

ETHICS, EVIDENCE, AND POLICY

Winter 2021-22

Syllabus

INSTRUCTOR: Rush T. Stewart
MEETING TIME: M 16:00-18:00
LOCATION: Ludwigstr. 31, Room 021
OFFICE HOURS: By appointment
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DESCRIPTION

There are a lot of problems in the world. It would be great if we could solve them all. But we can't. There are constraints on our time and resources. So how should we prioritize? This course is an introduction to the emerging field of [global priorities research](#).

PREREQUISITES

Our focus will be on conceptual issues, but this will involve us in a modest amount of formal work. While the course is self-contained, students should be prepared to put in the effort to learn the relevant technical material.

DROPBOX

To access reading materials and the current version of the syllabus, students must access the folder Ethics, Evidence, and Policy on [Dropbox](#).

LECTURES AND READINGS

We will be reading various articles and excerpts. All additional materials for the class will be made available on Dropbox. Any relevant handouts will also be posted.

We will hold the first meeting of the term on [Zoom](#). Most or all of the subsequent meetings will be held in person. Please observe that the [3G rule](#) is in effect at LMU.

REQUIREMENTS

Presentations: 15%
Final Paper: 85%

You should select a paper topic in consultation with me. Each week, email me a brief question or remark you have about the reading by noon on **Monday**. The presentation is intended to be an opportunity to get constructive feedback on a potential term paper topic. The length will depend on the number of people in the course. The final paper should be roughly 4,000-6,000 words or so.

OTHER RESOURCES

There are lots of videos and podcasts related to the topics of this course. A particularly useful resource is the [80,000 Hours](#) podcast. You can hear many long form interviews with many of the people on the syllabus and others. (The 80,000 Hours website also posts career advice and job openings related to effective altruism and global priorities work.)

If you would like additional help and feedback on your essay, please make use of the [Writing Center](#). You can schedule consultations with tutors.

SCHEDULE

It is *very* likely that the schedule will be adjusted throughout the term. Updates will be posted on Dropbox.

Date	Topic
18.10	Introductory remarks and syllabus review
ETHICAL ISSUES	
25.10	Population Ethics “Population Axiology,” Greaves Optional: “Path Independence and a Persistent Paradox of Population Ethics,” Stewart
01.11	All Saints Day: No Class
08.11	Longtermism “Astronomical Waste,” Bostrom “The Case for Strong Longtermism,” Greaves and MacAskill
EPISTEMIC ISSUES	
15.11	Moral Uncertainty “Why Maximize Expected Choiceworthiness?,” MacAskill and Ord “Moral Uncertainty about Population Axiology,” Greaves and Ord
22.11	Forecasting in the Social Sciences <i>Expert Political Judgment</i> , Tetlock, pp. 1–19, 54–66 “Long-term Forecasting and Evaluation,” Granger and Jeon Optional: “Have the Experts Been Weighed, Measured, and Found Wanting?,” Caplan
29.11	Cluelessness “Maximal Cluelessness,” Mogensen “The Epistemic Problem Does Not Refute Consequentialism,” Cowen Optional: “The Epistemic Challenge to Longtermism,” Tarsney, Sections 1–4, 7
DECISION-THEORETIC ISSUES	
06.12	Ord on Existential Risks “Catastrophic Risks,” Stefánsson “On Two Arguments for Fanaticism,” Russell Optional: “The Precautionary Principle Is Incoherent,” Peterson
13.12	No Class
20.12	“Discounting for Public Policy: A Survey,” Greaves
PHILANTHROPY	
10.01	“The Definition of Effective Altruism,” MacAskill (in Greaves and Pummer) Forum: The Logic of Effective Altruism “The Hidden Zero Problem: Effective Altruism and Barriers to Marginal Impact,” Budolfson and Spears (in Greaves and Pummer)
17.01	“Letter to a Young Philosopher: Don’t Become an Effective Altruist,” Crary “Stop the Robot Apocalypse,” Srinivasan “Philosophical Critiques of Effective Altruism,” McMahan

GROWTH

- 24.01 *Stubborn Attachments*, Cowen, ch. 2
The Great Escape, Deaton, ch. 7
[Brennan on Capitalism and Growthtopia](#), 34:00–60:00
- 31.01 “Optimum Population Size,” Greaves
[Informal Overview of Some Work by Chad Jones on Growth](#), Aschenbrenner
Optional: [Jones’s 2021 Atkinson Memorial Lecture](#)

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

- 07.02 On final paper topics