

Modern Consequentialism

Syllabus

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Overview

In this seminar, we will discuss (*ethical*) *consequentialism*, the view that only the value of consequences matters to the rightness and wrongness of actions. While a simple version of this view is easy to understand, consequentialism in the modern secondary literature has been advocated in a variety of forms: indirect consequentialism, subjective consequentialism, rule-consequentialism, satisficing consequentialism, scalar consequentialism, and so forth. Some of these modifications of consequentialism have been proposed in response to various objections to consequentialism, for which a wide literature exists now as well.

In this seminar, we will tackle some of these forms of consequentialism, and some of the common objections made against them. We will also see how consequentialism tackles various applied questions. Some basic knowledge of moral philosophy is helpful, but none will be needed.

In general, if you have any questions, concerns or feedback concerning the seminar, I strongly encourage you to email me. (See email address above.)

Requirements

All students are required to fulfil the following tasks:

➤ **Read the Literature**

In the Topic List, you will find a number of readings marked with two asterisks (**). These readings are the basis for the whole seminar, and I expect you to read *all* of them fully and carefully.

➤ **Write a Literature Review**

From my own experience as a student I know that “read the literature!” was never quite enough to motivate me to read (all of) it. For this reason, I expect you to write a *literature review* of *all* (**)-marked readings. In your literature review, you should summarise the main claims of each of the papers. You should also add some comments, questions or critique of the paper in question. There are also questions for each topic section – you can take these as a guide for your literature review.

From reading your reviews I must get the impression that you have read the papers, grasped their central points, and given critical atten-

tion to them. There's not set word limit, but a good review of each paper is usually around 200 words.

Deadline: 15 January, please send per email. If you send your review earlier, I also have a chance to take them into account when preparing for the seminar: for example, if you have questions or critical remarks. *Literature reviews are graded on a pass/fail basis.*

➤ **Give a Presentation**

I expect you to present on one of the topics on the reading list. Presentations should be about 10-15 minutes. I also expect you to be a "discussion leader" for the section you organise. Please note that there is "special" literature for each presentation topic, marked with a "*", in addition to the general literature, marked with "***". Presentations should not be simply a summary of the literature, or a repetition of the arguments in the literature.

Instead, I expect you to shortly present the *argument* of the paper. Presenting an argument is *more than a summary*: it means presenting what you think the premises of the author(s) are, what the structure of the argument is, which steps are relevant and which are unimportant etc. discussing the weaknesses and strengths of that argument. In this sense, a presentation is as if you wrote an essay.

Deadline: 9 January, please send per email. I expect your presentation by this date (slides plus brief notes on the slides). I will send you replies and commentary on your presentation, and I expect you to change your presentation accordingly before the seminar. If you don't use slides, please send me notes on your presentation, or your planned hand-out. *Presentations are graded on a pass/fail basis.*

➤ **Write an Essay (optional)**

There will be opportunities to write an essay if there are more participants than presentation slots. Essays should be 2,000-3,000 words long, and the deadline for them is 15 January.

Like the presentations, essays should be on one of the topics and one of the questions on the list, and they shouldn't be a mere summary or review of the literature; instead, I expect you to try to make your own arguments and points. (See the section below on how to write philosophy.) You also should answer one of the questions on the Topic List, or a question we agree on together. All essays will receive written comments. *Essays are graded on a pass/fail basis.*

➤ **Write a Hausarbeit** (for 6/8cp)

If you want to write a *Hausarbeit*, we will decide together on a topic and the particular shape of the project you want to undertake. The topic must be roughly related to consequentialism, but does not have to be from the topics on the seminar list. It is best that you have a rough idea of what you want before the seminar, so that we can talk about it while I'm in Bayreuth. We'll also discuss formal requirements, deadlines etc. together.

If your Hausarbeit is relevant to one of the topics of the seminar sections, you should present at the seminar. When distributing presen-

tation slots, I'll always give priority to students wishing to write a Hausarbeit.

There will be three strictly enforced deadlines: 31 January for the decision to write a *Hausarbeit* and a one-page proposal (required), 28 February for handing in a draft (optional, strongly recommended), and 31 March for the finished version.

Writing Philosophy Essays

I will presume that you have already taken the "Presentation and Writing Skills" course which is part of the P&E curriculum, and know the basic techniques of philosophical writing. Still, you might find the following remarks helpful.

In the words of Jim Pryor, "a philosophy paper consists of the reasoned defence of some claim" (see below). This excludes two kinds of papers from being acceptable: first, papers which do not defend any claim, but are primarily summaries of the literature, or a collection of unconnected observations or musings. Second, a good philosophical essay tries to make an *argument*: it offers the reader *reasons* to believe what the author proposes. Thus, a good paper is not merely a retelling of one's opinion, or a rhetorical appeal to some authority or widely held belief. Rather, it progresses from clear premises through a number of transparent steps to a conclusion.

Let me also stress that a good essay answers the question it is addressed to, not more and not less. It is a constant complaint of examiners that students fail to pay attention to the precise direction of an exam question, so I will insist on this point. At the same time, of course, you should read and think widely about the topics on the reading list. Most essay questions cover only part of the relevant material, and preparing only them is usually a mistake.

Another comment concerns language and structure. There is a common misunderstanding, especially in public culture, that complicated intellectual thought is (or only can be) expressed in complicated language. However, the primary function of an academic essay is to communicate an argument to your reader, and you should follow the maxim to make things as simple as possible, but not simpler. To do so, you should aim for clear and direct language. You will get no bonuses for style, and being overly ornamental will actually count against your essay. Similarly, make your essay structure as transparent as you can. Tell your reader explicitly how your argument works, and how its parts hang together.

Lastly, it is essential that you use proper academic referencing. Adequately referencing one's source materials is one of the basics of academic technique, and you should get into the habit of adhering to it early on. Plagiarism will under no circumstances be accepted.

The majority of the preceding advice and much more is also contained in Jim Pryor's excellent guide on how to write a philosophy paper. I strongly recommend that you read it over the vacation break. You can find it at

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Another very useful resource on how to write a philosophy essay is Douglas Portmore's guide, which is online at

<http://www.public.asu.edu/~dportmor/tips.pdf>

For all other question you have about writing a philosophical essay, talk to me directly.

Timetable

The following is a tentative timetable for the course. The scheduled times include shorter breaks. Note that I might spontaneously adjust the schedule during the seminar as needed. In general, we will take the full time required for everyone to understand each of the topics.

Friday, 16 January

Nature and Forms of Consequentialism

12.45-13	Welcome
13-14	Introduction: What is Consequentialism?
14-15	Session 2 Well-Being and Welfarism
15-16	Session 3 Act- and Rule-Consequentialism
16-17	Session 4 Consequentialism vs Deontology
17-18	Session 5 Agent-Relative Consequentialism

Saturday, 17 January

Objections and Consequentialist Replies

10-11	Session 6 Rejecting Constraints
11-12	Session 7 Demandingness Objection
12-13	Session 8 Extremism about Demands
	<i>Lunch Break</i>
14-15	Session 9 Friendship/Integrity Objection
15-16	Session 10 Indirect Consequentialism
16-17	Session 11 Impracticability Objection
17-17.30	Discussion: Thinking about Moral Theories

Sunday, 18 January

Applied Issues

10-11	Session 12 Repugnant Conclusion
11-12	Session 13 Replies to the Repugnant Conclusion
12-13	Session 14 Animals
	<i>Lunch Break</i>
14-15	Session 15 Esoteric Morality
15-16	Session 16 Effective Altruism

16-17	Discussion: Strengths and Weaknesses of Consequentialism
17-18	Wrapping Up; Feedback

Readings

Readings marked with two asterisks ()** are *required reading for all students*. I expect you to have read them all by the time of the seminar, and have some idea of their main points. Your literature survey must include commentary on all **-marked readings.

Readings marked with one asterisk (*) are required reading for students who prepare the presentation of that topic. E.g., if you prepare topic 5, you have to read both Scheffler and Lippert-Rasmussen. The same is true for students writing an essay on that topic—I expect that you have *at least* read those texts.

The questions are supposed to help you with your literature surveys – if you don't know what to write, just try to answer one of the relevant questions. If you prepare a presentation on a given topic, I expect you to focus on the questions relevant to the topic.

Overview: Required Literature

Topic 1	Hooker, "Consequentialism" (11 p.)
Topic 2	Keller, "Welfarism" (13 p.)
Topic 3	Hooker, "Rule-Consequentialism" (ca. 18 p.)
Topic 4	Kamm, "Nonconsequentialism" (14 p.)
Topic 5	Scheffler, "Agent-Centred Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues" (11 p.)
Topic 6	Mulgan, <i>Demands of Consequentialism</i> , ch. 2 (25 p.)
Topic 8	Kapur, "Consequentialism and Friendship" (22 p.)
Topic 9	Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality" (38 p.)
Topic 12	Parfit, "Overpopulation and the Quality of Life" (16 p.)

1 Introduction

In this lecture, I will clarify basic aspects of consequentialism, and ensure some terminological choices to ease discussion. I also explain the structure of the seminar and the ultimate questions I want to enable you to tackle for yourself.

Readings

**Hooker, Brad. "Consequentialism." In *The Routledge Companion to Ethics*, edited by John Skorupski, 444–55. London: Routledge, 2010.

2 Well-Being and Welfarism

Target Questions

What is well-being? What different theories of well-being are there? What is welfarism? How can it be defended? What possible counter-examples are there? What is an example of a consequentialist theory which is not welfarist?

Readings

- **Keller, Simon. "Welfarism." *Philosophy Compass* 4, no. 1 (2009): 82–95.
- *Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. Appendix I, "What makes Someone's Life Go Best?"
- Kagan, Shelly. "The Limits of Well-Being." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9, no. 2 (1992): 169–89.
- Sobel, David. "Well-Being as the Object of Moral Consideration." *Economics and Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (1998): 249–81.

3 Act- and Rule-Consequentialism

Target Questions

How do act- and rule-consequentialism diverge? On what basis should we decide which to accept? How does Hooker avoid that his rule-consequentialism does not collapse into act-consequentialism?

Readings

- **Hooker, Brad. "Rule Consequentialism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism-rule/>.
- *Arneson, Richard. "Sophisticated Rule Consequentialism: Some Simple Objections." *Philosophical Issues* 15, no. 1 (2005): 235–51.
- Hooker, Brad. *Ideal Code, Real World: A Rule-Consequentialist Theory of Morality*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Rawls, John. "Two Concepts of Rules." *Philosophical Review* 64, no. 1 (1955): 3–32.

4 Consequentialism vs Deontology

Target Questions

What does the denial of consequentialism imply? What is a side-constraint? Why is consequentialism incompatible with it? What is the "paradox of deontology" (or "paradox of constraints")?

Readings

- **Kamm, Frances. *Intricate Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Chapter 1, "Nonconsequentialism". Sections 1-4.A & 6-7 = p. 12-21 & 26-31. (Kamm's text is difficult and dense. Try to read it slowly and carefully.)

*Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974. "Moral Constraints and Moral Goals" and "Why Side Constraints?", pp. 28–33.

Foot, Philippa. "Utilitarianism and the Virtues." *Mind* 94 (1985): 196–209.

Lippert-Rasmussen, Kasper. "Kamm on Inviolability and Agent-Relative Restrictions." *Res Publica* 15, no. 2 (2009): 165–78.

5 Agent-Relative Consequentialism

Target Questions

What is "agent-neutral" and "agent-relative" value? Is consequentialism compatible with "agent-relative" value? If we accept agent-relative value, what is the difference between consequentialist and non-consequentialist views?

Readings

*Sen, Amartya. "Rights and Agency." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11, no. 1 (1982): 3–39.

Dreier, James. "Structures of Normative Theories." *The Monist* 76 (1993): 22–40.

Portmore, Douglas. "Combining Teleological Ethics with Evaluator Relativism: A Promising Result." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2005): 95–113.

6 Rejecting Constraints

Question

Are side-constraints strange? Are they irrational? Should we prefer a moral theory which does not contain side-constraints?

Readings

**Scheffler, Samuel. "Agent-Centred Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues." *Mind* 94, no. 375 (1985): 409–19.

*Lippert-Rasmussen, Kasper. "In What Way Are Constraints Paradoxical?" *Utilitas* 11, no. 1 (1999): 49–70.

Otsuka, Michael. "Are Deontological Constraints Irrational?" In *The Cambridge Companion to Nozick's Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, edited by Ralf Bader and John Meadowcroft, 38–58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

7 Demandingness Objection

Question

What is the "demandingness" objection against utilitarianism? What role should demandingness play in choosing between different ethical theories?

Readings

- **Mulgan, Tim. *The Demands of Consequentialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Ch. 2.
- *Sobel, David. "The Impotence of the Demandingness Objection." *Philosophers' Imprint* 7, no. 8 (2007): 1–17.

8 Extremism about Demands

Question

Is our common sense about how demanding morality is mistaken? Does morality have very extreme demands? Is the only reason why we reject the high demands of morality because we're lazy?

Readings

- *Unger, Peter. *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- *Kagan, Shelly. *The Limits of Morality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. (choose & pick from either of these books what you find interesting)
- Singer, Peter. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229–43.

9 Friendship/Integrity Objection

Target Questions

The person you most love requires your time, but you could do much more good for humanity using that time otherwise. Can consequentialism defend the claim that it's permissible for you to spend time with him/her? How?

Readings

- **Kapur, Neera Badhwar. "Why It Is Wrong to Be Always Guided by the Best: Consequentialism and Friendship." *Ethics* 101, no. 3 (1991): 483–504.
- *Williams, Bernard. "A Critique of Utilitarianism." In *Utilitarianism: For and against*, edited by J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, 77–150. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973. (Focus on sections 1-5.)

10 Indirect Consequentialism

Target Questions

What is indirect consequentialism? Can indirect consequentialism answer the friendship/integrity objection? Can it allow that we are partial towards our friends and relatives? Can it help us with the demandingness objection?

Readings

- **Railton, Peter. "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13, no. 2 (1984): 134–71.
- *Griffin, James. "The Distinction Between Criterion and Decision Procedure: A Reply to Madison Powers." *Utilitas* 6, no. 2 (1994): 177–82.
- Bales, Eugene. "Act-Utilitarianism: Account of Right-Making Characteristics or Decision-Making Procedure?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1971): 257–65.
- Mason, Elinor. "Can an Indirect Consequentialist Be a Real Friend?" *Ethics* 108, no. 2 (1998): 386–93.

11 Impracticality Objection

Target Questions

What is "subjective" consequentialism? Is it the best formulation of consequentialism? Can we apply consequentialism under realistic circumstances?

Readings

- *Lenman, James. "Consequentialism and Cluelessness." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2000): 342–70.
- *Jackson, Frank. "Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection." *Ethics* 101, no. 3 (1991): 461–82.
- Feldman, Fred. "Actual Utility, The Objection from Impracticality, and the Move to Expected Utility." *Philosophical Studies* 129, no. 1 (2006): 49–79.

12/13 Repugnant Conclusion

Question

What are total and average utilitarianism? How do these views conflict? What is the repugnant conclusion? What position should we take on population ethics?

Readings

- **Parfit, Derek. "Overpopulation and the Quality of Life." In *The Repugnant Conclusion*, 7–22. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004.
- *Arrhenius, Gustaf, Jesper Ryberg, and Torbjörn Tännsjö. "The Repugnant Conclusion." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/repugnant-conclusion/>.

Replies to the Repugnant Conclusion (session 13)

- *Huemer, Michael. "In Defence of Repugnance." *Mind* 117, no. 468 (2008): 899–933.

14 Animals

Question

If utilitarianism was true, what implications would it have for our attitudes towards animals?

Readings

- *Hills, Alison. "Utilitarianism, Contractualism and Demandingness." *Philosophical Quarterly* 60, no. 239 (2010): 225–42.
- *Singer, Peter. *Practical ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Chapter 3, "Equality for animals?"

15 Esoteric Morality

Question

Should utilitarianism sometimes deceive people about true morality? Should sometimes philosophers not tell the public inconvenient truths about morality?

Readings

- *De Lazari-Radek, Katarzyna, and Peter Singer. "Secrecy in Consequentialism: A Defence of Esoteric Morality." *Ratio* 23, no. 1 (2010): 34–58.
- *Hooker, Brad. "Publicity in Morality: A Reply to Katarzyna De Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer." *Ratio* 23, no. 1 (2010):

16 Effective Altruism

Question

Should you become a banker if you wish to do the most good?

Readings

- *MacAskill, William. "Replaceability, Career Choice, and Making a Difference." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17, no. 2 (2014): 269–83.
- *Ord, Toby. "The moral imperative towards cost-effectiveness." http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/sites/givingwhatwecan.org/files/attachments/moral_imperative.pdf
- *<http://80000hours.org/>, <http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/> (Have a look at these websites and find out what they advocate and why.)