

Experiential Ethics 2024

Effective Altruism

1. **Effective Altruism (1 hr)**
 - EA: What is it?
 - Crary's Critique.
 - Let's go deeper.
 2. **Ethical Questions (20 min)**
 - Ethical Questions Assignment.
 - Case Study for next session.
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Effective Altruism

- Philosophical and Social Movement:
 - Effective altruism is a project that aims to find the best ways to help others, and put them into practice.
 - Using evidence and reason to figure out how to benefit others as much as possible, and taking action on that basis.
- Crary:
 - Programme for rationalising charitable giving, positioning individuals to do the ‘most good’ per expenditure of money or time.
- Relationship with
 - Consequentialism
 - Ethical Lenses

Freedom:

Negative Freedom (Liberty): Are agents able to do as they see fit without undue interference from others? Do our practices protect individual rights (e.g. private property, bodily integrity)?

Positive Freedom (Autonomy): Are agents able to choose how to live their lives? Are they able to ‘form, revise, and pursue’ their own conceptions of the good, projects, and values? Are groups and communities able to govern themselves and have meaningful control over their norms and practices?

Care:

Do our practices and relations meet the needs of those involved and make their world habitable? Do they provide those who are vulnerable and in need of help with good quality care? Do our practices create healthy relations of dependence in which the well-being of care-givers and care-receivers are both promoted? Are the responsibilities and labors of care fairly distributed in our communities?



Justice:

Procedural Justice: Do our rules treat all agents fairly? Are anyone's interests, needs, or values prioritized over others' in our decision-making?

Substantive Justice: Do our activities disproportionately affect (positively or negatively) one group or individual over others in an unjustified manner? Do our practices place an agent or group at a systematic advantage or disadvantage (e.g. by reproducing structural injustice)?

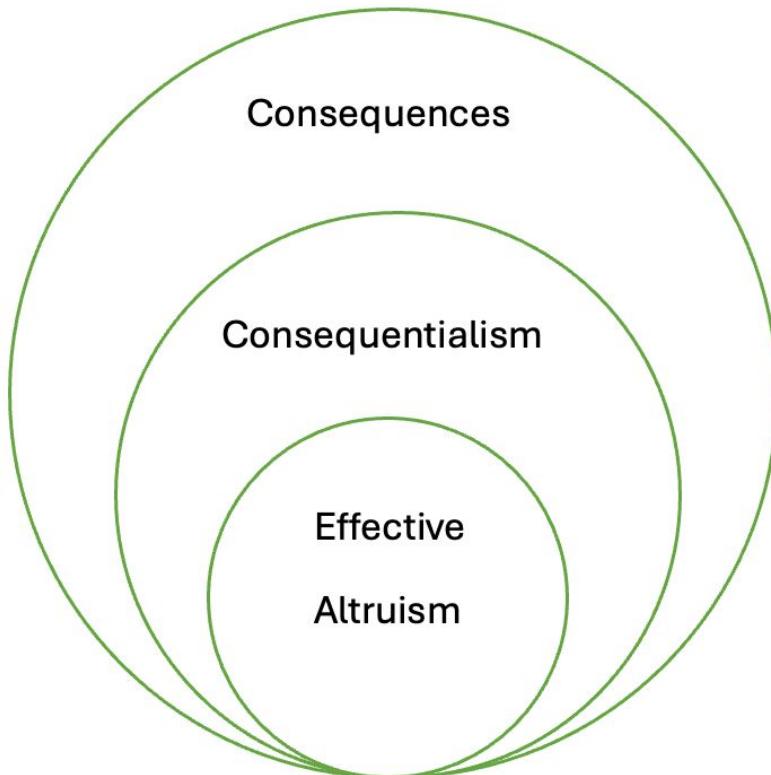
Flourishing:

Do agents have a real opportunity to live a *good life* – meaning the resources and conditions to develop and exercise their powers and capacities? Are agents part of communities that afford them meaningful relationships, dignity, and control over their lives? Do our practices provide agents with an adequate education to develop their reasoning capacities, virtues, and self-respect?

Consequences:

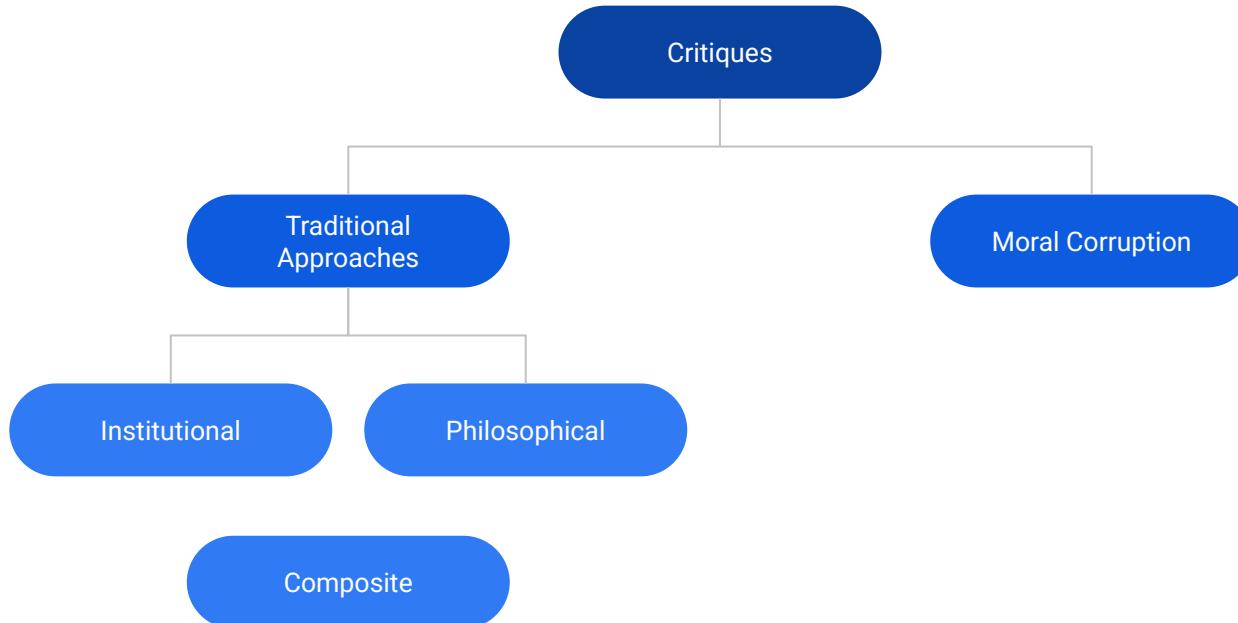
What are the long- and short-term benefits and harms of our actions? Do our practices successfully enable us to cooperate and meet our goals? Do our practices make optimal use of our resources? Is there a way to rearrange our practices to make more of what we have – be more productive, cost-efficient, etc.?

Effective Altruism



- A moral epistemology (theory of moral knowledge): It's possible to come to know what's valuable from a neutral perspective. Or: there are perspective-independent, neutrally-discovered facts about what's morally good.
- A right action theory (theory about what makes all right actions right): The right action to take in any situation is the one which, if taken, would maximize good consequences and minimize bad ones. We can call this consequentialism.
- An axiology (theory of what it is that's valuable): Well-being, or welfare, is what's valuable.
 - As Crary emphasizes, effective altruists are concerned with well-being for anyone who can be better or worse off. That includes animals!

Crary's Argument



Practical Activity 1

- Each group is assigned a critique:
 - Institutional, Philosophical or Composite.
 - Discuss how to briefly explain it to other people.
 - How EA responds to this criticism.
 - Propose one (or several) new criticisms of EA.
 - Use this document: [link](#)
 - Time: 10 minutes

Crary's Argument

- The philosophical critique: EA takes well-being to be the only thing of value, and assumes both rightness and value can and should be determined from Archimedean points.
- The institutional critique: EA is too individualistic—at best it uses single actions to put band-aids on systemic problems/failures, leaving bad systems/institutions unchanged, and at worst it actually contributes to the viability/longevity of bad systems/institutions.
- The composite critique: EA's focus on well-being and 'objective' 'view-from-nowhere' assessment limits its capacity to think about or solve social/systemic problems.

It's time to take a stand

- What positive things does Effective Altruism have?
- What criticisms (from Crary, another author or discussed today) make sense to you?
- What can we draw as conclusions?

Practical Activity 2

What is a good question?

- Important
- Answerable
- Open-ended + Neutral (ex ante)
- Simple and concise

Students work in groups. Each one presents a question (one of those sent in the Assignment or a new one if you prefer).

The other student provides comments on the question: do you understand what is being asked? Are there ways to make it more precise? Or maybe it's too specific? And so on...

The goal is to respectfully discuss about ethical questions

Answer this [form](#).