Ethics  
(PHIL10178)

Dr Guy Fletcher

Seminar: 2:10-4pm, room G.06, 50 George Square.  
Office Hour: Monday, 2:15–3:15. DSB 4.03

Course Secretary
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General

On this course we will examine two major species of normative ethical theory: Consequentialism and Contractualism. In part 1 we examine Consequentialism (and Utilitarianism). Our two main lines of inquiry will be (a) which form of consequentialism is best? and (b) is even the best form of consequentialism good enough? We close part 1 by looking at Consequentialism and aggregation.

In part 2 we turn to Contractualism, specifically the form defended by T. M. Scanlon in his groundbreaking *What We Owe to Each Other*. We will seek to understand the view in its own terms, assess the extent to which it improves upon Consequentialism, and consider what objections it faces. We close part 2 by looking specifically at Contractualism and aggregation and Contractualist answers to the Non-Identity Problem before, at the very end, thinking about the ethics of human extinction.

Warning: The material covered in part 2, Scanlon’s Contractualism, will be substantially more difficult than the material in part 1. Students considering taking this course are therefore advised to read the introduction to *What we Owe to Each Other*, available online here, to familiarise themselves before making a final decision on taking this course: https://nyti.ms/2DXVy0m

Assessment

30% Mid-Term Essay [1500 words]  
Deadline: Thursday 27th February, by noon.

70% Final Essay [2000 words]  
Deadline: Thursday 23rd of April, by noon.

100% Coursework Dissertation  
Deadline: Tuesday 21st April, by noon.

Essay questions/prompts will be posted on the assessment page of the LEARN site. Note: you are very welcome to submit suggestions for essay questions to me. If your suggestion is approved it will then appear on the list of essay questions on the assessment page. You *must* write an essay from the approved list of questions.

Information about assessment, feedback, penalties, word counts, etc is available here: https://bit.ly/38rXHOK
Readings and Topics
Listed below are the topics and readings. These divide into:

(i) Readings that would give you background for the lecture (i.e. they tend to discuss the same issues).
(ii) Specific readings for the tutorial (i.e. the text that we will discuss in the tutorial). Note: sometimes these will be the same as the background for the lecture.
(iii) Further readings (i.e. places to learn more about the topic and to start your research if thinking of writing an essay on a particular topic or papers to discuss with your A.I.G).

All readings will be available either through the library (check DiscoverED) or the readings page of the LEARN site.

PART 1

CLASS 1 — INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE, CONSEQUENTIALISM (I):
ACT CONSEQUENTIALISM

Lecture Background Reading
- Sinnott-Armstrong, W. ‘Consequentialism’ in https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/

Tutorial Reading
- Smart, J. J. C. ‘An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics’ (skip §8 if you wish) in Smart & Williams Utilitarianism: For and Against.

Further Reading
- Bykvist, K. Utilitarianism: A guide for the perplexed (Continuum, 2010)
- Mill, J. S. Utilitarianism.

CLASS 2 — CONSEQUENTIALISM (II): OBJECTIONS

Lecture Background Reading
- Williams, B. ‘A Critique of Utilitarianism’ in Utilitarianism: For and Against.

Tutorial Reading
- Williams, B. ‘A Critique of Utilitarianism’ in Utilitarianism: For and Against.

Further Reading

CLASS 3 — CONSEQUENTIALISM (III): RULE-CONSEQUENTIALISM

Lecture Background Reading
- Hooker, B. ‘Rule Consequentialism’ https://stanford.io/368YaDp

Tutorial Reading

Further Reading

**CLASS 4 — CONSEQUENTIALISM (IV): SOPHISTICATED CONSEQUENTIALISM AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

**Lecture Background Reading**

**Tutorial Reading**

**Further Reading**

**CLASS 5 — CONSEQUENTIALISM (V): CONSEQUENTIALISM AND AGGREGATION**

**Lecture Background Reading**

**Tutorial Reading**

**Further Resources**
- 📽 ‘The Trolley Problem’ (s2, e5) of *The Good Place*.

**NOTE: Innovative Learning Week falls between class 5 and class 6**

**PART II**

**CLASS 6 — CONTRACTUALISM (I): CONTRACTUALISM INTRODUCED**

**Lecture Background Reading**
- Ashford, E. & Mulgan, T. ‘Contractualism’ in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [https://stanford.io/38mQQ9k](https://stanford.io/38mQQ9k)
- Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*, ch. 4 ‘Wrongness and Reasons’.

**Tutorial Reading**
- Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*, ch. 4 ‘Wrongness and Reasons’.

**Further Resources**
- 📽 ‘What We Owe to Each Other’ (s1, e6) of *The Good Place*. 
CLASS 7 — CONTRACTUALISM (II): CONTRACTUALISM DEVELOPED

Lecture Background Reading
- Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*, Ch. 5 ‘The Structure of Contractualism’.

Tutorial Reading
- Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*, Ch. 5 ‘The Structure of Contractualism’.

Further Reading

CLASS 8 — CONTRACTUALISM (III): CONTRACTUALISM AND AGGREGATION

Lecture Background Reading

Tutorial Reading

Further Reading

CLASS 9 — CONTRACTUALISM (IV): THE NON-IDENTITY PROBLEM

Lecture Background Reading

Tutorial Reading

Further Reading

CLASS 10 — CONTRACTUALISM (V): CONTRACTUALISM AND HUMAN EXTINCTION

Lecture Background Reading

Tutorial Reading

Further Reading

CLASS 11 - CONCLUSION, WRAP UP, ESSAY WORKSHOP
Frequently Asked Questions

Email is a wonderful resource but (a) we are all overwhelmed by it, partly because we don’t use other available methods and (b) it is a very inefficient method for me to communicate with you as a group. I’d prefer to spend time doing things that improve the class for everyone than answering a common, administrative, question many times individually. I thus include here the answers to the most common queries. I won’t reply to emails that ask a question clearly answered within this document or on the LEARN page.

Q. When do tutorial start? / Is there a tutorial in week 1?
   Tutorials start in week 2.

Q. How do I sign up to / switch tutorial group?
   This isn’t something I can help with, unfortunately. Check with the teaching office.

Q. I missed a class what should I do?
   There will be a handout given out at each class and uploaded to the learn page. The questions for the tutorials will be available on the LEARN page. These plus the relevant reading will get you back up to speed. You could also come to my office hour to go over any material you’re unsure about.

Q. How do I go about finding extra readings?
   Read the prescribed texts and the further reading suggestions listed above. Then read the things cited and discussed within those. And so on.

Q. How many references do I need for my essay?
   There’s no fixed number. And it’s a mistake to think in that way (that there’s some number of references you must include). When deciding whether to reference something the only relevant question is whether discussing this person’s view / objection etc contributes positively to your answering the question. If it doesn’t, then leave it out.

Q. How should I reference?
   I don’t mind which convention you use. Just pick some convention and apply it consistently. For more information see, for example:

   http://www.docs.is.ed.ac.uk/docs/Libraries/PDF/SEcitingreferencesHarvard.pdf

Q. I need an extension / I have special circumstances
   You must talk to the student support officers (SSOs). Their office is on the ground floor of DSB, opposite the teaching office. Their email is: PPLS.SSO@ed.ac.uk