involves challenging some of our most deeply-held assumptions. One of these is the belief that equality is the marker of a good society, which we looked at in one of our discussions.

Imagine a society where the worst-off actually do ok. They have access to reasonable schools, adequate housing, and decent healthcare. The question we were looking at is whether it matters how much better the elites in this society are. In other words, if there's no absolute poverty, does it matter how rich the wealthiest are? A natural answer is that it doesn't – this is a good society whether the best-off are 10, 100, or 1000 times

better off than the worst. But this challenges the idea that equality is important. Instead, what it seems to indicate is that what matters the most is poverty, not inequality. And that's one example of the kind of thing that we looked at this year.

There's also a close overlap between the Moral Philosophy Seminar and the Business Challenge. What's the best way for a business to be a force for good in the world? Our discussion looks at three companies – drug manufacturer Pfizer, watch company Rolex, and social housing provider Civitas. Which is the best commercially and which is the best morally? Pfizer is responsible for arguably the most important development of the last few decades – the Covid-19 vaccine. But does this make

it a morally good organisation? Rolex generates a lot of cash, which it uses to support local causes in Geneva. But should it be using its money elsewhere? Civitas provides housing for vulnerable individuals. But is it any good from a business perspective?

In short, leaders need a moral compass to help them figure out what matters to them and what they think is important. The point of the Moral Philosophy Seminar is to help them develop this.

Dr Stephen Wright, WHT Academic Fellow



“The best part of this session was reflecting on the different positions backed by real-life examples from our home countries and personal journeys. This brought to the fore that each of our viewpoints is valid for various reasons. It also proved that the best way to reach a consensus is to understand the reasoning behind a stance. As global leaders with different experiences, this is key to working together.”

Annatu Neina Abdulai

Ghana,
MBA,
Mansfield College Kofi Annan Scholar,
Oxford-Weidenfeld and Hoffmann-Said/Lewis



“I really enjoyed Moral Philosophy seminars, which gave us a wonderful opportunity to think about and discuss challenging and pressing issues in today's world. It was really interesting to go from analysing through pre-readings and combining those insights with scholars' perspectives and real-life experiences from various countries. These seminars fostered an appreciation of the value of bringing in and listening to different points of view and taking into account backgrounds and powers affecting our perspectives while also focusing on looking for solutions and common ground.”

Rimma El Joueidi

Ukraine,
MPP,
Hertford, Oxford-Weidenfeld and Hoffmann-
Abraham/ Rausing