澳門理工大學
Universidade Politécnica de Macau
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COMP422 – Ethics and Professional Issues in Computing

Chapter 2

Introduction to Ethics

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Learning Objectives

2.1 Subjective relativism

2.2 Cultural relativism

2.3 Divine command theory

2.4 Ethical egoism

2.5 Kantianism

Learning Objectives

2.6 Act utilitarianism

2.7 Rule utilitarianism

2.8 Social contract theory

2.9 Virtue ethics

2.10 Comparing workable ethical theories

We Live in Communities

Looking down on London, England, at night from space. (Courtesy of NASA)

Living in Communities

- Benefits
  - More secure against external dangers
  - Facilitate exchange of goods and services
  - Higher standard of living from economic specialization
  - Opportunities for fulfilling personal relationships
- Costs
  - Certain actions are prohibited
  - Other actions are obligatory
  - Nonconformance can lead to punishment
- Communities exist because benefits outweigh costs

The Ethical Point of View

- Most everyone shares "core values", desiring:
  - Life
  - Happiness
  - Ability to accomplish goals

- Two ways to view world
  - **Selfish point of view**: consider only your own self and your core values
  - **Ethical point of view**: respect other people and their core values

Defining Terms

- **Society**
  - Association of people organized under a system of rules
  - Rules: advance the good of members over time

- **Morality** （道德）
  - A society's rules of conduct
  - What people ought / ought not to do in various situations

- **Ethics (倫理）**
  - The philosophical study of morality
  - Rational examination into people's moral beliefs and behavior

Examples of Morality

- Based on universal truths about the nature of human beings
    - Don't kill
    - Speak the truth
    - Be careful with what you say and do to others
    - Respect the property of others
    - Treat people in need or distress as we would want to be treated if our situation were reversed

https://www.verywellmind.com/what-are-moral-principles-5198602

Why Study Ethics?

- Our society is changing rapidly as it incorporates the latest advances in IT

- While most of the people benefit from them, some people selfishly exploit them for personal gain
    - Are these activities morally "good", "neutral", or "bad"?

- Existing moral guidelines may be too old-fashioned or unclear to help us answering the question

Are these activities morally "good", "neutral", or "bad"? *Why do you think it is bad?*

!! PHISHING EMAIL !!

From: Bank of America <crvdgi@comcast.net>
Subject: **Notification Irregular Activity**
Date: September 23, 2014 3:44:42 PM PDT
To: Undisclosed recipients: ;
Reply-To: crvdgi@comcast.net

Bank of America

Online Banking Alert

Would be capitalized

Dear member:

We detected unusual activity on your Bank of America debit card on **09/22/2014**.
For your protection, please verify this activity so you can continue making debit card transactions without interruption.
Please sign in to your account at https://www.bankofamerica.com
to review and verify your account activity, After verifying your debit card
transactions we will take the necessary steps to protect your account from fraud.
If you do not contact us, certain limitations may be placed on your debit card.

http://bit.do/ghsdfhgsd

Grammatical Error

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Are these activities morally "good", "neutral", or "bad"?

https://seo.ai/blog/ai-replacing-jobs-statistics#:~:text=In%20May%202023%2C%20a%20total,largest%20contributor%20to%20job%20displacement.

Why Study Ethics?

"I changed as a person during this course because I can look at situations from different viewpoints now, viewpoints that I didn't really have before taking this course."

— Quote from a student evaluation

More on Ethics

- **Ethics: rational, systematic analysis of conduct that can cause benefit or harm to other people**
  - Conclusions must be supported (people are required to explain why)
    - Best explanations based on **facts**, **shared values**, **logic**
  - When there are different conclusions:
    - Compare ethical evaluations by weighing the facts and the reasoning process behind their conclusions to determine the stronger line of thinking

- However, we do ethical analysis if it is an ethical question!
  - Ethics focuses on people's **voluntary**, **moral choices** make

Is this an ethical question?

I am ordering a new computer, I may choose whether it is an HP or a Dell.

Is my decision of buying a "Dell" computer in the moral realm?

Is this an ethical question?

I am driving down a busy street. I have been driving very carefully. However, a cat suddenly appears in the road, I attempt to miss the cat, but I lose control of my car, and hurt a pedestrian walking on the sidewalk.

Is my decision of missing the cat (but end up hurting somebody) in the moral realm?

Workable Ethical Theory

- That respects the ethical point of view (respect other people and their core values)

- That produces explanations that might be persuasive to a skeptical, yet open-minded audience

A Good Ethical Theory Enables You to Examine Moral Problems, Reach Conclusions Logically, and Defend those Conclusions in Front of Skeptical, Yet Open-Minded Audience.
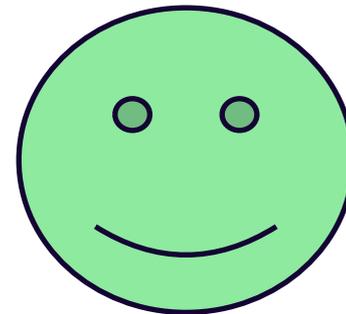
9 Ethical Theories

1. Subjective relativism
2. Cultural relativism

Ethical relativism

3. Divine Command theory
4. Ethical Egoism
5. Kantianism
6. Act Utilitarianism
7. Rule Utilitarianism
8. Social Contract Theory
9. Virtue Ethics
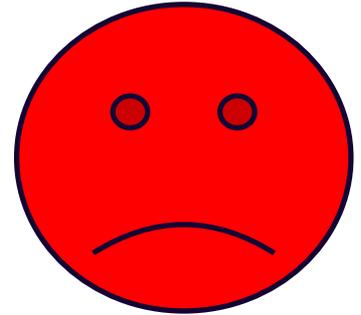
But not all of them are workable!

Ethical Relativism vs Objectivism

- Ethical **relativism**:
  - The theory that there are no universal moral norms of right and wrong
  - Morality is a human invention
  - Moral values are subjective and dependent on individual or cultural perspectives.
  - One person can say "X is right," another can say "X is wrong," and both can be correct
  - E.g., Subjective relativism, cultural relativism

Ethical Relativism vs Objectivism

- Ethical **objectivism**:
  - Morality has an existence outside the human mind
  - Asserting that there are objective moral principles that apply universally to all individuals, regardless of personal beliefs or cultural norms.
  - E.g., Kantianism, utilitarianism

2.1 Subjective Relativism

Subjective Relativism

- **Each person decides right and wrong for himself or herself**
    - "What's right for you may not be right for me"

- An example: One person may believe that lying is never morally justifiable, while another person may believe that lying is sometimes morally justifiable if it helps to protect someone's feelings or prevent harm.
    - According to subjective relativism, both individuals' beliefs are equally valid and it can't be determined which belief is "right" or "wrong".

Case Against Subjective Relativism

- Makes no moral distinction between the actions of different people

- Decisions may not be based on reason

- Blurs line between doing what you think is right and doing what you feel like doing

- Conclusion: Not a workable ethical theory, as everyone is right, no conclusion can be reached logically.

2.2 Cultural Relativism

Cultural Relativism in a Nutshell

- **What is "right" and "wrong" depends upon a society's actual moral guidelines**

- These guidelines vary from place to place and from time to time

- A particular action may be right in one society at one time and wrong in another society or at another time

- For example, commercial whaling:

Japan   Norway   Iceland

US   Australia

Case for Cultural Relativism

- Different social contexts demand different moral guidelines

- It is arrogant for one society to judge another

Case Against Cultural Relativism

- Because two societies **do** have different moral views doesn't mean they **ought to** have different views

- It doesn't explain how moral guidelines are determined

- It doesn't account for evolution of moral guidelines

- It provides no way out for cultures in conflict (see Israel vs. Palestinians)

- Conclusion: Not a workable ethical theory

2.3 Divine Command Theory

Overview of Divine Command Theory

- Good actions: those aligned with God's will

- Bad actions: those contrary to God's will

- Holy books reveal God's will

- We should use holy books as moral decision-making guides

Divine Command Theory in Action

Case for Divine Command Theory

- We owe obedience to our Creator

- God is all-good and all-knowing

- God is the ultimate authority

Case Against Divine Command Theory

- Different holy books disagree on certain teachings

- Divine command theory is impractical because society is multicultural, secular

- Some modern moral problems not directly addressed in scripture

- Based on obedience, not reason

- Conclusion: Not a workable ethical theory for our purposes

2.4 Ethical Egoism

Definition of Ethical Egoism

- Each person should focus exclusively on his or her self-interest

- **Morally right action is the action that provides self with maximum long-term benefit**

Ethical Egoism

- For example, I take my friend's car to work everyday. Her car is broken, should I loan her the money to fix it?
  - If I have no free-ride, I will be late to work everyday, will lose income.
  - If I loan her, her car will be fixed, I will travel to work without problem, still she will pay me back later.

Case for Ethical Egoism

- It is practical since we are already inclined to do what's best for ourselves

- It is better to let other people take care of themselves

- The community can benefit when individuals put their well-being first
  - E.g., entrepreneurs know how to make money, but they also create good products and jobs opportunities

- Other moral principles are rooted in the principle of self-interest
  - E.g., long-term consequence of lying and cheating are bad to the person, so he/she ought not do that.

Case Against Ethical Egoism

- An easy moral philosophy may not be the best moral philosophy
  - E.g., we may not always care for our long-term benefit, go playing games than do study

- Self-interest can lead to blatantly immoral behavior
  - E.g., treat the other person bad

- Other moral principles are superior to principle of self-interest
  - E.g., save a person's life (even you don't benefit from your action)

Case Against Ethical Egoism

- People who take the good of others into account lead happier lives

- Although it can reason logically, however, by definition, it does not respect the **ethical point of view**, which is respect other people and their core values.

- Conclusion: Not a workable ethical theory

2.5 Kantianism
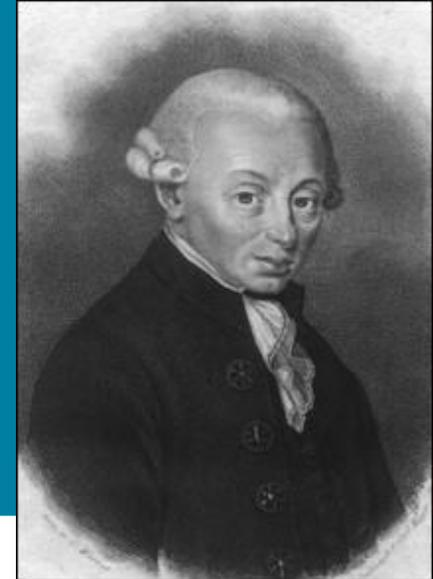
Immanuel Kant (German, 1724-1804)

"People's actions should be guided by moral laws, and that these moral laws are universal."

Good Will: The Desire To Do The Right Thing

- "Only thing in the world that is good without qualification is a good will" 世界上唯一沒有條件的善就是善意
- People with good will often accomplish good deeds

shutterstock.com · 2562749615

Good Will: The Desire To Do The Right Thing

- But producing beneficial outcomes is NOT what makes a good will good.

- Even person's best efforts at doing good might cause harm, the good will behind the efforts is still good.

Critical Importance of Good Will

- Since a good will is the only thing that is universally good, the proper function of reason is to cultivate a will that is good in itself.

Duty as a Moral Obligation

- Focus should be on what we ought to do (and not what we want to do)

Sense of **Ought to = Dutifulness**

- A dutiful person feels compelled to act in a certain way out of respect for some moral rules.

- Our will then should be grounded in moral rules

Moral Law or Moral Rule

- **Moral law (principle) or rule (guideline) dictates what actions are morally permissible or impermissible.**

- Do not lie

- Do not steal

- Respect other's autonomy尊重他人的自主權

- Keep promises

- Help those in need

- Do not engage in deceptive practices

- Do not commit suicide

Categorical Imperative 绝对命令 (1st Formulation)

- **"Act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to be universal moral laws."**

- 僅根據道德規則行事，同時您也可以將這些道德規則視為普遍的道德法則。

- In another words, you should act only on moral rules that you can imagine everyone else following without deriving a logical contradiction.

Illustration of 1ˢᵗ Formulation (1 of 2)

- Question: Can a person in a difficult situation make a promise with the intention of breaking it later?

- Proposed rule (maxim): "I may make promises with the intention of later breaking them."

- The person in trouble <u>wants his promise to be believed</u> so he can get what he needs.

Illustration of 1ˢᵗ Formulation (2 of 2)

- Universalize rule: Everyone may make & break promises

- Everyone breaking promises <u>would make promises unbelievable</u>, contradicting desire to have promise believed

- The rule is flawed. The answer to the question is "No."

Another Way to Reason It out (1 of 2)

- Question: Can I make a promise with the intention of breaking it later?

- I want my false promise to be believed.

- In order for my false promised to be believable, I want everyone except myself to be truthful all the time.

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Another Way to Reason It out

- In other words, I want to **privilege** my needs and desires over those of everyone else.

- Contradiction between what I want to do and what I want others to do.

- Therefore, what I am considering doing is wrong.

A Quick Check

- When evaluating a proposed action, **reverse roles**

- What would you think if that person did the same thing to you?

- Negative reaction (if you cannot wish to be treated that way by another) → evidence that your will to do that action violates the Categorical Imperative

Categorical Imperative (2nd Formulation)

- **"Act so that you treat both yourself and other people as ends in themselves and never only as a means to an end."**
 採取行動，將自己和他人視為目的本身，而不僅僅是達到目的的手段。

- This is usually an easier formulation to work with than the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative.

Kant: Wrong to Use Another Person Solely as a Means to an End

Evaluating a Scenario using Kantianism

- Suppose I manage a semiconductor fabrication plant for a large corporation. The plant manufactures integrated circuits on 8-inch wafers. I know that in one year the corporation is going to shut down the plant and move all of its production to other sites capable of producing 12-inch wafers. In the meantime, I need new employees to work but many of the best applicants are from out of state. I am afraid that if they knew the plant was going to shutdown next year, they would not want to come.
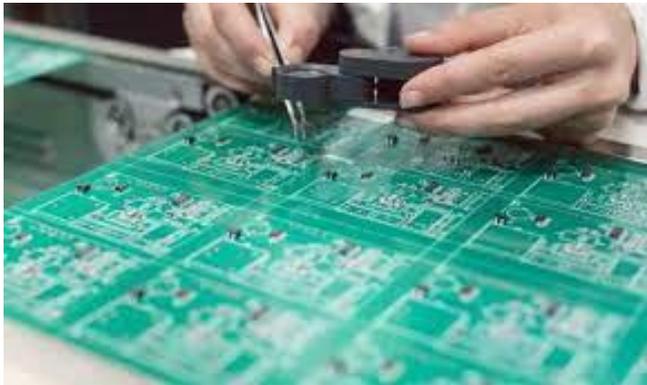
Evaluating a Scenario using Kantianism

- According to the 2nd formulation of the Categorical Imperative, I have an obligation to inform the applicants, since I know this information is likely to influence their decision.

- If not, then I am treating them as a means to an end:
  – Means to an end: produce wafers
  – Not as ends themselves: rational beings

Evaluating a Scenario using Kantianism

- Carla is a single mother who is working hard to complete her college education while taking care of her daughter. Carla has a full-time job and is taking two evening courses per semester. If she can pass both courses this semester, she will graduate. She knows her child will benefit if she can spend more time at home.

- One of her required classes is modern European history. In addition to the midterm and final exams, the professor assigns four lengthy reports, which is far more than usual amount of work. Students must submit all four reports in order to pass the class.

Evaluating a Scenario using Kantianism

- Carla earns an A on each of her first three reports. At the end of the term, she is required to put in a lot of overtime where she works. She simply does not have the time to research and write the final report. She uses the web to identify a company that sells term papers. She purchases a report and submits it as her own work.

- Was Carla's action morally justifiable?

Kantian Evaluation (1ˢᵗ Formulation)

- Carla wants credit for plagiarized report (motivation)

- Rule: "You may submit a report by someone else as your own work"

- If rule universalized, reports would no longer be credible indicator of student's knowledge, and professors would not give credit for reports

- Proposed rule is self-defeating

- It is wrong for Carla to turn in a purchased report

Kantian Evaluation (2nd Formulation)

- Carla submitted another person's work as her own

- She attempted to deceive professor

- She treated professor as a means to an end (rational being)
  - End: passing the course
  - Means: manipulate professor, not as a rational being to whom she could have communicated her situations

- What Carla did was wrong

Case for Kantianism

- Treats all persons as moral equals

- Gives all people moral worth as rational, autonomous beings (as ends in themselves)

- Holds everyone to the same standard
  - It's wrong for you to grant yourself an exception

- Produces universal moral guidelines

Perfect and Imperfect Duties

- **Perfect duty**: duty obliged to fulfill without exception
  - Example: Telling the truth, Not to lie, Not to steal or defraud others, Keep promises, Not to commit suicide

- **Imperfect duty**: duty obliged to fulfill in general but not in every instance
  - Example: Helping others; Develop your own talents

- If there is a conflict between a perfect duty and an imperfect duty, the perfect duty must prevail.

Perfect vs. Imperfect Duty

- Example: I am stealing food from a grocery store to feed my starving children.

- According to Kant, violating a perfect duty is never permitted, so the action is morally wrong.

Case Against Kantianism

- Sometimes no rule adequately characterizes an action

- Sometimes there is no way to resolve a conflict between rules
  - In a conflict between a perfect duty and an imperfect duty, perfect duty prevails
  - In a conflict between two perfect duties, no solution

- Kantianism allows no exceptions to perfect duties
  - Say a lie to your mom that her new haircut looks good

- Conclusion: Despite weaknesses, a workable ethical theory

Complex Moral Situation

- Imagine a situation where a murderer comes to your door, seeking to harm a friend who is hiding in your home. You know that if you tell the murderer where your friend is, they will be killed.

- Should you tell or not tell?
    - Moral rule → Duty: Do not lie
    - Moral rule → Duty: Do not kill
    - Conflict: Tell the truth, contribute to the death of your friends

- Demonstrate difficulties in applying Kant's deontological framework in real-life situation (too rigid)

2.6 Act Utilitarianism

Principle of Utility

- **An action is good if its benefits exceeds its harms**

- An action is bad if its harms exceed its benefits

English philosophers
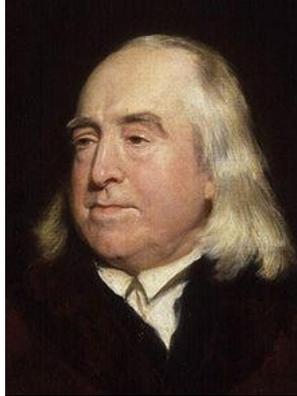
Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)


John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Principle of Utility (Greatest Happiness Principle) 最高幸福原則

An action is right (or wrong) to the extent that it increases (or decreases) the total happiness of the affected parties.

- **Utility: tendency of an object to produce happiness or prevent unhappiness for an individual or a community**

- Happiness = advantage = benefit = good = pleasure = +ve

- Unhappiness = disadvantage = cost = evil = pain = -ve

Principle of Utility

Suppose we have a set of possible actions. For each action, we must determine, for each affected person, the increase or decrease in that person's happiness and then add up all these values to reach a grand total.
=> The overall increase/decrease in happiness caused by that action. Repeat calculate, find the action that has the max total happiness.
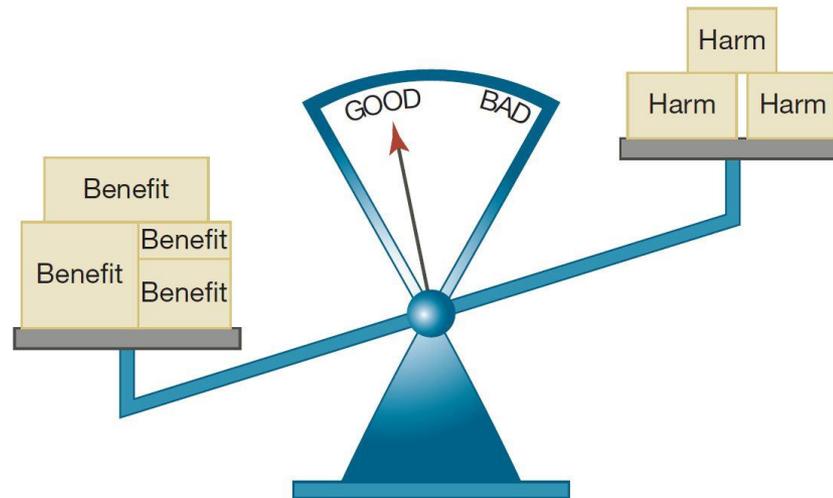
The moral action is the one the produces the maximum increase in happiness. (or the one that minimizes the decrease in happiness)

Act Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism
  - Morality of an action has nothing to do with intent (motive, good or bad), Bentham wrote.
  - Focuses on the consequences
  - A **consequentialist** theory

- **Act Utilitarianism**
  - Add up change in happiness of all "affected beings"
  - Sum > 0, action is good
  - Sum < 0, action is bad
  - Right action to take: one that maximizes the sum

Evaluating a Scenario using Act Utilitarianism - Highway Routing Scenario

- State may replace a curvy stretch of highway

- New highway segment 1 mile shorter

- 150 houses would have to be removed

- Some wildlife habitat would be destroyed

Evaluation

- Costs
  - $20 million to compensate homeowners
  - $10 million to construct new highway
  - Lost wildlife habitat worth $1 million
- Benefits
  - $39 million savings in automobile driving costs
- Conclusion
  - Benefits exceed costs
  - Building highway is a good action

Controversial

- Everything is translated into dollars, was that reasonable?

- What about breaking of neighborhood relationships, homeowners being forced out of their houses → difficult to quantify

- All benefits and costs are equally weighted

Bentham: Weighing Pleasure/Pain

Attributes that can be used to increase/decrease the weight:

- *Intensity*: magnitude of the experience

- *Duration*: how long the experience lasts

- Certainty: probability it will actually happen

- *Propinquity*: how close the experience is in space and time

- *Fecundity*: ability to produce more experience of the same kind

- *Purity*: extent to which pleasure is not diluted by pain

- *Extent*: number of people affected

Case for Act Utilitarianism

- Focuses on happiness:
    - It fits that the purpose of life is to be happy.

- Down-to-earth (practical):
    - Calculation is straightforward
    - Open manner, info available to all stakeholders: determine all actions, total up anticipated positive and negative consequences, choose the one with maximum total

- Comprehensive:
    - Take into account many factors (even emotional distress)

Case Against Act Utilitarianism

- Unclear whom to include in calculations and how far out into the future to consider (5 years? 20 years?), need to draw the line somewhere!

- Too much work if done for every moral decision

- We cannot predict consequences with certainty: we may misjudge the certainty, intensity, duration, etc.

- Susceptible to the problem of **moral luck** – sometimes actions have unforeseen consequences

Case Against Act Utilitarianism

- Susceptible to the problem of **moral luck** – sometimes actions have unforeseen consequences

Suppose I hear that one of my aunts is in the hospital, and I send her a bouquet of flowers. After the bouquet is delivered, she suffers a violent allergic reaction to one of the exotic flowers in the floral arrangement, extending her stay in the hospital. My gift gave my aunt a bad case of hives and a much larger hospital bill. Since my action had far more negative consequences than positive consequences, an act utilitarian would say my action was bad.

Case Against Act Utilitarianism

- Ignores our innate sense of duty, **all that matters are consequences** of the action.

  - If I keep my word, I produces 1000 units of good for A.
  - If I break my promise, I produces 1001 units of good for B.
  - I should break my promise (yet it's common belief that I should keep my promise)

- Conclusion: While it is not perfect, it is objective, rational, allow a person to explain why an action is right or wrong. Overall, a workable ethical theory.

2.7 Rule Utilitarianism

Applying Principle of Utility to Rules

- **We ought to adopt moral rules which, if followed by everyone, will lead to the greatest increase in total happiness**

- Act utilitarianism applies Principle of Utility to individual actions

- **Rule utilitarianism** applies Principle of Utility to moral rules

Anti-Worm Scenario (August 2003)

- Blaster worm infected thousands of Windows computers, causing them to reboot every few minutes.

- Soon after, Nachi worm appeared
  - Took control of vulnerable computers
  - Located and destroyed copies of Blaster
  - Downloaded software patch to fix security problem
  - Used computer as launching pad to try to "infect" other vulnerable PCs


```
00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00    .................
00 00 00 00 00 2C 39 C2    .............,9T
00 31 00 00 00 00 00 00    A........1......
00 49 20 6A 75 73 74 20    .........I just
73 61 79 20 4C 4F 56 45    want to say LOVE
21 21 00 00 00 00 00 00     YOU SAN!!......
61 74 65 73 20 77 68 79    .billy gates why
6D 61 6B 65 20 74 68 69     do you make thi
6C 65 20 3F 20 53 74 6F    s possible ? Sto
20 6D 6F 6E 65 79 20 61    p making money a
6F 75 72 20 73 6F 66 74    nd fix your soft
00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00    ware!!..........
```

Blaster, also known as Lovsan or MSBlast, was a computer worm that spread on computers running operating systems Windows XP and Windows 2000.

Evaluation Using Rule Utilitarianism

- **To analyze:** Think of a rule. Determine if it is universalized, would increase the happiness of the affected parties.

- Proposed rule: *"If I can write a helpful worm that removes a harmful worm from infected computers and shields them from future attacks, I should do so."*

- Who would benefit
  - People who do not keep their systems updated

Evaluation Using Rule Utilitarianism

- Who would be harmed
    - People who use networks – too much traffic by worms
    - People whose computers are invaded by *buggy* anti-worms, may contain bugs, even they are benevolent
    - System administrators – extra work to fight worms (they may not know if a worm is harmful or not)

- Conclusion: Harm outweighs benefits. Releasing anti-worm is wrong.
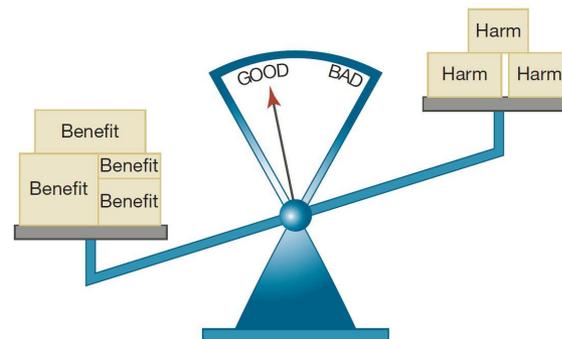
Case for Rule Utilitarianism

- Not every moral decision requires performing utilitarian calculus

- **Moral rules survive exceptional situations**
    - Long-term consequence will be considered (universalize, example: break and keep promise)

- **Avoids the problem of moral luck**
    - Highly unusual result does not affect the goodness of an action (Aunt in hospital example: sending flower is a good action)

- **Reduces the problem of bias**
    - Not "Is it okay for me to do this?", but
    - "Is it okay for everyone in a similar circumstance to do this?"

Case for Rule Utilitarianism

- **Appeals to a wide cross-section of society**
  - "An action is justifiable if allowing that action would, as a rule, bring about greater net happiness than forbidding it."

Case Against Utilitarianism in General

- All consequences must be measured on a single scale.
  - All units must be the same in order to do the sum
  - In certain circumstances utilitarians must quantify the value of a human life

- Utilitarianism ignores the problem of an unjust "distribution" of good consequences.
  - Utilitarianism does **not** mean "the greatest good to the greatest number (*distributive justice*, i.e. distribute the good as widely as possible)"

- Conclusion: Despite weaknesses, both act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism are workable ethical theories

2.8 Social Contract Theory

Basis of Social Contract Theory

- English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)
  - In a society, if there are no rules and no enforcement of the rules, then people would be in "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" - the "state of nature"
  - We **implicitly** accept a **social contract**
    - Establishment of moral rules to govern relations among citizens
    - Government capable of enforcing these rules
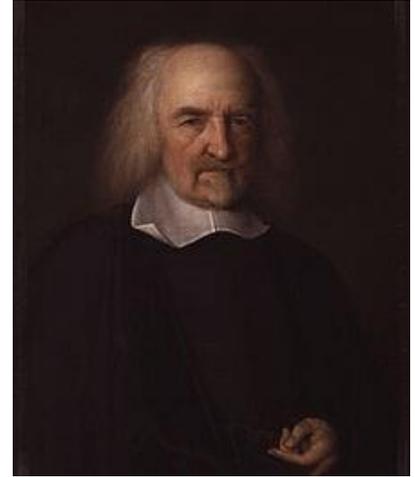
Basis of Social Contract Theory

- Franco-Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)
  - Everybody to give themselves and their rights to the whole community
  - The community will determine the rules for its members
  - Everyone will be obliged to obey the rules
  - No one is above the rules - prevent society from enacting bad rules

James Rachels's Definition of Social Contract Theory

"Morality consists in the set of rules, governing how people are to treat one another, that rational people will agree to accept, for their mutual benefit, on the condition that others follow those rules as well."

Kinds of Rights

- "All morally significant beings have certain rights", such as life, liberty, property, privacy, etc.

- *Negative right*: A right that another can guarantee by leaving you alone, e.g., freedom of expression

- *Positive right*: A right obligating others to do something on your behalf, e.g., free education

- *Absolute right*: A right guaranteed without exception, e.g., right to life

- *Limited right*: A right that may be restricted based on the circumstances, e.g., right of assembly (limited when public safety is at risk)

Correlation between Types of Rights

- Positive rights tend to be more limited:
  - E.g., "free education"

- Negative rights tends to be more absolute:
  - E.g., "right to life"

Veil of Ignorance

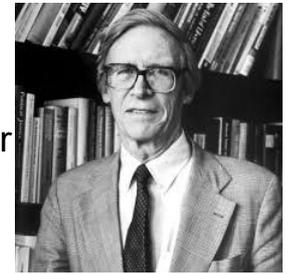https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuY79IKLO5U

- How to make sure the cookie is shared fairly?

Veil of Ignorance

American philosopher (1921 – 2002)

- A philosophical concept introduced by John Rawls in his seminal work, A Theory of Justice (1971). It serves as a thought experiment designed to **evaluate the fairness and impartiality of societal structures and institutions**.

- Rules are determined from an original position in which each person is hidden behind a veil of ignorance 無知之幕.

- People are ignorant of what place they will hold in society, their sex, race, ethnicity, wealth, intellectual capacity, physical abilities or disabilities, etc.

- Rules reached from this initial condition would be fair because people would not choose rules that would harm them if they turned out to be in a disadvantaged position in society relative to others.

- Rational people put behind a veil of ignorance would agree upon the following two principles of justice.

John Rawls's First Principle of Justice

Each person may have a "fully adequate" number of rights and liberties as long as they are consistent with everyone else having the same rights and liberties.
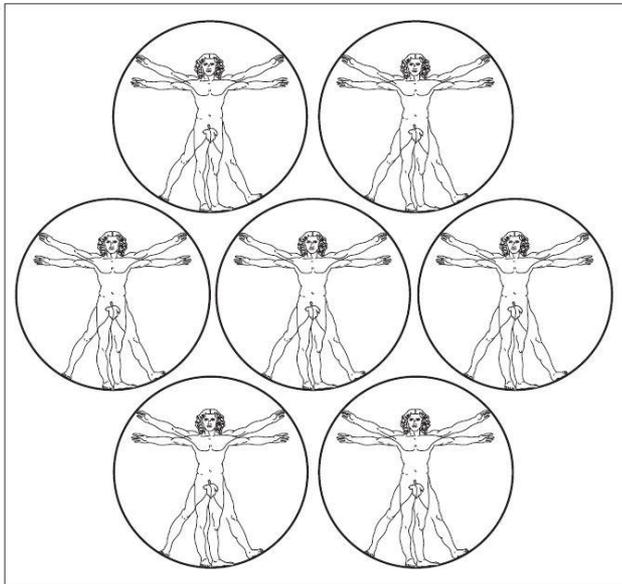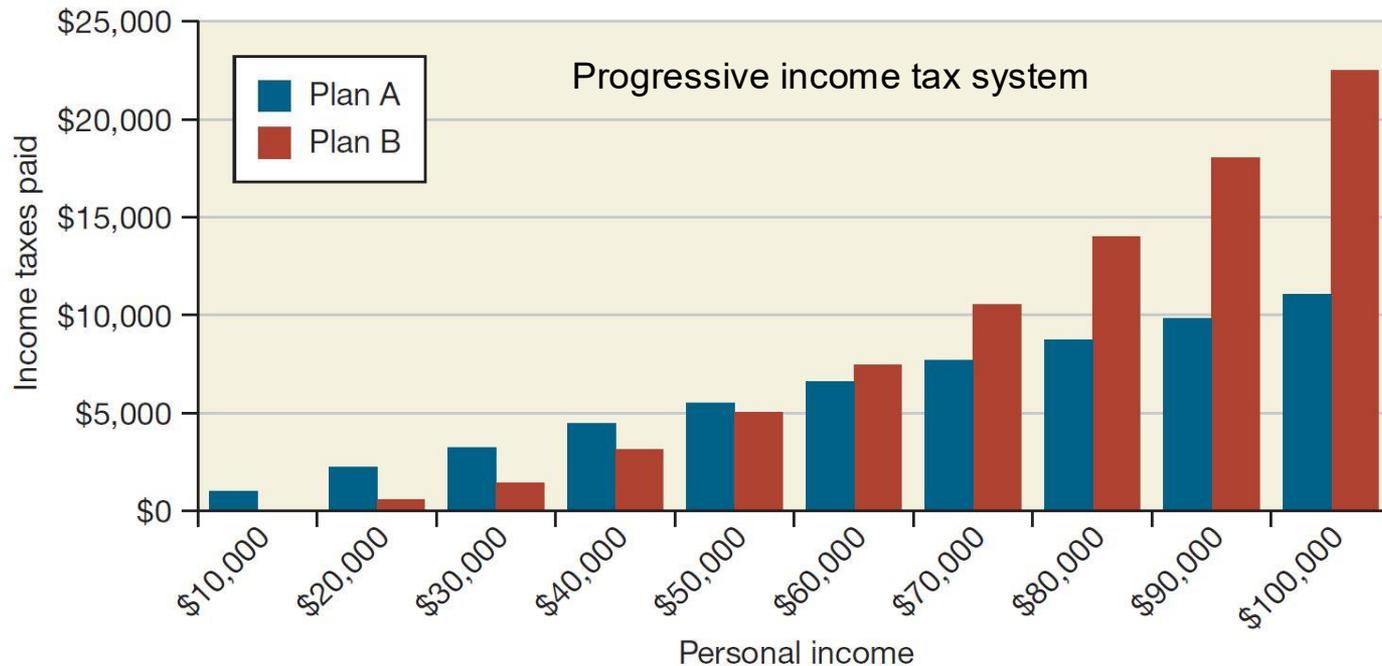

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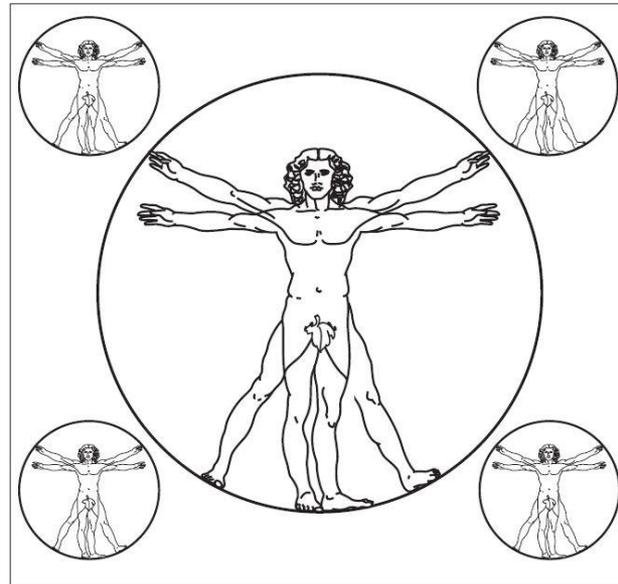
Unjust

- Right to life
- Right to property
- Right to privacy
- Liberty

John Rawls's Second Principle of Justice

Any social and economic inequalities must satisfy two conditions:
- Everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to achieve their position in society
- Result in greatest benefit for the least-advantaged members of society (the Difference Principle)

Evaluate Convenience Scenario using Social Contract Theory

Bill, the owner of a chain of convenience stores, uses a computer to keep track of the items purchased by each customer. Using this information, he is able to construct profiles of the customers: who is responsible for the care of an infant, who owns a pet, who uses a barbeque, etc. Bill sells these profiles to mail-order companies. The customers begin receiving many unsolicited mail-order catalogs. Some of the customers are happy to receive these catalogs and make use of them to order products. Others are unhappy at the increase in the amount of junk mail they are receiving.

Did Bill do the right thing?

Evaluation (Social Contract Theory)

- To analyze a scenario, think about the **rights of the rational parties involved**:
  - Bill
  - Customers
  - Mail-order companies

- Does customer have right to have their name and address to be kept confidential? (privacy)

- If customer purchases something from Bill, who owns information about transaction? Bill or the customer?

Evaluation (Social Contract Theory)

- Social contract theory asks: would rational, self-interested agents agree to this practice from behind a "veil of ignorance" (Rawls) or as part of mutually beneficial rules? The contract would balance data collection (for business efficiency) against privacy rights and consent.

- Customers have right to expect name and address or transaction to be confidential without giving permission

- Bill was wrong to sell information without asking for permission.

Case for Social Contract Theory

- Framed in language of rights

- "Human nature": people act out of self-interest in absence of common agreement

  - **Tragedy of the commons:** Individuals benefit from exploiting a resource, while the costs of the exploitation are shared by a community.

- Too many free riders destroy the shared resource and harm the entire community.

- How to prevent this? Law, punishment, system of law enforcement

Case Against Social Contract Theory

- No one signed social contract

- Some actions have multiple characterizations

- Conflicting rights problem: e.g., abortion (mother's right to liberty and fetus's right to life)

- May unjustly treat people incapable of upholding contract

- Conclusion: Despite weaknesses, a workable theory

2.9 Virtue Ethics

Critique of Enlightenment Theories

- Kantianism, utilitarianism, social contract theory ignore important moral considerations
    - moral education
    - moral wisdom
    - family and social relationships
    - role of emotions

- Virtue ethics
    - **arete**, virtue, excellence: **reaching one's highest potential**
    - Aristotle's **Nicomachean Ethics** (4th century BC):

        "The path to true happiness and genuine flourishing as a human being lies in living a life of virtue"
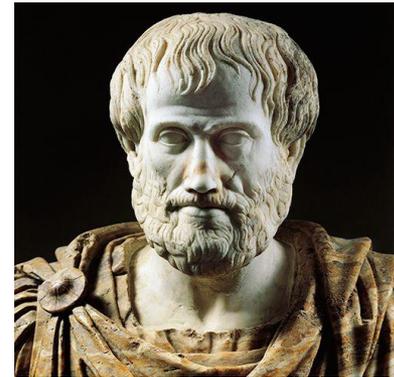
Virtues and Vices

- Two types of virtue
    - **intellectual virtues**: virtues associated with reasoning and truth
    - **moral virtues**: virtues of character (e.g., honesty)

Aristotle on Happiness

According to Aristotle, happiness derives from living a life of virtue. You acquire moral virtues by repeating the appropriate acts.

Moral Virtues

- Developed by habitually performing right action

- Deep-seated character traits

- Disposition to **act** in a certain way and **feel** in a certain way

- "Nobody would call a man just who does not **enjoy** acting justly, nor generous who does not enjoy generous actions, and so on" 沒有人會稱一個不喜歡公正行事的人為正義，也沒有人會稱一個不喜歡慷慨行為的人為慷慨

Scout training "do a good turn daily"

Summary of Virtue Ethics

- **A right action is an action that a virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the same circumstances.**

  正確的行為是一個有具有美德的人在同樣的情況下以其性格為基礎所採取的行為。

- A virtuous person is a person who possesses and lives out the virtues.

- The virtues are those character traits human beings needs in order to flourish and be truly happy.
  - Universal: honesty, justice, loyalty, etc.
  - Culture depend: (Western) self-reliance, (Chinese) self-regulation

Vices

- Vices are opposite of virtues

- Vice: a character trait that prevents a human being from flourishing or being truly happy

- Often, a virtue situated between two vices
  - Courage between cowardliness懦弱and rashness魯莽
  - Generosity between stinginess吝嗇and prodigality揮霍

Scenario Evaluation using Virtue Ethics

- Josh is a senior majoring in computer science at a small university. All the seniors in computer sicence are friends because they have most of their courses together. Josh is particularly close to Matt. They are from the same city about 200 miles from campus. Matt rides Josh to and from home a dozen times when school holidays. But Matt never asked Josh to help paying for the gas on any of these trips, and Josh never offered to do so. Matt is a hardworking, trustworthy and reliable student, thus, Matt and Josh are also course project parnters.

- Recently, Matt's father died in an accident and he has lost interest in school. What's worse, he is drinking too much, doesn't show up for project meetings, and codes he produces does not meet the specifications. No on in the team can persuade Matt to take the project seriously. Other teammates decide it's easier simply to rewrite Matt's part of the work themselves. He does join the oral presentation, talks about "his" portion of the code, but never mentioning that it was all rewritten by his teammates.

Scenario Evaluation using Virtue Ethics

- Everyone is supposed to send the professor an email grading the performance of their teammates. The professor will treat the peer assessment very seriously, considering that students getting poor or failing performance reviews from all their teammates maybe forced to repeat the class.

- Matt comes to Josh, tells him he really needs to pass this class because he can't afford to stay in college any longer, and pleads for a good performance review.

- Josh is an honest person, he has a hard time imaging that he could tell the professor that Matt did a good job when that is far from the truth. However, he feels indebted to Matt, particularly those free rides, he also feels compassion toward Matt, who lost his father.

- What should Josh do? (what are the options?)

Scenario Evaluation using Virtue Ethics

- Josh now understands he should have acted earlier, to talk to Matt, to discuss with the professor when Matt was not participating fully as a teammate.

- After reflecting on what he should do, he concludes he must be truthful with the professor. He will also take responsibility for his role by providing full account to the professor of how is own failure to respond to the situation leading to this unsatisfactory outcome.

Case for Virtue Ethics

- It often makes more sense to focus on virtues than obligations, rights, or consequences
  - Why is it wrong to steal to satisfy a selfish desire?
  - It's wrong because it disrupts one's acquisition of the virtue of honesty, a step toward genuine fulfillment and happiness

- Personal relationships can be morally relevant to decision making
  - Decision based on other theories require to be completely impartial and all human being as equal may be difficult to accept. (e.g., spend money on holiday with your kids or donate it for charity?)
  - Parents are supposed to be partial toward their own children

Case for Virtue Ethics

- Theory recognizes our moral decision-making skills develop over time
  - Can consult a role model (respected elders)

- Emotions play an important role in living a moral life
  - When things are going right, their feelings and thoughts are in alignment
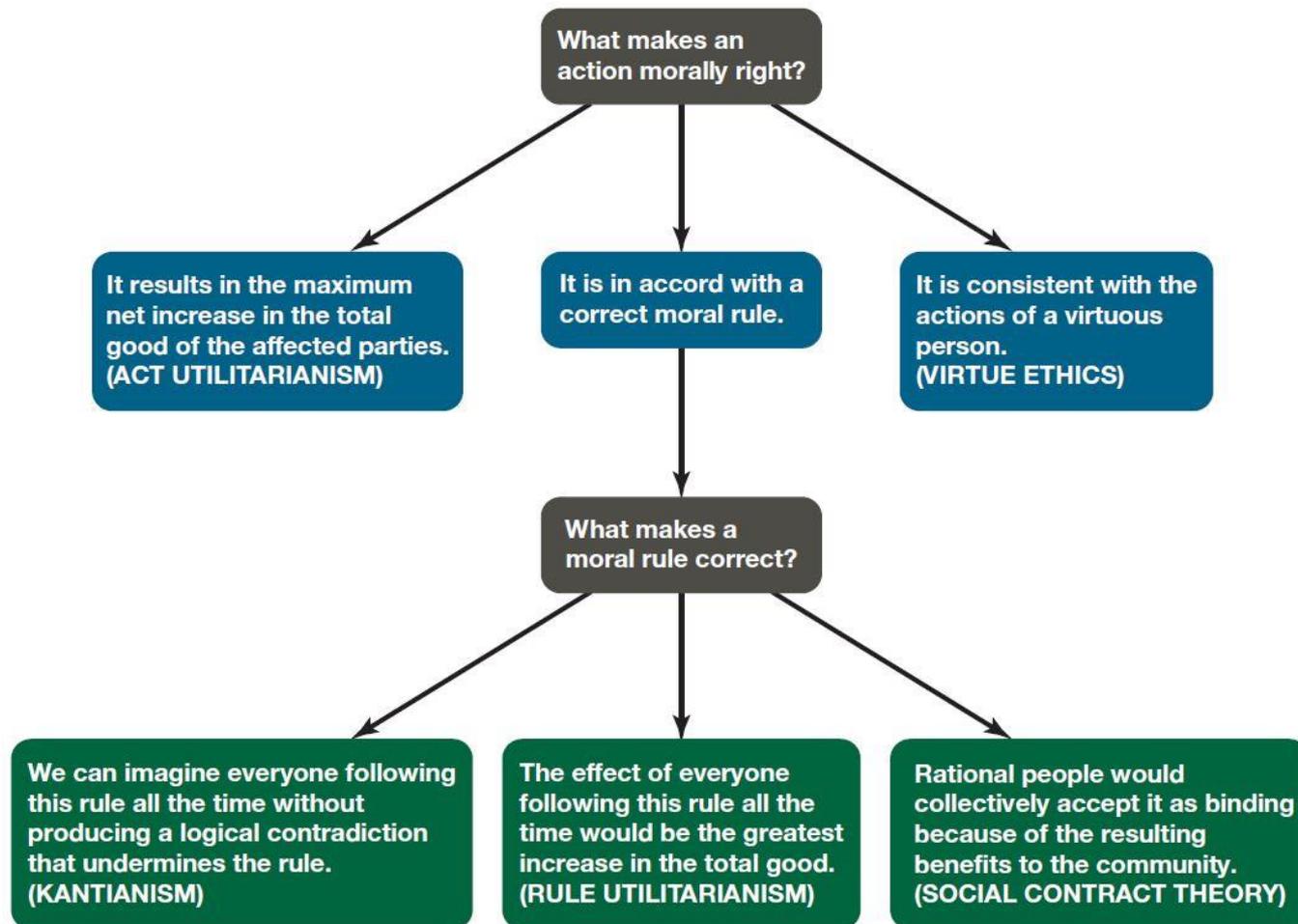
Case Against Virtue Ethics

- Reasonable people may disagree on character traits needed for human flourishing
  - If we cannot agree on which character traits are virtues, then we will not be able to agree on what a virtuous person would do in a particular situation.

- Focus on the individual, more than act or consequence
  - Cannot use virtue ethics to guide government policy
  - Consider the highway example, virtue ethics concerns about the officials involved in the action – honest, prudent, for example, but nothing for the analysis of the decision

- Virtue ethics undermines attempts to hold people responsible for their bad actions
  - Because people are not born virtuous, but acquired moral virtues over time

- Conclusion: Despite weaknesses, virtue ethics a workable theory

2.10 Comparing Workable Ethical Theories

Pearson

Workable Ethical Theories

- We seek theories with these characteristics:
  - Based on the ethical point of view
  - Objective moral principles developed using logical reasoning based on facts and commonly held values

- Workable ethical theories
  - Kantianism
  - Act and rule utilitarianism
  - Social contract theory
  - Virtue ethics

Comparing Workable Ethical Theories

What makes an action morally right?

- It results in the maximum net increase in the total good of the affected parties. (ACT UTILITARIANISM)
- It is in accord with a correct moral rule.
- It is consistent with the actions of a virtuous person. (VIRTUE ETHICS)

What makes a moral rule correct?

- We can imagine everyone following this rule all the time without producing a logical contradiction that undermines the rule. (KANTIANISM)
- The effect of everyone following this rule all the time would be the greatest increase in the total good. (RULE UTILITARIANISM)
- Rational people would collectively accept it as binding because of the resulting benefits to the community. (SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY)

Summary

Insights Offered by Various Theories

- Kantianism: Every person is equally valuable, and when you interact with other people you should always respect them as rational beings. It is wrong to privilege your needs and desires over those of other people.

- Utilitarianism: You should consider the consequences of an action before deciding whether it's right or wrong.

Insights Offered by Various Theories

- Social contract theory: We should collectively promote human rights, such as the rights to life, liberty, and property.

- Virtue ethics: You can count on a good person to do the right thing at the right time in the right way.

It's up to You

- You **can** consider duties **and** rights **and** consequences **and** virtues when making moral decisions

- Ultimately, you have to decide:
  - What kind of person do I want to be?
  - What kind of world do I want to live in?

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