

Doing Good: Consequentialism in Ethics

PHL 375, Winter 2023

Tues & Thurs 1:30-3pm, UC (University College) 256

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- Office:** Jackman Humanities Building (170 St. George St), Room 424
- Office hours:** Tuesdays 10am-12pm
Sign-up sheet:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1XnH0wYImXjYtmnJu30OXMMof0zUzgntV4IpZ6CX_j70/edit?usp=sharing
- Website:** <https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/296559>
- Readings:** All readings for the course can be downloaded from the course website.
- Music:** Nominate your favorite music to be played before class and during breaks by...
(1) Adding to the class Spotify playlist:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0Btl1X7GND6g2ZLVPKbMMQ?si=d8bdc01c9a2047c6&pt=0861b60a15d750c2af9dbb4fe0185c30>
(2) Filling out this Google form: <https://forms.gle/n33gYHLQao9Sg4LPA>
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Here's a simple ethical theory: you should always do whatever will produce the most good. This view, which we will call consequentialism (also popularly known as Utilitarianism), initially strikes many as obvious, even undeniable. Yet, while consequentialism is one of the most influential theories in moral philosophy, it is also one of the most reviled. The history of moral philosophy since 1900 could be written as a history of objections to consequentialism.

In this course, we will undertake a sustained investigation of consequentialism. Throughout we will be concerned not just with the narrow question of whether consequentialism is correct, but with the broader issue of how we should take the consequences of our actions into account when deciding what to do.

MARKING AND EXPECTATIONS

Mark breakdown

Paper 1: 25%
Paper 2: 35%
Final exam: 40%

Papers

There will be two paper assignments, the first worth 25% of your grade, the second worth 35%. Paper guidelines will be distributed in class and on Quercus well in advance of the due date.

Paper 1 (6-8 pages, 12 point font double spaced): due **Thursday, February 16th at 1:30pm**
Paper 2 (6-8 pages, 12 point font double spaced): due **Tuesday, March 28th at 1:30pm**

You will submit your papers online via Quercus. All papers must be submitted **before the start of class** on the day they are due. You will be free to choose the topic of both papers (within certain constraints), but I'll also hand out suggestions for topics.

Final exam

There will be a final exam, worth the remaining 40% of your grade. The date and time of the exam are to be determined; I will post the exam information on Quercus as soon as it is available. The final exam will consist of short essay questions on the content of the course. More detailed guidelines for the final exam will be distributed well in advance of the exam date. But the best way to prepare for the exam is simple: do the readings, come to class, pay attention, and ask questions.

Reading and class participation

I expect you to read the assigned readings before class and come to class ready to discuss them. As an advanced small lecture, in-class discussion will be a central part of this course. Though you will not be formally graded on class participation, actively engaging in class is the best way for you to learn the material and prepare for the final exam.

COURSE POLICIES

Late papers

Late papers will lose 3 points per day they are late, up to a maximum late penalty of 30 points. Papers turned in more than 10 days late can receive credit, but the 30 point penalty will be applied.

Papers turned in after the start of class on the due date are considered one day late. A paper turned in more than 24 hours after the time it was due (i.e. after 1:30pm the day after the due date) is two days late; and so on.

Extensions

My view on extensions is this: it's important that you have *a* deadline, but not very important *when* that deadline is. So, I am happy to grant an extension for any reason so long as it is requested **more than 48 hours** before the official deadline.

To streamline this process, I've created Google forms that you can use to request an extension any time before the 48-hour cutoff.

Google form for Paper 1 extensions: <https://forms.gle/dKXmUAoNpjTjypqP7>

Google form for Paper 2 extensions: <https://forms.gle/VynmuCaTdNgimtC37>

Simply visit these links, enter your UofT email address, student ID number, and your desired extension length (up to one week maximum), and *voila!* – you have an extension. No need to email me to confirm or explain: your paper will be counted as due on the date you set in the form.

- Note: Quercus will automatically say that your paper is 'late', but don't worry: I will apply the extended deadline.

48 hours before the paper is due (i.e. Tuesday before the deadline at 1:30pm), the form will automatically stop accepting responses. After that point, I will not grant extensions unless you have a note from your doctor, registrar, or accessibility advisor.

IMPORTANT: After you submit an extension request, **double-check that you have received a confirmation email** from Google. If you have not received an email, you should assume that your extension request has not gone through and submit it again. Also, make sure to **save the confirmation email**: if your extension request doesn't show up on the form, I'll ask you to show me the confirmation you received.

Email communication

I will try to answer your emails within 1-2 days of receiving them. To make this task manageable, please respect the following guidelines:

- If you have a practical question about the course schedule, assignments, or requirements, please consult the course website and syllabus first before emailing me.
- If you want to request an extension, don't send me an email – just fill out the Google Form!
- If you have a substantive question about the course material or your essays, please come to office hours and ask it in person.
- I won't be able to read over drafts of your essays or provide comments on outlines over email. I am happy to discuss your drafts and outlines in office hours. To get detailed feedback on a rough draft, you can also visit the Philosophy Essay Clinic (see 'Resources' section below).

Academic honesty and plagiarism

It should go without saying that your papers must be your own work. There is an easy way to avoid academic dishonesty: **cite everything you don't think of and write entirely on your own.** Better to cite too much than too little. Acknowledge anything that has helped you write your paper with a citation or footnote:

- If you quote something verbatim, **make sure it appears between quotation marks** and that you identify the source and the page numbers you are quoting from.
 - This applies to *any* text you didn't write yourself, including text from class handouts. **Any text from the handouts must be quoted and cited** as you would with any other source.
- If you paraphrase something you read, add a footnote citing the source and page numbers of the passage you are paraphrasing.
- If you read something helpful, add a footnote citing the source and acknowledging that it helped you with the paper – even if you aren't paraphrasing it directly. An example: “My thinking about this paper has been helped by the article ‘Consequentialism’ in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/>.”
- If you get an idea from a conversation with a friend or anyone else, then acknowledge their help in a footnote. Example: “Thanks to my roommate Justin Bieber for suggesting this response to my objection to Foot's argument.” (Philosophers do this all the time!)

The University of Toronto takes cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University's policies and procedures regarding academic honesty can be found in its *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, available at:

<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>

More information is available at <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you are in any doubt about whether something you are doing constitutes academic dishonesty, ask me.

Original plagiarism detection tool

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Your papers will be reviewed by Original by default when you submit them on the Quercus course website. Use of Original is **voluntary**: if you wish to opt out of having your papers reviewed by Original, email me and we will set up an alternative arrangement.

ChatGPT and AI text generators

Many of you will have heard the buzz about ChatGPT, the remarkably capable text-generating AI that came out last year. You may have also heard the buzz about ChatGPT being able to write essay assignments. Let me be clear: **using ChatGPT or any AI text generator to write any portion of your essays constitutes plagiarism and will be treated as such.** This is true even if you edit the text generated by the AI to change the phrasing.

Some other things to note:

- Use of chatbots is **detectable**. There are telltale signs that a text has been written by AI, and algorithms that can detect whether a body of text has been generated by a chatbot.
- The essays generated by chatbots **aren't very good**. Even if you don't get caught, you may get a passing grade, but you certainly won't get a good one.
- You might wonder, "Can I use ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas, if I don't copy the text for my paper?" If you use a chatbot in any way while writing your essay, **you must cite it and attach a copy of the chatbot text you used to your paper**. This is just as with any other source you use in your paper. If you do that, you won't be plagiarizing – though your work will be much less original, and I doubt it will be improved.
- Most importantly, using a chatbot, as with any other form of cheating, **defeats the whole point of getting an education**. You are investing time and money in university in order to learn, and if you don't do the assignments yourself, you won't learn. So if you're tempted to cheat, ask yourself, "Why am I taking this course at all, if I don't want to learn?"

Accessibility and accommodation

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility, and students with disabilities and other diverse learning needs are welcome in this course. If you require accommodation for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about this course, please contact either me or Accessibility Services as soon as possible (accessibility.services@utoronto.ca; 416-978-8060). For more information on accessibility at U of T, go to <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>

RESOURCES

Want help? Here are some people you can ask:

- (1) **Me**. I am here to help you learn, and want to see you succeed. So please don't hesitate to ask me for help! I am always happy to meet with you to talk about anything you are struggling with (or excited about!) in the course.
- (2) **The Philosophy Essay Clinic**. You can get one-on-one help on your philosophy papers at the Philosophy Essay Clinic: <http://philosophy.utoronto.ca/st-george/undergraduate-at-st-george/philosophy-essay-clinic/>. The essay clinic is a great place to get feedback on rough drafts of your papers. The clinic is also popular, however, so book a slot early!

- (3) **Your college's Writing Centre.** Each college has a writing centre where students from that college can go for help with their writing assignments. To find your college's writing centre, go here: <http://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science/>
- (4) **Writing Plus workshops.** U of T's writing center holds a series of workshops throughout the term on every aspect of academic writing: see <https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-plus/winter-workshops/>. You can also find lots of writing advice on the center's website: <http://writing.utoronto.ca/>
- (5) **ELL (English Language Learning).** If English is not your first language, or if you want to improve your English language skills for any reason, there are helpful resources available at <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>.

University of Toronto also offers support services for a wide range of challenges you might encounter, including (but not limited to) mental health, financial distress, housing crises, and sexual violence. **If you need help, please ask for it.** There are people whose job it is to give you help. For a guide to these resources, visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/feeling-distressed>

Finally, for a fun and helpful guide to reading and writing philosophy, I highly recommend "The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes" by Professor Helena de Bres: <https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

To keep the readings manageable in length, I've divided them into fine-grained sections. So, pay close attention to the pages listed below!

Part I: Promoting the good

Tuesday 1/10: Introduction

No reading

Thursday 1/12: Hedonism about the good, for and against

G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*

Sections 50-55 (p. 133-145)

Tuesday 1/17: Catch-up day (finish Moore)

Thursday 1/19: The idea of a good state of affairs

Philippa Foot, "Utilitarianism and the Virtues"

Whole article

Tuesday 1/24: Aggregating value across persons

John Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?"

p. 293-310 (end of second paragraph)

Thursday 1/26: Finish Taurek + discussion of Paper 1

Tuesday 1/31: Collectively caused harm

Shelly Kagan, "Do I Make a Difference?"

Sections 1-3 (p. 105-111), p. 116 (second and third paragraphs), section 6 (p. 117-119), section 8 (p. 121-124), sections 11-12 (p. 129-134), section 16 (p. 140-141)

Thursday 2/2: Catch-up day (finish Kagan)

Tuesday 2/7: Longtermism

Hilary Greaves and William MacAskill, "The Case for Strong Longtermism"

Sections 1-5 (p. 2-17), section 7-7.2 (p. 19-21)

Thursday 2/9: Can we know the consequences of our actions?

James Lenman, "Consequentialism and Cluelessness"

Sections 1-2 (p. 342-350), section 4 (p. 351-359)

Tuesday 2/14: Catch-up day (finish Lenman)

Part II: Constraints

Thursday 2/16: Introduction to constraints

[PAPER 1 DUE]

Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*
Chapter 3, sections 1-2 (p. 70-84)

Tuesday 2/28: The status rationale for constraints

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*
“Moral Constraints and Moral Goals” and “Why Side Constraints?” (p. 28-33)

and

Frances Kamm, “Non-consequentialism, the Person as an End-in-Itself, and the Significance of Status”
p. 382 (from “Why a Constraint?”) – p. 389

Thursday 3/2: Catch-up day (finish Nozick and Kamm)

Tuesday 3/7: The freedom rationale for constraints

Japa Pallikkathayil, “Deriving Morality from Politics: Rethinking the Formula of Humanity”
Section II, part A (p. 129-131) and parts C-D (p. 132-141)

Thursday 3/9: Rule consequentialism

Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*
Chapter 6, section 5 (p. 223-235, ending at “...to factorial consequentialism across the board.”)

Tuesday 3/14: Catch-up day (finish rule consequentialism)

Thursday 3/16: Contractualism

Thomas Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”
p. 596-598 (second paragraph on p. 596 up to last paragraph on p. 598); p. 600-604 (starting at Section III and ending at “...is a further question too large to be entered into here.”)

Tuesday 3/21: Trolleyology

Caspar Hare, “Should We Wish Well to All?”
Section 1 (p. 451), sections 3-4 (p. 454-464)

Thursday 3/23: Catch-up day (finish Hare)

Part III: Partiality

Tuesday 3/28: Consequentialism and integrity

[PAPER 2 DUE]

Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism”
Section 3 (p. 93-100), section 5 (p. 108-118)

Thursday 3/30: Options to do less than the best

Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*
Chapter 2 (p. 14-22)

and

Shelly Kagan, "Does Consequentialism Demand Too Much? Recent Work on the Limits of Obligation"

Section 3 (p. 249-254)

Tuesday 4/4: A reply: sophisticated consequentialism

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

Introduction and sections I-IV (p. 134-146) and VI-VII (p. 148-160)

Thursday 4/6: Agent-relative consequentialism

Douglas Portmore, "Combining Teleological Ethics with Evaluator Relativism: A Promising Result"

Whole article