# History of Moral Doctrines

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***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

Is it right to use the nuclear bomb or bomb civilians to end a war? Is it right to impose sanctions and embargoes that target civilians? Can economic maximization justify the killing of the sick or the exploitation of workers? Is it right to conduct lethal experiments on embryos or human beings already born to save future generations? Or clone a human to have organs to heal many others? Or torture a man to thwart an attack? Or kill an innocent to save a hundred? Is it right to choose the lesser evil?

All consequentialists (or almost all) would answer in the affirmative to such questions, since they believe that the moral qualification of actions depends, from time to time, on their consequences, and deny the existence of inviolable human rights; instead deontologism (with the exception of some authors) and the ethics of intrinsic evil claim that there are always evil actions (regardless of the consequences), as well as absolute moral principles and imperative human rights.

The course especially aims to examine whether intrinsically evil acts and unconditional human rights exist (and on what basis).

At the end of the course, students will be able to know and understand the main ethical concepts mentioned above and to address the related moral issues.

This will also allow students to evaluate these concepts and, to the extent that they deem them fruitful/fruitless, to examine various aspects of contemporary ethos, some existing laws, and some political choices. They will also be able, if and to the extent that they deem it fruitful, to change some of their choices and actions by applying some of these concepts concretely in their own life and civil commitment.

At the end of the course, students will have conceptual tools to consolidate their autonomous judgment and critical sense, to refine their understanding of moral philosophy issues and their communication skills in the ethical field.

***COURSE CONTENT***

Part of the course will be a historiographical reconstruction and an analysis of the thought of some of the utilitarian-consequentialist authors who developed this paradigm: in particular, Bentham, then Mill, Hare, Harsanyi, etc. The course will also address the utilitarian ethics of P. Singer, a contemporary worldwide famous author, especially known for his theses in favour of equating humans and animals (against ‘speciesism’) and for the lawfulness of infanticide.

In addition, the course will address the issues of good, of acting (its ontology and its identification), of moral responsibility, and of the cognitive value of emotions.

The course will also examine some moral dilemmas, which occur when there appear to be two stringent duties that force incompatible actions (some similar dilemmas were mentioned above, at the beginning; others - with elements that can be reconstructed online - are, for example: the “dilemma of Sophie”, that [cf. I. Berlin] of the Jewish leader threatened by the Nazis, that of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac).

Finally, the ethics of the natural moral law inspired by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas will be reconsidered.

***READING LIST***

Bentham J., *Introduzione ai principi della morale e della legislazione*, UTET 1998 (some short parts of the textbook that will be specified during the course).

Mill J.S., *L’utilitarismo*, Sugarco 1991 (some short parts of the textbook that will be specified).

Samek Lodovici G., *L’utilità del bene. Jeremy Bentham, l’utilitarismo e il consequenzialismo*, Vita e Pensiero 2004 (some short parts of the textbook that will be specified).

Spaemann R., *La responsabilità personale & il suo fondamento*, in AA. VV., Etica teleologica o etica deontologica?, Cris, Roma 1983, pp. 5-25.

Note: the reading list is approximate and will be specified during the course.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Classroom lectures and seminars.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

Oral interview (on a 30-point scale) aimed at verifying the acquisition and correct understanding of the course contents.

The exam consists of 6-7 questions (with approximately equal weight) on the course contents aimed at assessing the students’ knowledge of the topic, and their presentation and analytical skills.

The final mark will be based (especially) on the accuracy and completeness of the answers, but also (to a lesser extent) on the ability to argue statements, judgments, analyses, and the appropriate use of the specific terminology shown during the interview.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

A generic knowledge of some general concepts of ethics and philosophical anthropology can be useful (though not necessary).

However, interest in philosophical reflection on moral and anthropological questions is expected.

*COVID-19*

In the event that the health emergency should continue, both teaching activities and any forms of learning monitoring, both in progress and final, will be provided also remotely through our University's Blackboard platform, the Microsoft Teams platform and any other tools envisaged and notified at the beginning of the course, so as to ensure the full achievement of the formative objectives set out in the study plans and, at the same time, the safety of our students.

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG or on the Faculty notice board.