

Philosophy 202
 Fall, 2006
 Revised Oct 3

Core Course in Ethics
 Professor Richard Arneson

This seminar meets Tuesdays 3:30-6:20 in HSS 3077.

Consequentialism and its critics.

Consequentialism broadly speaking is the idea that the moral rightness and wrongness of a thing (an act, a policy, an institution) is determined by the quality of its consequences. A prominent version is act consequentialism, which holds one morally always ought to do an act whose outcome is no worse than the outcome of any other act one might have done instead. This doctrine has little content—no commitment is involved as to how one should evaluate consequences—but is still highly controversial. What is called common-sense morality or CSM—moral views it is supposed many people embrace—rejects consequentialism as both too demanding and too permissive. Too permissive, because CSM includes constraints, rules one should not break even if doing so would produce the best attainable outcome. Too demanding, because CSM includes options. The demands of CSM mostly involve refraining from harming others in certain ways, and provided one observes these constraints, one is morally at liberty to do whatever one chooses, whether or not that produces the best outcome. In most situations, according to CSM, morality allow one many options, alternative acts one is morally permitted to do.

Some hold that whereas consequentialism broadly speaking is attractive, act consequentialism is not the best specification of the idea. Typically those who take this line hope for some reconciliation of consequentialism and certain aspects of CSM in a new specification. Typically those who take this line of thought end up supporting some form of rule consequentialism (One morally ought always to act in conformity to that set of rules the following or acceptance of which would have best consequences). Rule consequentialism had seemed subject to devastating objections and hence moribund, but in recent years R. B. Brandt, Brad Hooker, and Derek Parfit have revived the idea.

A lot of work in recent moral philosophy has involved the articulation of CSM. Constraints and options are perhaps best thought of as a package deal, and how should we conceive the package? Work by Judith Thomason and Frances Kamm has pressed this program. If one thinks this nonconsequentialist project runs into difficulties, consequentialism, the rival, may look more appealing.

This course surveys some recent work on consequentialist and nonconsequentialist approaches to ethics. I intend both to provide a general survey of major topics that does not presuppose any prior work in moral philosophy by the student, and also to investigate some current controversies.

Persistent and occasional auditors are welcome.

Seminar discussions will be self-contained; no prior background knowledge is presupposed. Each student will be expected to read and think about the reading each week and come to class prepared to talk about it. In smaller type I have made suggestions for further reading; but these are suggestions for those who want to delve further into the topic, perhaps with a view to deciding whether to write a term essay on it. In class, the idea is to explore the readings listed in big type.

Course requirements: regular participation in seminar discussions, a seminar presentation, and a term essay of about 15 pages on a topic central to course themes.

Background reading: The survey articles “Consequentialism” by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and “Rule Consequentialism” by Brad Hooker, both in the on-line Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and “Some Forms and Limits of Consequentialism” by David Brink, in the *Oxford Handbook of Moral Theory*, are useful, as is the debate in *Three Methods of Ethics*, by Marcia Baron, Philip Pettit, and Michael Slote.

Readings: The following texts are in the bookstore: J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism—For and Against*; R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking*; Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World*; Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*; and Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality*. Other readings will be either available through JSTOR (<http://www.jstor.org/>) or copies placed in the Dept, Library or both.

Tentative schedule of topics and readings.

Week 1.

Introduction: John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism.

Reading: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapters 1, 2, and 5.

Week 2. Act-consequentialism and the integrity objection.

Reading: Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism,” sections 3, 4, and 5, in J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism—For and Against*.

Further reading: Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1984); Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (excerpt); Scheffler, “Relationships and Responsibilities,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1997)..

Week 3. Act-consequentialism and rule-consequentialism.

Reading: John Rawls, “Two Concepts of Rules,” *Philosophical Review* (1955); R.M. Hare, *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point*, chapters 2 and 3.

Further reading: J.J.C. Smart, “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism,” *Philosophical Quarterly* (1956); David Lyons, *The Forms and Limits of Utilitarianism*.

Week 4. Rule consequentialism.

Reading: Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World*, chapters 1-3.

Further reading: Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World*, concluding chapters; R. B. Brandt, “Some Merits of One Form of Utilitarianism”; R. Arneson, “Sophisticated Rule Consequentialism: Some Simple Objections,” *Philosophical Issues, Nous* supp vol. 15 (2005)..

Week 5. Rule consequentialism.

Reading: Derek Parfit, “Climbing the Mountain,” chapter 11, “Contractualism” and chapter 12, “Consequentialism.”

Week 6. Consequentialism and virtue.

Reading: Julia Driver; *Uneasy Virtue* (excerpt); Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (excerpt).

Further reading: Robert Adams, “Motive Utilitarianism,” *The Journal of Philosophy* (1976); Peter Railton, “How Thinking about Character and Utilitarianism Might Lead to Rethinking the Character of Utilitarianism,” in Railton, *Facts, Values, and Norms: Essays toward a Morality of Consequence*.

Week 7. Moral Constraints and Moral Rights.

Reading: Robert Nozick, excerpt from chapter 3, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*; Amartya Sen, "Rights and Agency," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1982).

Week 8. Moral Constraints and Moral Rights.

Judith Thomson, *The Realm of Rights*, chapters 1-6, especially chapters 5 & 6; Frances Kamm, *Intricate Ethics: Rights, Responsibilities, and Permissible Harm*, chapter on "Rights Beyond Interests."

Week 9. Moral Constraints, pro and con.

Reading: Shelly Kagan, excerpts from *The Limits of Morality*; Frances Kamm, *Intricate Ethics*, chapter on "Toward the Essence of Nonconsequentialist Constraints on Harming."

Further reading: Frances Kamm, "No-Consequentialism, the Person as an End-in-Itself, and the Significance of Status," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1992); Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, "Moral Status and the Impermissibility of Minimizing Violations," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1996).

Week 10. Demandingness, Moral options.

Reading: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" *Philosophy and Public Affairs* ; Garrett Cullity, "Asking Too Much" *The Monist* (2003).; Richard Miller, "Beneficence, Duty, and Distance," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (2005).

Further reading: Liam Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory*; Garrett Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence*; Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*; Jean Hampton, "Selflessness and the Loss of Self," *Social Philosophy and Policy* (1993); Richard Arneson, "Moral Limits on the Demands of Beneficence?", in Deen Chatterjee, ed. *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy*; Arneson, "Consequentialism versus Special-Ties Partiality," *The Monist* (2003), Arneson, "What We Owe to Distant Needy Strangers."