

Seminar on Longtermism

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This is a graduate seminar on *longtermism*: the idea that, very often, what we ought to do is entirely determined by how our choices would affect the very far future. The seminar will focus on philosophical foundations of longtermism and arguments for and against it. The goal is twofold: first, to put ourselves in a better position to assess the case for longtermism and its prospects; second, to understand the underlying philosophical issues in their own right. These philosophical issues will include central topics in population ethics (the procreative asymmetry, the nonidentity problem, and the repugnant conclusion), decision theory (paradoxes of unbounded utility, probability discounting, risk aversion, unawareness), and their intersection.

1 Introduction to longtermism

Main: Greaves and MacAskill, “The Case for Strong Longtermism.”

Additional: Greaves, MacAskill, and Thornley, “The Moral Case for Long-Term Thinking.” Bostrom, “Astronomical Waste.” Beckstead, *On the Overwhelming Importance of Shaping the Far Future*, ch. 3.

2 Neutrality and the non-identity problem

Main: Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, chapters 16 and 17.

Additional: Narveson, “Utilitarianism and New Generations.” Harman, “Can We Harm and Benefit in Creating?” Boonin, *The Non-Identity Problem and the Ethics of Future People*, selections.

3 Neutrality and extinction

Main: Frick, “On the survival of humanity?”

Additional: Broome, *Weighing Lives*, ch. 12.

4 The asymmetry

Main: Thomas, “The asymmetry, uncertainty, and the long term.” Frick, “Conditional reasons and the procreation asymmetry.”

Additional: Bader, “The asymmetry.”

5 Population axiology

Main: Greaves, “Population axiology.” Tarsney and Thomas, “Non-additive axiologies in large worlds.”

Additional: Greaves and Ord, “Moral uncertainty about population axiology.”

6 Fanaticism

Main: Beckstead and Thomas, “A paradox for tiny probabilities and enormous values.” Russell, “On Two Arguments for Fanaticism.”

Additional: Wilkinson, “In defense of fanaticism.” Bostrom, “Pascal’s Mugging.”

7 Ignoring small probabilities

Main: Kosonen, *Tiny Probabilities of Vast Value*, chapters 4 and 6.

Additional: Monton, “How to avoid maximizing expected utility.” Isaacs, “Probabilities cannot be rationally neglected.”

8 Discounting the future

Main: Mogensen, “The only ethical argument for positive δ ?” Russell, “Problems for impartiality.”

Additional: Cowen and Parfit, “Against the social discount rate.” Lloyd, “Time discounting, consistency, and special obligations: a defence of Robust Temporalism.”

9 Deontological options and constraints

Mogensen, “Moral demands and the far future.” Mogensen and MacAskill, “The paralysis argument.”

10 Risk aversion and extinction

Main: Pettigrew, “Effective altruism, risk, and human extinction.”

Additional: Buchak, *Risk and Rationality*, selections. Thoma, “Risk aversion and the long run.”

11 Cluelessness

Main: Tarsney, “The epistemic challenge to longtermism.”

Additional: Greaves, “Cluelessness.” Mogensen, “Maximal Cluelessness.”

12 Ambiguity and Unawareness

Steele and Stefánsson, *Beyond Uncertainty: Reasoning with Unknown Possibilities*, selections.

13 The Hinge of History

Main: MacAskill, “Are we living at the hinge of history?” Mogensen, “The Hinge of History Hypothesis.”

Additional: Mogensen, “Doomsday rings twice.” Thomas, “Doomsday and objective chance.”