

PHIL680 Problems of Philosophy 1
The Ethics of Population Health Measure
Leacock 927, Thursday 12:05-1:55

Instructor: Iwao Hirose (iwao.hirose@mcgill.ca)

Office hours: Thursday 2:00-3:30

Description: Philosophy plays an important role in seemingly purely technical matters in real world and may consequently impact on decisions and actions of NGOs, governments, and international organizations. The summary measure of population health is one of such examples. It estimates the badness of mortality (death) and morbidity (disease and injury) of a population. From early 1990's, Global Burden of Disease Studies (GBD), which is now administered by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in Seattle, offer the most comprehensive health data set. One of the salient features of GBD is that architects of GBD involve normative ethicists, philosophers of science and welfare economists from the very early stage of the project. In this course, we will examine the philosophical issues arising from measuring and evaluating the mortality and morbidity. Each class consists of two parts. In the first part, I will provide background/technical information and explain the philosophical problems. In the second part, we will have class discussion on the required readings. This course

Evaluation method

- Attendance and participation 20 points (there will be a disproportional penalty on unexcused absences. 3 or more absences will result in 0 point)
- Weekly discussion topics 20 points
- Term paper 60 points

There will be 2 or 3 required readings each week. From week 2, you will be asked to post two discussion topics or questions on the discussion board of MyCourses at least 24 hours before each class. For the first class on January 11, you do not need to prepare anything.

Schedule

January 11: Introduction to the course. Overview of GBD

- Murray, C. J., Lopez, A. D., & World Health Organization. (1996). The global burden of disease: a comprehensive assessment of mortality and disability from diseases, injuries, and risk factors in 1990 and projected to 2020: summary.

January 18: The value of life.

- Sudhir Anand and Kara Hansn. "Disability-Adjusted Life Years: A Critical Review". In Sudhir Anand et al. (eds.) *Public Health, Ethics, and Equity*. OUP (2004).
- Joshua Salomon et al. "Disability weights for the Global Burden of Disease 2013 study" *Lancet Global Health*, 3 (2015).

January 25: What is health? Is health separable from well-being?

- John Broome. "Measuring the burden of disease by aggregating well-being" in Christopher Murray et al (eds.) *Summary Measures of Population Health Concepts, Ethics, Measurement and Applications*. WHO (2002).
- Dan Hausman. "The value of health" in Iwao Hirose et al. (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*. OUP (2015).
- Dan Hausman. *Valuing Health*, ch.6. OUP (2015).

February 1: How do we measure the health outcome? Should we ask people?

- Dan Hausman. *Valuing Health*, chs. 7 and 8. OUP (2015).

February 8: Sequelae and adaptation. How bad is it to become blind?

- Jeffrey Blustein and Daniel Putnam. "Disability: Health, well-being and personal relationships" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016).

February 15: What is the "badness" of death? How do we measure it?

- Thomas Nagel. "Death" in *Mortal Question*. CUP.
- John Broome. "Goodness is reducible to betterness: the evil of death is the value of life" in *Ethics out of Economics* (1999).

February 22: Age-weighting and the time-relative interest account.

- John Broome. "The badness of early death", mimeo.
- Jeff McMahan. "Death and the value of life" *Ethics*, 99 (1988).

March 8: Age-weighting.

- Greg Bognar. "Age-weighting" *Economics and Philosophy*, 24 (2008).

March 15: Incidence, prevalence, and the temporal location of the "badness" of death.

- Jens Johansson. "The timing problem" in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*. OUP (2012).
- Ben Bradley. *Well-being and Death*, ch.3. OUP (2009).
- Andrew Schroeder. "Incidence, prevalence, and hybrid approaches to calculating disability-adjusted life years" *Population Health Metrics*, 10 (2012).

March 22: Causal attribution by counterfactuals

- Jeff McMahan. *The Ethics of Killing*. OUP (2002).
- John Broome. "The value of living longer" in Sudhir Anand et al. (eds.) *Public Health, Ethics and Equity*. OUP (2005).

March 29: Severity weights. Should health data be egalitarian?

- Iwao Hirose. "Axiological sufficientarianism" in Carina Furie et al (eds.) *What is Enough?* OUP (2016).

April 5: Aggregation. Comparing a small benefit for a large number of people and a huge benefit for a small number of people.

April 12: Closing discussion.