

PHIL 453: The Ethics of Aggregation
Spring 2021
TTh 5:30-6:45pm

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Functional Competency Satisfied by this Course: Critical Analysis and Reasoning

Texts: (This will be available in the UMBC bookstore. Other texts will be provided by me on Blackboard)

John Broome *Weighing Lives*

Course Goals and Expectations:

One of the most famous puzzles in the recent history of ethics is the Trolley Problem. It is so famous that it got its own episode on the television show, the Good Place. The Trolley Problem is a problem about how to go about ethically deciding who to save in situations where you can't save everyone. It involves weighing one set of lives against another. In such cases there is a famous theory in ethics, Utilitarianism, which says that typically the right answer will be to save the greatest number. The more people on one side of the choice the more weight they should have in your decision.

There has always been significant opposition to the idea that weighty ethical issues like this can be resolved simply by counting numbers of people. In this course we will look at the complex questions that arise in attempting to give different, more complex answers to questions about weighing lives. We will look at this issue in two parts. First we will look at the Trolley Problem itself. The Trolley Problem is an example of a synchronic choice between lives. That is, it is a choice about who will live and who will die at a some moment in time. We will consider two kinds of response to the Trolley Problem, one on which the number of lives on each side of the decision don't matter and one on which they do matter, but don't totally decide the issue.

In the second part of the course, which will be shorter than the first part, we will look at diachronic choices between lives, or choices about who will live and who will die over time. This involves us in the somewhat puzzling issue of population ethics, where we have to make decisions balancing off the lives of people currently alive and the lives of those who do not yet exist. While some of the same issues that arose in Part One of the course will show up in the second part, adding time to the problem brings up interesting new puzzles.

Both these issues, the synchronic and diachronic choices between lives, have application to ethical issues we face all the time. The author who we will finish the semester with, John Broome, is, in addition to being a Philosophy and Economics Professor, a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, because questions of population ethics arise in their work with a vengeance. Questions about how we should decide who to save right now are of course central to figuring out many of the ethical issues related to health care and global poverty alleviation. So while much of the material in this course

will be formal and somewhat abstract, we will try to bring the issues into contact with ethical questions of immediate and pressing importance.

Through the writing of shorter exam essays, a longer final paper, and participation in class discussion, students will come to better understand the key ethical challenges facing decision-making concerning the balancing of competing interests, and how to think clearly about issues that arise when considering aggregates of individuals and more general questions about whether and how numbers do and don't count in ethical deliberation.

Methods of Evaluation:

Final Paper	30% of your grade
Midterm Exam	20% of your grade
Final Exam	30% of your grade
Participation	20% of your grade

The Final Paper of 8-10 pages will be on a topic developed by the student with the advice and approval of the instructor.

The Midterm and Final exams will be in-class, involving the writing of 2-3 shorter essays. The essay questions will be provided to you before the exam day. The participation grade will be determined by attendance and attentiveness in class and contribution to class discussions.

Course Schedule:

Week One 1/26 – 1/29 – Course Introduction and Ethics Overview
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – Consequentialism
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – Deontological Ethics

Part One – Synchronic Choices Between Lives

Week Two 2/1 – 2/5

Philippa Foot – “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”

Judith Jarvis Thomson – “The Trolley Problem”

Week Three 2/8 – 2/12

John Taurek – “Should the Numbers Count?”

Week Four 2/15 – 2/19

Derek Parfit – “Innumerate Ethics”

Gregory Kavka – “The Numbers Should Count”

Week Five 2/22 – 2/26

Ben Bradley – “Saving Lives and Flipping Coins”

Week Six 3/1 – 3/5

Tim Henning – “From Choice to Chance? Saving People, Fairness and Lotteries”

Robert Lawlor – “Taurek, Numbers and Probabilities”

Week Seven 3/8 – 3/12

Tim Scanlon *What we Owe to Each Other*, pg. 229 - 241
Tim Scanlon *Moral Dimensions* ch. 1–2

Week Eight 3/15 – 3/19

Spring Break

Week Nine 3/22 – 3/26

Frances Kamm – Tanner Lecture I – “Who Turned the Trolley”

Week Ten 3/29 – 4/2

Mid-term 4/1

Frances Kamm – Tanner Lecture II – “How the Trolley was Turned”

Part Two – Diachronic Choices Between Lives

Week Eleven 4/5 – 4/9

Parfit *Reasons and Persons* chapters 16-17

Week Twelve 4/12 – 4/16

Parfit *Reasons and Persons* chapters 18-19

Week Thirteen 4/19 – 4/23

Broome *Weighing Lives* chapters 1-4

Week Fourteen 4/26 - /30

Broome *Weighing Lives* chapters 5-9

Week Fifteen 5/3 – 5/7

Broome *Weighing Lives* chapters 10 –13

Week Sixteen 5/10 – 5/12

Broome *Weighing Lives* chapters 14–18

Final Paper due 5/12

Final Exam during Final Exams Week

UMBC Statement of Values for Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the [UMBC Student Handbook](#), or the [Office of Undergraduate Education](#).

Disclosures of Sexual Misconduct and Child Abuse or Neglect

As an instructor, I am considered a Responsible Employee, per [UMBC's Policy on Prohibited Sexual Misconduct, Interpersonal Violence, and Other Related Misconduct](http://humanrelations.umbc.edu/sexual-misconduct/umbc-resource-page-for-sexual-misconduct-and-other-related-misconduct/) (located at <http://humanrelations.umbc.edu/sexual-misconduct/umbc-resource-page-for-sexual-misconduct-and-other-related-misconduct/>). While my goal is for you to be able to share information related to your life experiences through discussion and written work, I want to be transparent that as a Responsible Employee I am required to report disclosures of sexual assault, domestic violence, relationship violence, stalking, and/or gender-based harassment to the University's Title IX Coordinator.

As an instructor, I also have a mandatory obligation to report disclosures of or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect (www.usmh.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionVI/VII150.pdf).

The purpose of these reporting requirements is for the University to inform you of options, supports and resources; you will not be forced to file a report with the police. Further, you are able to receive supports and resources, even if you choose to not want any action taken. Please note that in certain situations, based on the nature of the disclosure, the University may need to take action.

If you need to speak with someone in confidence about an incident, UMBC has the following Confidential Resources available to support you:

The Counseling Center: 410-455-2472

University Health Services: 410-455-2542

(After-hours counseling and care available by calling campus police at 410-455-5555)

Other on-campus supports and resources:

The Women's Center, 410-455-2714

Title IX Coordinator, 410-455-1606

Additional on and off campus supports and resources can be found at: <http://humanrelations.umbc.edu/sexual-misconduct/gender-equitytitle-ix/>.

Student Disability Services (SDS)

UMBC is committed to eliminating discriminatory obstacles that may disadvantage students based on disability. Services for students with disabilities are provided for all students qualified under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the ADAAA of 2009, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act who request and are eligible for accommodations. The Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) is the UMBC department designated to coordinate accommodations that would allow students to have equal access and inclusion in all courses, programs, and activities at the University.

If you have a documented disability and need to request academic accommodations, please refer to the SDS website at sds.umbc.edu for registration information and to begin the process, or alternatively you may visit the SDS office in the Math/Psychology Building, Room 212. For questions or concerns, you may contact us through email at disAbility@umbc.edu or phone (410) 455-2459.

If you require accommodations for this class, make an appointment to meet with me to discuss your SDS-approved accommodations.