

Internet Appendix A42: Philosophy

A42.1 Illustrative Pitch Template Example on Ethical Theory

Pitcher's Name	Simon Burgess	FoR category	Philosophy	Date Completed	5 July, 2015
(A) Working Title	Ethical theory for business ethics: can it be both unified and practical?				
(B) Basic Research Question	Is a 'loose', pragmatic account of ethical theory inevitable in practical business ethics or is it possible to develop a coherent, unified account of ethical theory?				
(C) Key paper(s)	<p>Thomas Hurka 'Sidgwick on consequentialism and deontology: a critique', <i>Utilitas</i>, Vol. 26, 2014, pp. 129-52</p> <p>Roger Scruton 'Parfit the perfectionist', <i>Philosophy</i>, Vol. 89, Issue 4, October 2014, pp. 621 – 634</p> <p>Ben Eggleston 'Rejecting the Publicity Condition: The Inevitability of Esoteric Morality', <i>The Philosophical Quarterly</i>, Vol. 63, No. 250, January 2013, pp. 29–57</p>				
(D) Motivation/Puzzle	<p>In their approach to ethical theory we have come to expect business ethicists to settle for a pluralistic kind of 'practical synthesis', commonly one in which consequentialist, deontological, and Aristotelian approaches, for example, are each regarded as alternative 'lenses' through which to view a situation (see for, e.g.: Shaw & Barry, Crane & Matten, or Gael McDonald). This paper is motivated by the thought that something more ambitious and genuinely unified may be possible. The position that I am seeking to advance is one that fully embraces a form of pluralism (e.g., across consequentialist, deontological and Aristotelian modes of ethical thought) but it places these various traditions within a clear, hierarchy of accountability. In broad terms, the ostensibly non-consequentialist concepts are regarded as being ultimately accountable to consequentialist considerations. The main philosophical issues to be explored therefore concern the contrasts between act-consequentialism and rule-consequentialism, together with issues associated with act-consequentialism's notorious lack of congruity with our common expectations about transparency, trustworthiness, psychological integrity.</p>				
THREE	Three core aspects of any empirical research project i.e. the " IDioTs " guide				
(E) Idea?	<p>Following Brad Hooker and others, I will be advancing the case for thinking that rule-consequentialism can be of great practical value for business ethics. While it has often been suggested that there is a sense in which rule-consequentialism is unstable, I argue that the kind of instability involved actually highlights a deep philosophical issue that afflicts all non-consequentialist ethical theories in one way or another. I then highlight some of the most important ways in which a thoroughgoing form of act-consequentialism sometimes competes with our need for transparency, trustworthiness, psychological integrity and prudence, and I argue that this problem renders act-consequentialism largely unsuitable for business ethics. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, I seek to show that for practical purposes, rule-consequentialism is as stable as any ethical theory can be.</p>				
(F) Data?	<p>While some forms of analysis are simply accountable to a discrete data set, scholarly work in ethical theory is accountable to a body of literature that comes without any clear boundaries, and to various evaluative considerations that remain in dispute. A paper of this kind requires a scholarly understanding of the philosophical literature in ethical theory, along with a reasonably sound understanding of the business ethics textbook literature. Given this context, 'data' is perhaps best understood here in an extremely broad sense. I will be drawing primarily upon on the 'data' that is the philosophical literature in ethical theory, along with that of business ethics. Many of the elements of this literature that are of particular relevance are those that pertain to certain controversies concerning act-consequentialism and rule-consequentialism.</p>				
(G) Tools?	<p>The toolbox to be used is broadly Aristotelian in character. In other words, the argumentative methods used need to be appropriate to the subject matter, and it is not assumed that those applicable in the humanities are limited to those that have been shown to be so important in the natural sciences, mathematics, or quantitative analysis. As is common in the humanities, some of the contentions to be advanced in this paper will be imbued with judgements of value, and some of the conclusions to be drawn may rest upon the acceptance of certain human values. Importantly, however, the judgements of value involved can be expected to meet with widespread acceptance; none will be perverse or idiosyncratic.</p> <p>In applying these tools, it is worth remembering that the paper aims to contribute towards a project in ethical theory that is long-standing and fairly ambitious. It is also highly integrative in that it draws upon a great variety of literature. The required strategies of scholarly argument are therefore very different to those that are commonly applied when simply seeking to show that one theory should be rejected in favour of another. In general terms, many of the strategies to be employed will be those of 'befriend and defend', as opposed to those of 'compete and defeat'. For the purposes of clarity, congeniality, persuasiveness, and justice to others, it will be vital to acknowledge all the significant work on each issue and to develop this paper's argument against that background. A great variety of writers will be mentioned, many of whom identify themselves exclusively with one particular theory or approach. That being so, it will be especially important to avoid starting any battles unnecessarily. On some contentious issues, it will be worth taking certain precautions in order to carefully isolate what is truly at issue and to characterise certain claims in the most precise terms possible. Also, to help ensure that the arguments are both persuasive and interesting, no supposedly important points should be illustrated merely through appeal to fanciful examples, and none of the arguments should be reliant upon hopelessly vague abstractions.</p>				

TWO	Two key questions
(H) What's New?	<p>Against the background of Smart's popular 1973 articulation of utilitarianism, many attempts to integrate deontological principles and the like into a form of consequentialism have suggested that steadfastly adhering to certain principles, for example, is somehow constitutive of impartially good consequences. Importantly, these attempts have been subjected to some compelling criticisms and they have now been largely abandoned. While this paper accepts these criticisms and endorses a more traditional conception of consequentialism, the paper is new in some important respects. Although rule-consequentialism's alleged problem of instability has been noticed for over 40 years, the issues that it raises have seldom been addressed directly, and there has been very little discussion about how serious the problem is. One new aspect of the position that I advance is its claim that although there is a sense in which rule-consequentialism is theoretically or philosophically unstable, for all practical purposes it is as stable as any ethical theory can be. There has also been remarkably little scholarly discussion pertaining directly to act-consequentialism's alleged 'esotericism' and lack of transparency. It also happens that there are widely divergent views about how serious these problems are. A second new aspect of my position is the claim that although there is a theoretical or philosophical sense in which act-consequentialism is uniquely stable, it is badly lacking in practical value.</p>
(I) So What?	<p>Consequentialist attempts to integrate the various practical concepts and practices drawn from the non-consequentialist literature do not always recognise that there is genuinely anything of much importance in those concepts and practices, and nor do they consistently give much credit to those non-consequentialist traditions. In such respects, this paper promises to be of notable generosity. Most importantly, however, the paper will explain precisely why both act-consequentialism and rule-consequentialism are both formidable, albeit in quite different ways. It will argue that although act-consequentialism is impractical, it remains philosophically formidable. At the same time, it will argue that rule-consequentialism is extremely practical, and that there is good reason to think that its theoretical instability should not give rise to any serious practical problems.</p>
ONE	One bottom line
(J) Contribution?	<p>The paper will indicate a way by which a unified or integrated account of ethical theory may be developed, and it will do so by contributing to a scholarly tradition that is long-established and broadly consequentialist in character. It will defend rule-consequentialism from the allegation that it is unstable in any practical sense, and it will suggest that a form of rule-consequentialism can provide a unified theoretical basis for a thoroughly practical approach to business ethics.</p>
(K) Other Considerations	<p>Collaboration is not especially needed for this paper. I gained a reasonably sound knowledge of the literature while completing my PhD, and have been rehearsing many of the arguments involved for a few years. The target journals include <i>Utilitas</i> and <i>Philosophy</i>.</p> <p>The risks are reasonably low, both with regard to competitor risk and the risk of obsolescence. It is possible that some forthcoming additions to the literature could prompt a need to make certain adjustments (perhaps to incorporate insightful or freshly expressed arguments, perhaps to express certain points more precisely or concisely, or perhaps in order to avoid certain unnecessary confusions or controversies). Even if any of these possibilities occur, however, it seems unlikely that any forthcoming papers will render the general thrust of piece redundant.</p> <p>No new data will be collected for this paper, and so no ethics clearance will be required.</p> <p>The scope of the piece is broad in some respects, but narrow in others. In aiming to suggest a way in which ethical theory can be better unified, its scope is extremely broad. In addressing that aim, however, it will be highly integrative. The paper will be quite narrow with respect to certain issues relating to the contrast between rule-consequentialism and act-consequentialism. Papers that address such issues, however, do routinely get published in the top journals.</p>