Overview

**Population ethics** is the part of moral theory that deals with acts that can affect the identity and the number of people that exist. This course gives an overview over theoretical and practical debates within population ethics. Among other things we will grapple with the following questions: Can we say that it is better for me to exist than not to exist? Can an action be wrong even though it doesn’t harm anyone? Which population is preferable: a large population with lower average well-being or a small population with higher average well-being? Is it wrong to have a child when you know you are not going to be a good parent? Why should we worry about climate change? Should we worry about human existential risk? Which large-scale altruistic causes are most important to support?

Convenor: Korbinian Rüger
(korbinian.rueger@balliol.ox.ac.uk)

**Friday, July 14: 13:00 - 19:00**

**Introduction**

*Session 1*

**The Non-Identity Problem I**
Can we do wrong without harming?

*Session 2*

**The Non-Identity Problem II**
Can we benefit people by bringing them into existence?

*Session 3*

**The Neutrality Intuition**
We are in favour of making people happy and neutral about making happy people.

**Saturday, July 15: 10:00 - 18:00**

*Session 4*

**The Repugnant Conclusion**
Can the best population be one where 100 billions of people exist at the subsistence level?

*Session 5*

**The Mere Addition Paradox**
Might it be bad to add people with lives worth living?

*Session 6*

**Procreation and Reproductive Technology**
Should we try to create only those children with the best chance in life?

*Session 7*

**Climate Change**
Why should we worry about climate change?

**Sunday, July 16: 10:00 - 16:00**

*Session 8*

**Existential Risk**
Why would it be bad if humans died out?

*Session 9*

**Animals**
Should we care about wild animal suffering?

*Session 10*

**Effective Altruism and Population**
What is effective altruism and what does population ethics tell us about where to give? Should we aim to reduce population size?
Reading List

Readings marked with an asterisk* are REQUIRED reading for all students. Most of the required readings are quite short and all of them are very accessible, often from newspapers and blogs, rather than academic publications. I will expect everyone to have read them closely. The other readings are only required for presenters and respondents of the respective session, but recommended for everyone. The further recommended readings might be of interests for presenters and for those wanting to write a term paper.

Introductory Reading

Session 1
The Non-Identity Problem I
Can we do wrong without harming?


Session 2
The Non-Identity Problem II
Can we benefit people by bringing them into existence?


Session 3
The Neutrality Intuition
We are in favour of making people happy and neutral about making happy people.


Session 4
The Repugnant Conclusion
Can the best population be one where 100 billions of people exist at the subsistence level?

Session 5

The Mere Addition Paradox
Might it be bad to add people with lives worth living?

Session 6

Procreation and Reproductive Technology
Should we try to create only those children with the best chance in life?

Session 7

Climate Change
Why should we worry about climate change?

Session 8

Existential Risk
Why would it be bad if humans died out?
b) Singer, P. et. al. (2013): “Preventing human extinction”. in the effective altruism online forum.*

Session 9

Animals
Should we care about wild animal suffering?

Session 10

Effective Altruism and Population
What is effective altruism and what does population ethics tell us about where to give?
Should we aim to reduce population size?

Further Recommended Readings


POPULATION ETHICS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE
July 14 - 16 2017, University of Bayreuth

Presentation Guidelines

Every student will have to pick one of the ten topics and present it to his or her fellow students. Presentations should be quite short (between 15 and 20 minutes). Rather than merely summarizing the readings, presenters should try to present what they take to be important arguments from the readings and try to evaluate those arguments. Thus it is not your job to imply give an overview over the texts(s). What you do need to do, however, is to address the questions/prompts given before the respective readings in the list above. Your presentation should be kept simple and easily accessible to your fellow students. Each topic will have a team of two presenters. The 15 to 20 minutes is the time that you will have to divide between the two of you. It is your job to come up with a good way of dividing the work amongst the two of you. It is also possible that only one of you speaks. It is recommended to use at least a few slides for your presentation, but not required. If you do, please send me the slides in PDF format by 8pm the night before your presentation.

Response Guidelines

Every student will have to pick one session in which to respond to the presentation that has been given. The responses should be between 10 and 15 minutes long and fulfil two purposes. First, you should, well, respond to the presentation by critically evaluating what has been said. Second, you should fill in any gaps that you feel the presenters have left. Since the presenters are not meant to give a full summary of the literature, but rather pick what they take to be the central elements and present those, they might leave something out that others find important. It is therefore imperative that you know the relevant readings very well in order to be able to adapt your remarks in light of what the presenters have said. The responses are therefore as least as important as the presentations and you might also find them more challenging. As with the presentations, each topic will have a team of two respondents.

Hausarbeit Guidelines

If you want to, you can write a term paper to earn marked credits (5 or 6 depending on your Studienordnung). Term papers should be between 4,000 and 5,000 words long excluding references. The strict deadline for receipt of the term papers is September 30, 2017 (If you want to graduate this term, this might need to be earlier). Your topic must be related to the themes of the seminar, but need not correspond to any particular session. However, I need to approve your choice of topic before you start writing. If you already know that you want to write a paper, it’s best to start thinking of potential topics early on, so that we can discuss it during the weekend I am in Bayreuth. Before you start writing, I very much recommend reading this guide on writing philosophical essays: http://www.matthiasbrinkmann.de/docs/guide.pdf.