PSL ★
UNIVERSITÉ PARIS

Altruisme efficace et perspectives interdisciplinaires sur l'altruisme

Effective altruism and interdisciplinary perspectives on altruism

Responsable du cours : Tom Bry-Chevalier

Autre(s) enseignante(s) / enseignant(s) : Ibtissem Khelifati

Descriptif du cours :

Climate change, extreme poverty, factory farming, artificial intelligence, pandemic risk, etc. Understanding contemporary issues and how we can help improve the world can be difficult and overwhelming, leading to inaction or inefficient use of our resources.

What tools can help us identify the causes that should be the focus of our attention? How can we find effective solutions to the most pressing problems?

Drawing on the ideas of effective altruism, a philosophical and social movement that advocates "using evidence and reason to determine how to best benefit others, and acting on that basis", this course aims to introduce concepts and tools that can help you maximize your positive impact on the world.

Effective altruism is growing rapidly and its influence is being felt more and more in the English-speaking world. In just 15 years since the birth of the effective altruism movement, around hundreds of millions dollars per year have been donated to effective charities, thousands of people changed their career plans in the hope to do more good, and dozens of organizations have been created to help solve some of the most pressing problems identified. In parallel, Effective Altruism has gathered detractors such as Nobel prize winner Angus Deaton or philosopher Martha Nussbaum, giving rise to thought-provoking debates.

In this course, we introduce concepts and tools used in the effective altruism movement, put them into the broader philosophical and political context, with the aim to help you maximize your positive impact on the world.

Objectifs pédagogiques et compétences développées :

- Understanding and mastering different concepts and tools used to evaluate causes and actions (e.g. bayesianism, expected utility, counterfactual reasoning, RCTs, the Scale-Tractability-Neglectedness framework).
- Understanding the main theories in ethics and how they apply to altruism.

- Gaining a general understanding of some of the most pressing global issues as identified by the Effective Altruism movement and the solutions considered most promising in addressing them.
- Good understanding of the limits and criticisms of effective altruism
- Getting motivated to make the world a better place!

Contenu détaillé du cours :

Class 1 - Introduction | Tom Bry-Chevalier

Presentation of the course, elements of critical thinking (e.g. distinction between facts and values) and constructive disagreement.

Core reading:
● This syllabus

Optional reading:
● Galef, J. (2021). "*The Scout Mindset: Why Some People See Things Clearly and Others Don't*". Portfolio.

Class 2 - Effective altruism | Tom Bry-Chevalier

What is effective altruism? How did this movement originate, and what are its objectives? What ethical framework underlies this movement?

Core reading:
● MacAskill W. (2019). "*The Definition of Effective Altruism*". Oxford University Press.
● Centre for Effective Altruism. "*What is effective altruism?*"
https://www.effectivealtruism.org/articles/introduction-to-effective-altruism

Optional reading:
● Singer, P. (2015). "*The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas About Living Ethically*". Yale University Press.
● MacAskill, W. (2015). "*Doing Good Better".* Random House.
● Gabriel, I. (2017). "*Effective altruism and its critics*". Journal of Applied Philosophy.

Class 3 - The psychology of altruism | Tom Bry-Chevalier

What motivates people to act altruistically? What kind of cognitive biases affect people? Can we improve the way people think and reason about helping others?

Core reading:

● Chapters 1 and 3 ("The Norms of Giving"; "Distant Causes and Nearsighted Feelings"). Schubert, S. Caviola, L. (2024). *Effective Altruism and the Human Mind: The Clash Between Impact and Intuition*. Oxford University Press

Optional reading:

● Greene, J. D. (2013). "*Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap between Us and Them*". The Penguin Press.
● Clavien, C. (2018), "Altruisme (A)", dans Maxime Kristanek (ed.), *L'Encyclopédie philosophique*.
● Singer, P. (2009). *The Life You Can Save*. Random House. (book available here)
● Caviola, L., Schubert, S., & Greene, J. D. (2021). "*The psychology of (in) effective altruism*". Trends in Cognitive Sciences.
● Schubert, S. Caviola, L. (2024). *Effective Altruism and the Human Mind: The Clash Between Impact and Intuition*. Oxford University Press.
● Slovic, P. (2007). "*If I look at the mass I will never act": Psychic numbing and genocide*", Judgment and Decision Making.
● Berman, J. Z., Barasch, A., Levine, E. E., & Small, D. A. (2018). "*Impediments to effective altruism: The role of subjective preferences in charitable giving*". Psychological science, 29(5), 834-844.

Class 4 - **How to prioritize actions and causes? | Tom Bry-Chevalier**

How do we determine the best opportunities to help others? A few tools for dealing with uncertainty (e.g. Bayesianism, expected utility). The Scale-Tractability-Neglectedness framework.

Core reading:
● MacAskill, W. (2018). "*What are the most important moral problems of our time?*". Ted2018.
● "*Expected Value*". conceptually.org.
● Todd, B. (2021). "*Counterfactuals and how they change our view of what does good*". 80 000 Hours.
● "*Scope Insensitivity*". conceptually.org.
● "*Thinking at the Margin*". conceptually.org.

Optional reading:
● Wiblin, R. Harris, K. (2018). "*Our descendants will probably see us as moral monsters. What should we do about that?*". 80 000 Hours.
● Wiblin, R. (2016). "*A framework for comparing global problems in terms of expected impact*". 80 000 Hours.
● Cotton-Barratt, O. (2016). "*Prospecting for Gold*". effectivealtruism.org.
● Todd, B. (2021). "*How much risk to take if you want to do good?*". 80 000 Hours.
● Todd, B. (2021). "*Cluelessness: can we know the effects of our actions?*". 80 000 Hours.

Class 5 - Metaethical issues | Ibtissem Khelifati

Basic concepts in metaethics (subjectivism, relativism, moral realism) and how they apply to ethical disagreements.

Core reading:
● Crashcourse. (2016). "*Metaethics: Crash Course Philosophy #32: Crash Course Philosophy #32*". Youtube.
● Introduction (p. 1-9), M. (2003). *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*. Polity Press.

Optional reading:
● Jaquet, F., & Naar, H. (2019). "*Qui peut sauver la morale? Essai de métaéthique*". Ithaque.

● Monsieur Phi. (2017). "*À chacun sa morale ?*". YouTube.
● Lemaire, S. (2016). "*Métaéthique (GP)*". dans Maxime Kristanek (ed.), L'Encyclopédie philosophique.
● Miller, Al. (2003). "*An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*". Polity Press.

Class 6 - Ethical and political issues | Ibtissem Khelifati

Basic concepts of ethics (consequentialism, utilitarianism, deontology, welfarism, etc.). Do we have a moral or political obligation to help others (in the most efficient way)?

Core reading:
● The Wandering Professor (2019). "*A Brief Intro to Normative Ethics*", Youtube.
● Singer, P. (1972). "*Famine, Affluence, and Morality*". *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. (Fr. translation here)

Optional reading:
● Temkin, Larry S. (2022). "*Being Good in a World of Need*" (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.
● Vandamme, P. (2017). "*Justice sociale (GP)*", dans Maxime Kristanek (ed.), *L'Encyclopédie philosophique*
● Dézèque, F. (2021). "*Bien-être (A)*", dans Maxime Kristanek (ed.), *L'Encyclopédie philosophique*.
● Monvoisin, J. (2021). "*Justice distributive globale (A)*", dans Maxime Kristanek (ed.), *L'Encyclopédie philosophique.*
● Jaquet, F. (2016). "*Utilitarisme (A)*", dans Maxime Kristanek (ed.), *L'Encyclopédie philosophique.*
● Broi, A. (2020). "*Introduction à l'utilitarisme*". Youtube.
● Todd, B. (2021). "*What is social impact? A definition*". 80 000 Hours.
● Young, I. (2011). "*Responsibility for Justice*". Oxford University Press.

Class 7 - Methodological issues: measurement, evaluation | Tom Bry-Chevalier

How to measure well-being? How to experimentally identify promising altruistic interventions? RCTs in experimental economics and their limits.

Core reading:
● Duflo, E. (2010). "*Social experiments to fight poverty*". Ted2010.
● UNICEF Innocenti. (2014). "*Randomized Controlled Trials*". YouTube.
● Deaton, A. (2017). "*The problems with Randomised Controlled Trials*". CEPR & VideoVox Economics. YouTube.
● UNICEF Innocenti. (2014). "*Building Blocks of Impact Evaluation*". YouTube.
● UNICEF Innocenti. (2014). "*Strategies for Causal Attribution*. YouTube.
● UNICEF Innocenti. (2014). "*Data Collection & Analysis*. YouTube.
● Bhula, R. Mahoney, M. Murphy, K. (2020). "*Conducting cost-effectiveness analysis*". J-PAL.

Optional reading:
● Deaton, A. (2016). "*Understanding and misunderstanding randomized controlled trials (1/2)*". Paris School of Economics. YouTube.
● Deaton, A. (2016). "*Understanding and misunderstanding randomized controlled trial (2/2)*". Paris School of Economics. YouTube.
● Sassi, F. (2006). "*Calculating QALYs, comparing QALY and DALY calculations*". Health policy and planning.
● Whitehead, S. Ali, S. (2010). "*Health outcomes in economic evaluation: the QALY and utilities*". British Medical Bulletin.

- Hubbard, D. (2014). *How to Measure Anything*. Wiley.
- Manheim, D. Garrabrant, S. (2019). "*Categorizing variants of Goodhart's Law*". arxiv.

Class 8 - Global poverty | Tom Bry-Chevalier

A billion people still live in extreme poverty and getting people out of poverty might plausibly be the best use of our resources. However, there are many possible approaches to tackling poverty: how do we choose between them?

Core reading:
- Ord, T. (2013). "*The moral imperative toward cost-effectiveness in global health*". Center for Global Development.
- Go to Dollar Street and "visit" some of the homes
- Chapter 1. Rosling, H. Rosling, O. Rosling Rönnlund, A. (2018). *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World--and Why Things Are Better Than You Think*. Flatiron Books.

Optional reading:
- Duflo, E. Banerjee, A. (2011). *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. PublicAffairs.
- Ortiz-Ospina, E. "*Global Health*". Our World In Data.
- Roser, M. Ortiz-Ospina, E. "Global Extreme Poverty. Our World In Data.
- Adler, M.D., (2017). *A Better Calculus for Regulators: From Cost-Benefit Analysis to the Social Welfare Function*. Duke Law School Public Law & Legal Theory Series.
- Bhula, R. Murphy,K (2020). "Conducting cost-effectiveness analysis". JPAL.
- Pogge, T. (2011). "*Are we violating the human rights of the world's poor?*" Yale Hum. Rts. & Dev.
- Sen, A.. (1999). *Development as Freedom.* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Karnofsky, H. (2016). "*The lack of controversy over well-targeted aid*" Givewell.
- Hickel, J. (2019). "A letter to Steven Pinker (and Bill Gates, for that matter) about global poverty".

Class 9 - Non-human animals | Tom Bry-Chevalier

While human life is typically afforded greater moral worth, few would contend the moral value of animals is zero. Even if given a reduced moral worth, the vast numbers of animals relative to humans is a salient consideration. For those acknowledging these premises, animal welfare emerges as a critically neglected challenge deserving of substantive ethical attention and remediation in the contemporary era.

Core reading:
- Singer, P. (1989). *All animals are equal*. Oxford University Press.
- (pp 7-17). Sebo, J. "*Effective Animal Advocacy" (pp. 7-17)*. The Routledge Handbook of Animal Ethics. Routledge.
- Monsieur Phi. (2018). "ÉTHIQUE ANIMALE : la probabilité d'une catastrophe | Argument frappant #9 - Ep.1". YouTube.

Optional reading:
- Singer, P. (1975). *Animal Liberation*. HarperCollins.
- Huemer, M. (2019). *Dialogues on Ethical Vegetarianism*. Routledge.
- Espinosa, R. Treich, N. (2024). "*Animals and social welfare*". Social Choice Welfare.

● Groff, Z. and Ng, Y.K. (2019). "*Does suffering dominate enjoyment in the animal kingdom? An update to welfare biology*". Biology & Philosophy.

● Hestermann, N. Le Yaouanq, Y. and Treich, N., (2019). "*An economic model of the meat paradox*". Econstor Discussion Paper No 164.

● Lusk, J.L. Norwood, F.B. (2011). "*Animal welfare economics*". Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy.

● Friedrich, B. (2019). "*The next global agricultural revolution*". Ted2019.

● Fischer, B. (2022). "*The Welfare Range Table*". Rethink Priorities.

● Fischer, B. (2023). "*Rethink Priorities' Welfare Range Estimates*". Rethink Priorities.

● Budolfson, M. Espinosa, R. Treich, N. Fischer, B. (2024) "*Monetizing Animal Welfare Impacts for Benefit-Cost Analysis*". Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis

Class 10 - **Alternative proteins | Tom Bry-Chevalier**

Numerous studies highlight the significant negative externalities associated with meat consumption, necessitating a shift towards diets with reduced meat intake. Given the challenges in persuading individuals to reduce meat consumption in their diet and the low popularity of coercive policies, alternative proteins have been proposed as a solution to facilitate the protein transition.

Core reading:
● Good Food Institute. (2024). "*Introduction to alternative proteins*".

● Verkuijl, C., Achakulwisut, P., Green, J., & Noble, K. (2023). "*What's cooking? An assessment of the potential impacts of selected novel alternatives to conventional animal products*". UNEP.

Optional reading:
● Bry-Chevalier, T. (2024). "*Comparing the potential of meat alternatives for a more sustainable food system*".

● Siegrist, M., & Hartmann, C. (2023). "*Why alternative proteins will not disrupt the meat industry*". Meat Science.

● Santo, R. E., Kim, B. F., Goldman, S. E., Dutkiewicz, J., Biehl, E. M., Bloem, M. W., ... & Nachman, K. E. (2020). "*Considering plant-based meat substitutes and cell-based meats: a public health and food systems perspective*". Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems.

● Dutkiewicz, J., Hayek, M. (2021). "*Yes, plant-based meat is better for the planet*". Vox.

● He, J., Evans, N. M., Liu, H., & Shao, S. (2020). "*A review of research on plant-based meat alternatives: Driving forces, history, manufacturing, and consumer attitudes*". Comprehensive reviews in food science and food safety.

Class 11 - **Future generations and the case for long-termism | Tom Bry-Chevalier**

What value should be placed on the lives of individuals who will exist in the future compared to individuals alive today? What consequences for our actions?

Core reading:
● Sigal, S. (2021). "*What we owe to future generations*". Vox.
● Chapter 1 & 2. Ord, T. (2020). *The Precipice*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Optional reading:
● Ord, T. (2020). *The Precipice*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
● Greaves, H. MacAskill, W. (2021). "*The case for strong longtermism*". Global Priorities Institute.
● Summers, L. Zeckhauser, R. (2008). "*Policymaking for posterity*". Journal of Risk and Uncertainty.

- MacAskill, W. (2022). "*What we owe to the future*". Basic books.
- Roser, M. (2022). "*The Future is Vast: Longtermism's perspective on humanity's past, present, and future*". Our World In Data.

Class 12 - Global catastrophic risks | Tom Bry-Chevalier

Some risks, called global catastrophic risks, threaten the survival of human civilization as we know it, and even of humanity itself. What are these risks? How to prevent them?

Core reading:
- Monsieur Phi. (2022). "*Le progrès des sciences nous condamne-t-il à l'apocalypse ?*". YouTube.
- Specter, M. (2012). "*The Deadliest Virus: Did a scientist put millions of lives at risk, and was he right to do it?*". The New Yorker.
- Piper, K. (2019). "*AI could be a disaster for humanity. A top computer scientist thinks he has the solution.*" Vox.

Optional reading:
- Christian, B. (2020). "*The Alignment Problem*". W. W. Norton & Company.
- Nguyên Hoang, L. El Mhamdi, E. (2019). "*Le fabuleux chantier: Rendre l'intelligence artificielle robustement bénéfique*". Edp Sciences.
- Wallace-Wells, D. (2017). "*The Uninhabitable Earth*", *Annotated Edition*. Intelligencer.
- Millett, P. Snyder-Beattie, A. (2017). "*Existential risk and cost-effective biosecurity*". Health Security.
- Matheny, J.G. (2007). "*Reducing the risk of human extinction*". Risk Analysis: An International Journal.
- Martin, I.W. Pindyck, R.S. (2019). "*Welfare Costs of Catastrophes: Lost Consumption and Lost Lives*". National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Bostrom, N. (2013). "*Existential risk prevention as global priority*". Global Policy Volume.
- Méjean, A. Pottier, A. Zuber, S. Fleurbaey, M. (2023) "*Opposite ethical views converge under the threat of catastrophic climate change*". Ecological Economics.

Class 13 - Criticisms of effective altruism | Tom Bry-Chevalier

As the effective altruism movement has gained traction and visibility, it has also attracted a growing number of critics from various spheres - mainstream media, academic research, and even from within the movement itself. What are the most common criticisms? What are they based on? What alternatives are being put forward?

Core reading:
- Hickel, J. (2019). "*A response to Max Roser: how not to measure global poverty*"
- Crary, A. (2021). "*Against 'Effective Altruism*'', Radical Philosophy.
- Matthews, D. (2022). "*How effective altruism let Sam Bankman-Fried happen*". Vox.

Optional reading:
- Sullivan, D. Hickel, J. (2023). "*Capitalism and extreme poverty: A global analysis of real wages, human height, and mortality since the long 16th century*". World Development.
- Adams, J, C. Crary, A. Gruen, L. (2023) "*The Good It Promises, the Harm It Does Critical Essays on Effective Altruism*". Oxford University Press.
- "*Criticism of Effective Altruism*". Effective Altruism Forum.
- McMahan, J. (2016). "*Philosophical critiques of effective altruism*". Philosophers' Magazine.

- Dietz, A. (2019). "*Effective altruism and collective obligations*". Utilitas.
- Crary, A. (2023). "*The toxic ideology of longtermism*". Radical Philosophy*.*
- Cremer, C. (2023) "*How effective altruists ignored risk*". Vox.

Class 14 - Altruism in action | Tom Bry-Chevalier

What available resources do we have to help others? The importance of time and money, and how your career could contribute to solving some of the most challenging problems.

Core reading:
● 80 000 Hours. "*Start here*".
● Todd, B. (2017). "*Advice for undergraduates*". 80 000 Hours.
● Todd, B. (2021). "*Why some of your career options probably have 100x the impact of others*". 80 000 Hours.
● Giving What We Can. "*Common Concerns About Donating to Charity*".
● Hazell, J. Plant, M. (2021). "*Can money buy happiness? A review of new data*". Giving What We Can.

Optional reading:
● "Career planning and decision making — all our best resources". 80 000 Hours.
● The website of Giving What We Can.

Class 15 - Final presentation of group projects | Tom Bry-Chevalier and Ibtissem Khelifati

Presentation of the final group project to the rest of the class, followed by Q&A sessions from students and teachers.

Langue d'enseignement : English

Type de cours : CM

Class is organized as follow:
At the start of the class: Quiz related to the core class ressources.
Presentation with slides.
At the end of the class: Discussion about a topic related to the lecture and core resources

Modalités d'évaluation :

Class participation : 20 %
Mid-term homework assignment : 40 %
Group project : 40 %

Année : L3

Semestre : Semestre 1

Lectures obligatoires :

Students must review the core resources (readings, videos, podcasts, etc.) listed for each class prior to the session. Comprehension of these preparatory materials will be assessed via an interactive quiz at the start of class. This ensures students grasp foundational concepts to enable deeper engagement during class time.

Lectures recommandées :

Optional resources accompanying each class allow students to deepen their understanding of covered topics. Further resources can be provided upon request to enable more extensive study of specific areas of interest.