

Consequentialism

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260 / Winter, 2012

Topic Description

The purpose of this course is to analyze the differences between consequentialist and non-consequentialist accounts of normative ethics at the most fundamental level. We will begin the class with some basic background readings on consequentialism (mostly from the 1970s) after which we will focus on what is thought to fundamentally distinguish consequentialist from non-consequentialist accounts of normative ethics – namely, agent-centered restrictions (ACRs). Here we will be concerned with what ACRs are, what considerations ground them, and whether they are paradoxical, as is often thought.

We will then consider whether consequentialism, as typically envisaged, is self-defeating – a purported result of the fact that a) it is very demanding, and b) it often requires that we have the intuitively wrong sorts of motives for our actions. In light of these objections, we will investigate a couple non-standard versions of consequentialism, including *satisficing* consequentialism, according to which we are only obligated to make things go sufficiently better (as opposed to *best*), as well as *motive* consequentialism, according to which only the acts motivated in the right way have value.

We will then take a step back and return to an investigation of the structure of consequentialism at the most fundamental level, in an attempt to determine whether a suitably sophisticated consequentialist axiology can accommodate ACRs. This is connected with the broader issue (on which will spend the last third of the quarter) of whether it is possible to ‘consequentialize’ non-consequentialist theories of ethics -- that is, whether it is possible to non-trivially re-cast non-consequentialist theories constraints in consequentialist terms.

Grading and the Structure of the Class

There will be no final paper for this course. Instead, your grade will be based on class presentations and three short papers. Each student will be required to present a detailed synopsis and commentary of at least two assigned readings (except for those covered in the first week) over the course of the quarter. The synopsis should cover the entirety of the reading, though your commentary can be on the reading as a whole or just on a particular part of it. You should expect your presentation to last about 30-45 minutes. It will be followed by class discussion.

Each short paper (roughly 1,500 to 2,500 words long) will be on a topic of your choosing, so long as a) it is relevant to the material covered so far, and b) it is *not* on a topic that pertains solely to the readings on which you presented. You are required, at least one week prior to the paper’s due date, to submit a short proposal (a couple paragraphs in length) by email to me. You are of course encouraged to discuss your proposal with me in person, though this is not required.

Schedule of Readings

All of the readings are available online at sites.google.com/site/bazarganthings

Jan. 9 – Background to the Consequentialist/Anti-Consequentialist Debate

- John Rawls: "Classical Utilitarianism" 1972
- Bernard Williams: "Consequentialism & Integrity" (from *A Critique of Utilitarianism*) 1973
- Robert Nozick: "Side Constraints" from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* 1974
- Philip Pettit: "Consequentialism" from *A Companion to Ethics* 1991

Jan. 23 – Agent-Centered Restrictions

- Samuel Scheffler: from *The Rejection of Consequentialism* 1982
- Thomas Nagel: 'Autonomy and Deontology' from *The View From Nowhere* ch.9 1986
- Stephen Darwall: "Agent-Centered Restrictions From the Inside Out" 1986

Jan. 30 – Self-Effacing Motives in Consequentialism

- Derek Parfit: section 10-17 from *Reasons and Persons* 1984
- Peter Railton: "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality" 1984

FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE

Non-Maximizing Consequentialism (part 1)

- ~~T.M. Scanlon "Rights, Goals, and Fairness" 1978~~
- ~~Michael Slote "Satisficing Consequentialism – Part I" 1984~~

Non-Maximizing Consequentialism (part 2)

- ~~Philip Pettit "Satisficing Consequentialism – Part II" 1984~~
- ~~Ben Bradley "Against Satisficing Consequentialism" 2006~~

Feb. 6 – Motive Consequentialism

- Robert Adams: "Motive Utilitarianism" 1976
- Steven Sverdlik: "Consequentialism and Motives" from *Motive and Rightness* 2011

Feb. 13 – The Axiological Basis of Consequentialism

- Philip Pettit: "The Consequentialist Perspective" from *Three Methods of Ethics* 1997
- John Broome: "The Structure of the Good" from *Weighing Goods* 1991
- Amartya Sen: sections 1-3 from "Utilitarianism and Welfarism" 1979

Feb. 27 – Consequentialization (part 1)

- Amartya Sen: "Rights and Agency" 1982
- James Dreier: "Structures of Normative Theories" 1993

SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE

Mar. 5 – Consequentialization (part 2)

- Michael Smith: "Neutral and Relative Value" 2003
- Jennie Louise: "Relativity of Value and the Consequentialist Umbrella" 2004

Mar. 12 – Consequentialization (part 3)

- Mark Schroeder "Teleology, Agent-Relative Value, and 'Good'" 2005
- Douglas Portmore "Consequentializing Moral Theories" 2007

Mar. 19

THIRD SHORT PAPER DUE