

Contemporary Moral Theory

PY4635

Semester 1, 2015-16

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Module Aims: This module aims to provide a critical appreciation of the main contemporary moral theories. It provides an in-depth examination of consequentialism--the view that one should always act so as to bring about the most good--as well as objections to the view and its main alternatives: e.g., Aristotelianism, feminist ethics, Kantianism.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this module, students should have gained a good critical understanding of the complexities of moral theory and a solid grasp of the leading contemporary theories. Students will be able to analyze and evaluate critical discussion of these theories in recent and contemporary literature, formulate and articulate their own views on the issues covered, and provide a rational defence of these views in written work and discussion.

To these ends, the requirements of the module are: attending all classes, preparing for seminars by doing the assigned readings and preparing to discuss them, and completing all formal assessment.

Course Materials: On the list of readings (below) you'll see that there are parenthetical notations next to some of them. These notations indicate how to find the reading in question. Here's what they each mean:

- Web: find it on the internet
- LORL: Library Online Reading List
- MMS: The PY4635 MMS site
- ABR: Available by request (ask Dr. Pummer)

Other listed readings have no notations next to them. These readings are yours to find on your own using the library.

Seminar sign-up: A sign-up system has been set up on MMS, and you will be able to sign up for a seminar as soon as the first lecture is over. Log in to MMS and click on 'tutorial sign-up' for this module, view the groups and sign up to one of them.

Assessment:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Portion of Overall Mark</u>
Weekly Blog Entries	10%
Essay/Essay Outline 1—Material from Part 1	45%
Essay/Essay Outline 2—Material from Part 2	45%

Essays/Essay Outlines

Prompt: Write an essay that makes an original contribution to some debate that came up during the designated Part of the course. For each essay you are required first to submit an essay outline, which Sachs or Pummer will comment on and give back to you. The topic for each essay will normally be settled through approval of your essay outline, though in some cases the topic will be settled through a separate discussion between you and Sachs or Pummer.

- The word limit for each essay is 3200.
- The expectations and marking criteria for each essay/essay outline will be described in a separate handout.

- All outlines and essays are to be submitted on MMS.
- The University's policy on plagiarism will be enforced, and can be found at www.st-andrews.ac.uk/staff/policy/tlac/academicmisconduct/academicmisconduct/.

Blog Entries: You are required to make a blog posting before each seminar. That's 10 postings, each worth two points, for a maximum of 20 points total. The blog can be found on the module's Moodle page. Further instructions will be provided in a separate handout.

Assignment Schedule

	Outline Due	Feedback Provided By	Essay Due
Essay/Essay Outline 1	10 Nov	13 Nov	24 Nov
Essay/Essay Outline 2	6 Dec	9 Dec	19 Dec

Topics and Readings

PART 1: CONSEQUENTIALISM

Week 1 Lecture/Week 2 Seminar: (1) Introduction and (2) Act-Utilitarianism as a Political Morality (Sachs)

(1) A review of the main strands of consequentialist thought and how the theory has developed over time.

(2) Should governments use their power in the service of maximizing the happiness of their people?

Introductory Readings:

Jeremy Bentham, "Offences Against One's Self", especially pp. 389-90 and 398-401.

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2.

Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed., Book IV, Chs. III-IV.

G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chs. III, V-VI

Required Readings:

Robert E. Goodin, *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy*, Ch. 1. (LORL)

Will Kymlicka, "Utilitarianism" (LORL)

Further Readings:

John C. Harsanyi, "Can the Maximin Principle Serve as a Basis for Morality? A Critique of John Rawls's Theory"

Thomas Nagel, "Equality" in his *Mortal Questions*.

Week 2 Lecture/Week 3 Seminar: Objection #1—Demandingness (Sachs)

In principle there's nothing that act-consequentialism cannot demand that you do. And in the world as we actually find it, where there is a lot of misery that we can do something about, act-consequentialism seems to demand quite a lot of us. Is this a solid justification for rejecting act-consequentialism?

Introductory Readings:

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Ch. 5.1.

Required Readings:

Shelly Kagan, "Does Consequentialism Demand Too Much?"
David Sobel, "The Impotence of the Demandingness Objection"

Further Readings:

Peter Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions"
Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, rev. ed., Chs. 2-3.
Dale Dorsey, "Weak Anti-Rationalism and the Demands of Morality"

Week 3 Lecture/Week 4 Seminar: Objection #2 – The Repugnant Conclusion (Pummer)

One of the biggest challenges for any moral theory sensitive to the goodness of outcomes is how to avoid what's known as the *Repugnant Conclusion*. According to the Repugnant Conclusion, compared with the existence of many people who would all have some very high quality of life, there is some much larger number of people whose existence would be *better*, even though these people would all have lives just barely worth living. It turns out to be very difficult to avoid this counterintuitive conclusion without denying premises which are independently highly plausible.

Introductory Readings:

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, pp. 381-91
Gustaf Arrhenius, Jesper Ryberg, Torbjörn Tännsjö, "The Repugnant Conclusion" entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy—SEP* (Web)

Required Readings:

Michael Huemer, "In Defence of Repugnance"
Derek Parfit, "Can We Avoid the Repugnant Conclusion?" (MMS)

Further Readings:

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, all of Part Four
John Broome, *Weighing Lives*
Krister Bykvist, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ethically Neutral"
Gustaf Arrhenius, *Population Ethics* (ABR)

Week 4 Lecture/Week 5 Seminar: Objection #3 – The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing (Pummer)

Many moral philosophers distinguish between doing harm, on the one hand, and merely allowing harm to occur, on the other. Consequentialists do not believe this distinction is of fundamental moral significance, but defenders of the Doctrine of Doing and Allowing (DDA) do. We will consider some of the best arguments for and against the DDA.

Introductory Readings:

Frances Howard-Snyder, "Doing and Allowing Harm", *SEP* (Web)

Required Readings:

Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Chapter 3
Philippa Foot, "Killing and Letting Die" in her *Moral Dilemmas and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*

Further Readings:

Warren Quinn, "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing"
Jeff McMahan, "A Challenge to Commonsense Morality"
Judith Thomson, "Turning the Trolley"

Weeks 5 Lecture/Week 6 Seminar: Objection #4 – The Doctrine of Double Effect (Pummer)

Many moral philosophers distinguish between intending harm (as an end or as a means), on the one hand, and merely foreseeing harm, on the other. Consequentialists do not believe this distinction is of fundamental moral significance, but defenders of the Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE) do. We will consider some of the best arguments for and against the DDE.

Introductory Readings:

Alison McIntyre, "Doctrine of Double Effect", *SEP* (Web)

Required Readings:

Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality*, Chapter 4

Alison Hills, "Defending Double Effect"

Further Readings:

Warren Quinn, "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect"

Dana Nelkin and Samuel Rickless, "Three Cheers for Double Effect"

Week 6 Lecture/Week 7 Seminar: Revising Act-Consequentialism (Sachs)

In weeks 2-5 we examined several objections to act-consequentialism. Some act-consequentialists want to respond to these objections by revising act-consequentialism so as to render it consistent with the intuitions that it is accused of being unable to accommodate. The result is a considerably more moderate theory.

Introductory Readings:

Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" in Williams and Smart, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*

Required Readings:

Amartya Sen, "Rights and Agency".

Amartya Sen, "Evaluator Relativity and Consequential Evaluation"

Further Readings:

Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality".

Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Ch. IX.

John Broome, "Deontology and Economics".

David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 217-36, 256-83.

Mark Schroeder, "Teleology, Agent-Relative Value, and 'Good'".

Benjamin Sachs, "Consequentialism's Double-Edged Sword".

PART 2: ALTERNATIVES

Week 7 Lecture/Week 8 Seminar: Varieties of Non-Consequentialism, Part 1 – Neo-Kantianism (Sachs)

Kant's first two formulations of the Categorical Imperative each contained the kernel of a compelling moral idea. The first formulation suggests that acting morally means acting on rules that you'd be willing to have everyone follow; or, more colloquially, not making a special exception of yourself. The second formulation suggests that acting morally means respecting the autonomy of others. Various contemporary theorists are intent on taking these ideas and turning them into a compelling alternative to consequentialism.

Introductory Readings:

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington, pp. 7-15, 30-37 (SL)

Required Readings:

Korsgaard, Christine M., "Kant's Formula of Universal Law" (LORL)

Onora O'Neill, "Between Consenting Adults"

Further Readings:

Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality" in his *Moral Luck*

Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*.

Joshua Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul" in Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, ed. *Moral Psychology*

Thomas E. Hill, Jr., *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, Ch. 3.

Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice*, Ch. 3.

Week 8 Lecture/Week 9 Seminar: Varieties of Non-Consequentialism, Part 2 – Rossian Pluralism (Sachs)

W.D. Ross held that various kinds of action are prima facie required and others are prima facie impermissible, and what one is obligated to do (or not do) overall is a function of how these prima facie facts stack up in a given case. The main attraction of such a view is its insistence on what both consequentialists and neo-Kantians deny: that the entirety of morality cannot be boiled down to a single principle.

Introductory Readings:

W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Ch. 2.

David McNaughton, "An Unconnected Heap of Duties?"

Required Readings:

Philip Stratton-Lake, "Recalcitrant Pluralism".

Ned Markosian, "Rossian Minimalism".

Further Reading:

Robert Audi, "A Kantian Intuitionism".

Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, rev. ed., Ch. 4.

Week 9 Lecture/Week 10 Seminar: Neo-Aristotelianism, Part 1 – The Function Argument (Sachs)

Aristotle would have agreed with the consequentialists that moral thinking should begin with a theory of the good, but he would have insisted that nothing is just plain good. Rather, there are multiple ways to be good, each of them corresponding to a function. Knives have a way of being good, corresponding to the function of a knife. Similarly, humans have a way of being good, corresponding to the function of a human. But contemporary theorists disagree as to whether we can make sense of a human having a function.

Introductory Readings:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 7-8. (Web)

Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Ch. 3

Required Reading:

Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics" (LORL)

Christine Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, Ch. 4.

Further Readings:

Bernard Williams, "Replies", pp. 194-202, in Altham and Harrison, eds. *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*

Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Chs. 9-11.

Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Ch. 2.

Week 10 Lecture/Week 11 Seminar: Neo-Aristotelianism, Part 2 – Virtue Ethics (Sachs)

Taking as given the idea that each human has a function, the next challenge for the neo-Aristotelian is to show that there are distinctive character traits that are conducive to discharging that function and that those traits can reasonably be called virtues.

Introductory Readings:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1-7 and Book VI, 1-13. (Web)

Gary Watson, "On the Primacy of Character", in Flanagan and Rorty, eds. *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*

Required Reading:

Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Chs. 3, 6.

Marth Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues"

Further Reading:

Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Ch. 1.

Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, Ch. 4.

Philippa Foot, (the rest of) *Natural Goodness*

Robert N. Johnson, "Virtue and Right"

Liezl van Zyl, "Right Action and the Non-Virtuous Agent"

John M. Doris, "Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics"

Week 11 Lecture: Feminist Ethics (Pummer)

Several feminist philosophers have criticized traditional approaches to ethics on the grounds that it ignores a variety of elements of women's moral experience – such as those connected to women's interests, issues, traits, perspectives, and modes of reasoning. We will explore and assess such criticisms.

Introductory Readings:

Rosemarie Tong and Nancy Williams, "Feminist Ethics", *SEP*. (Web)

Required Readings:

Alison Jaggar, selections from, *Living with Contradictions* (LORL)

James Sterba, *Three Challenges to Ethics*, Chapter 2 (LORL)

Further Readings:

John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*

Julia Annas, "Mill and the Subjection of Women"

Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, Chapter 9