

Philosophy 458/ EP&E 338

**Applied Utilitarianism:  
Poverty, Animals, and the Sanctity of Life**

Spring 2001

Mathias

Risse

Wednesday 3.30 - 5.20

SSS 902

Office Hour Wed 2-3

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"Applied Ethics" or "Practical Ethics" uses ethical theory (such as utilitarianism) to solve real-world moral problems. The goal of this class is to look at a range of important moral problems from the utilitarian point of view. Many of these issues confront us every day: the ethics of our relationship with animals, which raises serious questions about the food we eat; our environmental impact; problems for the sanctity of human life; and the disparity of wealth between those living in affluent nations and the poorest people in the world. We will put special emphasis on the work of Peter Singer, who has produced a sequence of influential and controversial books over the last thirty years in which he applies utilitarianism to problems such as world hunger, abortion, animal rights, euthanasia, etc. The class will begin with a brief introduction to utilitarian theory, and the remaining seminar meetings will be devoted to exploring the utilitarian take on specific moral problems. Opposing views will also be represented. Our eye in this course will be towards not so much questions of public policy, as to finding ways of understanding these controversies that illuminate what is morally important about them, and which allow us to have some confidence that we can actually make progress in our thinking about them.

*Requirements*

Priority in this seminar is given to EP&E majors; enrollment is limited to 20 students. Students are required to attend the seminar meetings and to give one 5-10 min presentation on an article or a book chapter. By the end of the terms students are also expected to have written a 20-pages paper related to the material discussed in this class. Some prior knowledge of philosophical ethics will be assumed (i.e., to the extent taught in Philosophy 120).

*Required Readings*

The following books are available for purchase at Book Haven:

William.H. Shaw, *Contemporary Ethics. Taking Account of Utilitarianism*  
Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*  
Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*  
Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer (eds.), *Bioethics. A Reader*

In addition, a reader is available for purchase at Tyco.

### *Schedule*

(a) = required readings

(b) = additional recommended readings (for students with special interests or those planning on writing on that subject area)

Wed, Jan 10: Introduction; Utilitarianism - Theory

(a) Shaw, chapters 1, 2, and 3

(b) Excerpts from J. J. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism - For and Against*, in Reader

Wed, Jan 17: continued

(a) Shaw, chapters 6, 7, and 8

(b) *Practical Ethics*, chapters 1 and 2; John Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?", in Reader

Wed, Jan 24: Rich and Poor: World Hunger and International Justice

(a) Nigel Dower, "World Poverty", in Reader; Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", in Reader; Singer, "The Singer Solution to World Poverty", in Reader; Kamm, "Famine Ethics: the Problem of Distance in Morality and Singer's Ethical Theory", in Reader

(b) *Practical Ethics*, chapter 8

Wed, Jan 31: continued

(a) Robert Van Wyk, "Perspectives on World Hunger and the Extent of Our Positive Duties", in Reader; Robert De George, "Property and Global Justice", in Reader; excerpts from James Fishkin, *The Limits of Obligation*, in Reader; John Arthur, "Rights and the Duty to bring Aid", in Reader

(b) Robert Goodin, "Free Movement: If people were Money"; Garrett Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor"; Nick Eberstadt, "Myths of the Food Crisis", all in Reader

Wed, Feb. 7: Animal Rights

(a) *Animal Rights*, chapter 1-3

(b) Immanuel Kant, "Duties Towards Animals"; Jeremy Bentham, "A Utilitarian View", both in *Bioethics*; H. J. McCloskey, "Rights", in Reader

Wed, Feb 14: continued

(a) *Animal Rights*, chapters 4-6; Jan Narveson, "Animal Rights", in Reader;

(b) Richard Hare, "Why I am only a Demi-Vegetarian"; Response to Narveson by Regan; Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People"; Bonnie Steinbock, "Specieism and Equality", all in Reader

Wed, Feb. 21: The Sanctity of Life: What's Wrong with Killing, and is there a Difference between Killing and Letting Die?

(a) *Practical Ethics*, chapter 4; Jonathan Glover, "The Sanctity of Life"; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on Euthanasia"; Germain Grisez and Joseph Boyle, "The Morality of Killing: A Traditional View", all in *Bioethics*;

(b) Thomas Nagel, "Death", in Reader; Jonathan Bennett, "Whatever the Consequences"; Winston Nesbitt, "Is Killing No Worse Than Letting Die", both in *Bioethics*

Wed, Feb. 28: The Sanctity of Life: Abortion

(a) *Practical Ethics*, chapter 6; Judith J. Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion", in *Bioethics*; John Finnis, "Abortion and Health Care Ethics", in *Bioethics*, Jim Stone, "Why Potentiality Matters", in Reader

(b) Mary Ann Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion", in Reader

Wed, March 19: continued

(a) Warren Quinn, "Abortion: Identity and Loss", in Reader; Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral", in *Bioethics*; Richard Hare, "Abortion and the Golden Rule", in *Bioethics*; Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion", in Reader

(b) /

Wed, March 26: The Sanctity of Life: Brain Death and Vegetarian State

(a) "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee" in *Bioethics*; Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death*, chapters 1-3, in Reader; Michael Green and Daniel Wikler, "Brain Death and Personal Identity"; David Lamb, *Death, Brain, and Ethics*, chapters 5, 6, and 8; Germain Grisez and Joseph Boyle, *Life and Death with Liberty and Justice*, chapter 3, all in Reader

(b) Singer, "Is the Sanctity of Life Doctrine Terminally Ill?", in *Bioethics*

Wed, April 4: The Sanctity of Life: Physician Assisted Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia

(a) *Practical Ethics*, chapter 7; James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia", in *Bioethics*; Philippa Foot, "Euthanasia"; Joel Feinberg, "Voluntary Euthanasia and the Inalienable Right to Life", both in Reader

(b) Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Physician-Assisted Suicide: Two Moral Arguments", in Reader

Wed, April 11: Environment

(a) *Practical Ethics*, chapter 10; Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic", in Reader; Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair", in Reader; Elliott Sober, "Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism", in Reader; Karen Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism", in Reader

(b) Rolston, "Respect for Life: Counting what Singer Finds of No Account"; Robert Elliot, "Environmental Ethics", both in Reader

Wed, April 18: Concluding Discussion: Why Act Morally?

(a) *Practical Ethics*, chapter 11 and 12

(b) /