

## *The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

### *Syllabus*

## *Utilitarianism: From Sidgewick to Parfit - 54127*

*Last update 03-10-2021*

*HU Credits:* 2

*Degree/Cycle:* 1st degree (Bachelor)

*Responsible Department:* Philosophy, Economics & Political Science

*Academic year:* 0

*Semester:* 2nd Semester

*Teaching Languages:* English

*Campus:* Mt. Scopus

*Course/Module Coordinator:* Shlomi Segall

*Coordinator Email:* [shlomi.segall@mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:shlomi.segall@mail.huji.ac.il)

*Coordinator Office Hours:* Mondays, 10-11

*Teaching Staff:*

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Prof Shlomi Segall

Course/Module description:

*This graduate seminar-style course will begin examining Jeremy Bentham's account of classical utilitarianism in Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, 1780 followed by reading parts of J. S. Mill's famous statement of classical utilitarianism, Utilitarianism 1863. We will then turn to Henry Sidgwick's classic The Methods of Ethics first issued in 1874 and reissued several times with the last, 7th edition appearing in 1907.*

*Sidgwick's The Methods of Ethics is one of the two definitive statements of 19th-century, classical utilitarianism, the other being J. S. Mill's 1861 Utilitarianism. We will focus on Sidgwick's revealing "Preface to the Sixth Edition" from 1901 before turning to chapters where he discusses the three methods of ethics, focusing especially on the method of universalistic hedonism. We shall clarify why Sidgwick thinks that the method of intuitionism can be accommodated with both the methods egoistic and universalistic hedonism. And we shall devote considerable energy to why he concludes that egoistic hedonism and universalistic hedonism simply cannot be reconciled with each other, leaving ethics in a tragic, irresolvable, deep dilemma that Sidgwick famously referred to as the "dualism of practical reasoning."*

*Parfit's Reasons and Persons and On What Matters are very long and exceptionally detailed defenses of a version of consequentialism that owes much to Sidgwick. Among other things, we will try to determine just how much Parfit is indebted to Sidgwick both methodologically and substantively.*

*In preparation for the course, we recommend that students read all of Mill's short Utilitarianism mentioned above. Hopefully, many of you will already have previously read this essay.*

Course/Module aims:

*The course will weave through historical accounts of utilitarianism with contemporary writing inspired by utilitarianism. It will be structured so that a class dealing with the history of utilitarianism will be followed by a class discussing a contemporary text.*

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

*Basic understanding of core issues in utilitarianism.*

Attendance requirements(%):

100

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Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Frontal teaching and discussions.

Course/Module Content:

1. March 16th: Introduction: Utilitarianism as Variety of Consequentialism

2. March 23rd: Classical Utilitarianism: Bentham

*Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Preface and Chapters 1-5*

3. March 30th: Utilitarianism and the Separateness of Persons

*Diane Jeske, 'Persons, Compensation, and Utilitarianism', The Philosophical Review 102 (1993), 541-575*

4. April 20th: Classical Utilitarianism: John Stuart Mill

*John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism (1863), Chapters 2 and 3*

5. April 27th: The Expanding Circle

*Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality," Philosophy and Public Affairs, no. 1, Spring 1972)*

6. May 11th: The Beginning of Analytical Classical Utilitarianism: Henry Sidgwick

*Henry Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics (1907), Preface to 6th Edition, Book IV, Chapters I-III*

7. May 18th: Negative Utilitarianism and the Asymmetry between Pain and Pleasure

*Toby Ord, 'Why I am not a Negative Utilitarian',  
<http://www.amirrorclear.net/academic/ideas/negative-utilitarianism/>*

8. May 25th The Dualism of Practical Reasoning

*Henry Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics, Book IV, Chapters IV-V and Concluding Chapter*

9. June 1st : Utilitarianism's Repugnant Conclusion

*Derek Parfit, 'Can We Avoid the Repugnant Conclusion?' Theoria 82 (2016), 110-127.*

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10. June 8th : Kantian Consequentialism

*Derek Parfit, On What Matters (2011), Volume I, Chapters 16-17)*

11. June 15th: Intransitivity

*Larry Temkin, "Intransitivity and the Mere Addition Paradox" Philosophy and Public Affairs, 16, no. 2 (Spring, 1987)*

12. June 22nd: Solving "The Profoundest Problem of Ethics

*Does Anything Really Matter? Ed. Peter Singer (2017), Chapter 13*

13. June 29th: Wrapping up: Caring About Consequences

Required Reading:

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13. June 29th: *Wrapping up: Caring About Consequences*

Additional Reading Material:

*Will be added as we go along.*

Course/Module evaluation:

End of year written/oral examination 0 %

Presentation 0 %

Participation in Tutorials 0 %

Project work 100 %

Assignments 0 %

Reports 0 %

Research project 0 %

Quizzes 0 %

Other 0 %

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*Additional information:*