

PHIL 194: Consequences for Ethics
Fall Quarter
Stanford Philosophy

Contact: Barry Maguire; ?@stanford.edu; office hours t.b.d. and by appointment

Class Details: t.b.d.

Course Description: Should you always do whatever would have the best consequences? Plausibly, if everything else is equal, and the first of your two options will do more good than the second, then you should take the first one. But this principle faces a number of interesting challenges. Studying these challenges will yield insight into the nature of morality. The course is structured around three units. In the first unit we will study the structure of consequentialist ethical views. We will read the work of old dead masters and exciting new theorists. In the second unit we address questions arising from collective action, such as the following: do you have any reason to vote, or recycle, or protest, if your actions by themselves are guaranteed not to make much difference? We will address a related dispute in the philosophy of activism. The third unit addresses the relationship between actions and character. We'll address questions such as the following: what's so great about abandoning one's friends and family to attend to the greater good? Is it a problem if the best moral theory tells us not to follow it? By the end of all this, you will improve your understanding of ethics generally, as well as applications of related principles in economics, political theory, and public policy.

Reading: Everything on this syllabus has been carefully chosen. Read each piece a few times. Read once, quickly, to get the structure of the argument, the main claims, and the conclusion(s). Read a second time to study the argument more carefully, to formulate the argument in your own words, to think up your own examples to illustrate the main claims, and to think of counterexamples to these claims. Read a third time to soak up any remaining details. Some excellent reading advice can be found online here: www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading. You are encouraged to read anything else that interests you. In general, the more you read, the better a sense you will have of the strengths and weaknesses of prominent views in any given topic, and of typical forms of argument in the area.

Writing: An important goal of this course is for you to develop your skills in philosophical writing. I will distribute a guide to writing philosophical essays in the first class. The assessments are designed to help you develop these skills. Please also read Jim Pryor's 'Guide to Writing Philosophy Papers,' Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*, George Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language,' and Angela Mendelovici's 'A Sample Philosophy Paper.'

Text Availability: All texts for this class are available on the course website or online (e.g. jstor.org) or in the library.

Assignments: There will be three assignments. Two involve argument reconstructions (roughly 1,500 words each). One involves a longer essay (2,500 words). These assignments are designed to help you to write about complex issues simply, clearly, and compellingly. Writing advice online here: www.barrymaguire.com/teaching. I reserve the right to add further short writing assignments and quizzes; these would be required but would not affect your grade. In addition, you will be assessed for your participation in the class discussions; I will explain this in class.

Submission: Submit your assignments in .docx (preferred) or .pdf to tbd@gmail.com by 11.59pm on the due date. Late fees (10% deduction per day) will accrue to essays late, unreadable, not properly uploaded, etc.

Assessment:

First assignment: 25% of grade

Second assignment: 25% of grade

Participation: 10% of grade

Final paper: 40% of grade

Attendance: You will lose 5% of your grade if you miss more than one class without a formal explanation (e.g. note from your doctor saying that you broke your leg). Arriving more than ten minutes late for class, or leaving more than ten minutes early, without a formal explanation, counts as missing the class. Terms are short so this attendance policy will be strictly enforced.

Electronics Policy: Phones and Laptops are not permitted in class without a formal explanation.

Email Policy: Please be professional, and avoid asking anything you can find out without yourself from the syllabus or online. Please keep your questions brief and accept my apologies in advance for terse replies. I will reply as soon as possible. If you don't receive a reply within two days, please send a short follow-up email.

Students with Disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability should initiate the request with the Student Disability Resources Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information please see <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oea>. Please also feel free to contact me at any time if there is anything I can do to make the course more accessible for you.

Honor Code: You have all taken the Stanford Honor Code, of which plagiarism is a violation. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. It is in your interest to keep a

careful record of any resources you use in research and writing. Always cite any resource that you use. Do not re-use papers written for past classes.

Provisional Nature of the Syllabus: I reserve the right to alter the syllabus at any time. Alterations will be announced via e-mail and an updated syllabus will be uploaded to the course website.

Topics and Readings

Unit One: The Structure of Consequence-Based Ethical Theory

Week One: The Basics: Act Consequentialism

Julia Driver, Commonsense Consequentialism

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, selections

Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, selections

Week Two: Direct versus Indirect Consequentialism

Shelley Kagan, 'Evaluative Focal Points'

Elinor Mason, 'Against Blameless Wrongdoing'

Week Three: Universalisation and Moral Worth

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (selections)

Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue* (selections)

Sunday of Week Three: Assignment One Due

Unit Two: Consequences of Collected Actions

Week Four: Isolated Actions and Prisoners Dilemmas

Warren Quinn, 'The Puzzle of the Self-Torturer,' *Philosophical Studies*.

Chrisoula Andreou, 'Environmental Damage and the Puzzle of the Self-Torturer,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*.

Optional: Diana Raffman and Sergio Tenenbaum, 'Vague Projects and the Puzzle of the Self-Torturer,' *Ethics*.

Week Five: Individual versus Group Approaches

Julia Nefsky, 'Consequentialism and the Problem of Collective Harm,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*

Richard Tuck, *Free Riding* (selections on voting)

Optional:

Shelley Kagan, 'Do I Make a Difference?' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*

Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, 'It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations,' in *Perspectives on Climate Change*.

Week Six: Structural Problems and Effective Altruism

Emily Clough, 'Effective Altruism's Political Blind Spot'

Jeff McMahan, 'Philosophical Critiques of Effective Altruism'

Amia Srinivasan, 'The Robot Apocalypse'

Sunday of Week Six: Assignment Two

Unit Three: The Importance of What We Care About

Week Seven: Morals and Motives

Michael Stocker, 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories'

Robert Adams, 'Motive Consequentialism'

Week Eight: Impartiality and Demandingness

Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints'

Joan Tronto, 'Women and Caring: What can Feminists Learn About Morality from Caring?'

Week Nine: Personal Relationships

Bernard Williams, 'A Critique of Utilitarianism' (selections)

Susan Wolf, 'One Thought Too Many: Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,' in Ulrike Heuer and Gerald Lang, eds., *Luck, Value, & Commitment: Themes from the Ethics of Bernard Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 71-92.

Week Ten: Avoiding Alienation

Neera Kapur Badhwar, 'Why is it Wrong to Be Always Guided by the Best: Consequentialism and Friendship,' *Ethics*

And either

Peter Railton, 'How Thinking about Character and Utilitarianism might lead to Rethinking the Character of Utilitarianism,' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*

Or

Peter Railton, 'Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*

End of Term (exact date t.b.d.): Final Essay