Chapter 2:
Introduction to Ethics
Quick Info

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Ethics and Morality

- The term *Ethics* is derived from *Ethos* (Greek), and *Morality* from *Mores* (Latin).
  - Both terms translate roughly into notions affecting “custom,” ”habit,” and “behavior.”

- Ethics is defined as *the study of morality, which* raises questions such as:
  - (a) What is *morality*?
  - (b) What is *the study of morality*?
  - (c) Why should we study morality?
What is Morality?

- Morality can be defined as:
  - a system of rules for guiding human conduct, and principles for evaluating those rules.
  - having to do with right and wrong.

Two points are worth noting in this definition:
- (i) morality is a system;
- (ii) it is a system comprised of moral rules and principles.
- Moral rules can be understood as "rules of conduct," which are very similar to "policies."
Basic Components of a Moral System

- **Rules of Conduct**
  - (Action-guiding rules, in the form of either directives or social policies)
  - Two types
    - Rules for guiding the actions of *individuals* (micro-level ethical rules)
    - Examples include directives such as: "Do not steal" and "Do not harm others."
    - Rules for establishing *social policies* (macro-level ethical rules)
    - Examples include social policies such as: "Software should be protected" and "Privacy should be respected."

- **Principles of Evaluation**
  - (Evaluative standards used to justify rules of conduct)
  - Examples include principles such as of social utility and justice as fairness
# Four Features of a Moral System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Rational</th>
<th>Impartial</th>
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<tr>
<td>The rules are known to all of the members.</td>
<td>The rules are informal, not like formal laws in a legal system.</td>
<td>The system is based on principles of logical reason accessible to all its members.</td>
<td>The system is not partial to any one group or individual.</td>
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Components of a Moral System

Grounds for justifying moral principles

Moral principles and rules

Source of moral rules

Religion

Philosophy

Law

Principles of Evaluation

Rules of Conduct

Core Values
The Role of Values in a Moral System

- The term *value* comes from the Latin *valere*, which translates roughly into having worth or being of worth (Pojman, 2006).

- Values can be viewed as objects of our desires or interests.
  - Examples of values include very general notions such as happiness, love, freedom, etc.

- Moral principles are ultimately derived from a society's system of values.
Intrinsic vs. Instrumental Values

- Philosophers distinguish between two types of values: *intrinsic* and *instrumental* values.

- Any value that serves some further end or good is called an instrumental value because it is tied to some external standard.
  - Automobiles, computers, and money are goods that have instrumental value.

- Values such as life and happiness are intrinsic because they are valued for their own sake.
Core Values

- Another approach to cataloguing values is to distinguish *core values*, some of which may or may not also be intrinsic values, from other kinds of values.

- Some argue that values such as life, happiness, and autonomy are core values because they are basic to a society's thriving and perhaps even to a society's survival.

- Not all core values are also *moral* values.
Moral vs. Non-Moral Values

- Morals and values are not necessarily identical.
- Values can be either moral or non-moral.
- Reason informs us that it is in our interest to develop values that promote our own survival, happiness, and flourishing as individuals.
- When used to further only our own self-interests, these values are not necessarily moral values.
Moral Values

- Once we bring in the notion of *impartiality*, we begin to take the "moral point of view."

- When we frame the rules of conduct in a moral system, we articulate a system of values having to do with notions such as autonomy, fairness, justice, etc., which are moral values.

- Our basic moral values and our core non-moral values are somehow connected.
Components of a Moral System: An Expanded View

Grounds for Justifying the Moral Principles

- Religion (Obedience to Divine Command)
- Philosophical Ethics (Ethical Theory and Logical Argumentation)
- Law (Obedience to a legal system)

Moral Principles
Principles such as social utility, duty, obligation, etc. are used as standards to evaluate and justify rules of conduct.

Rules of Conduct
Moral rules are derived from basic moral values (macro-level rules or policies such as "protect privacy"); micro-level rules or directives such as "do not cheat").

Basic Moral Values
Moral values are derived from core non-moral values by using the notion of impartiality. (Examples include autonomy and respect for persons.)

Core Non-Moral Values
Non-moral values originate from desires and typically involve rational self interests. (Examples include: survival, security, pleasure, etc.)
Three Schemes for Grounding the Evaluative Rules in a Moral System

- The principles are grounded in one of three different kinds of schemes:
  - Religion;
  - Law;
  - Philosophical Ethics.

- Consider how a particular moral principle can be justified from the vantage-points of each scheme.
  - E.g., consider the rule of conduct: “Do not steal.”
Approach #1: Grounding Moral Principles in a Religious System

Consider the following rationale for why stealing is morally wrong:

\[ \text{Stealing is wrong because it offends God or because it violates one of God's (Ten) Commandments.} \]

From the point of view of institutionalized religion, stealing is wrong because of it offends God or because it violates the commands of His supreme authority.
Approach #1: Grounding Moral Principles in a Religious System

We can further expand this as follows:

Stealing is wrong because it offends God. Stealing offends God because it violates His law of love.
Approach #2: Grounding Moral Principles in a Legal System

An alternative rationale would be:

*Stealing is wrong because it violates the law.*

- Here the grounds for determining why stealing is wrong are not tied to religion.
- If stealing violates a law in a particular nation or jurisdiction, then the act of stealing can be declared to be wrong independent of any religious beliefs that one may or may not happen to have.
Approach #3: Grounding Moral Principles in a Philosophical System of Ethics

- A third way of approaching the question is:

  *Stealing is wrong because it is wrong* (independent of any form of external authority or any external sanctions).

- On this view, the moral "rightness" or "wrongness" of stealing is not grounded in some external authoritative source.

- It does not appeal to an external authority, either theological or legal, for justification.
Approach # 3 Continued

- Many philosophers and ethicists have argued that, independent of either supernatural or legal authorities, reason alone is sufficient to show that stealing is wrong.

- They argue that reason can inform us that there is something either in the act of stealing itself, or in the consequences that result from this kind of act, that makes stealing morally wrong.

- What exactly is it about stealing that makes it wrong?
  - Philosophical ethics attempts to promote reason/reasoning as the sole justification for all human action.
  - What kind of society will this produce?
Approach # 3 Continued

- In the case of both law and religion, specific sanctions against stealing exists in the form of punishment.

- In the case of (philosophical) ethics, the only sanction would be in the form of social disapprobation (disapproval) and possibly social ostracism.
  - E.g., there is no punishment in a formal sense.

- External conditions or factors, in the form of sanctions, are irrelevant.
The Method of Philosophical Ethics

The method philosophers use to analyze moral issues is normative, in contrast to the descriptive method that is used by social scientists.

Sociological and anthropological studies are descriptive because they describe or report how people in various cultures and groups behave with respect to the rules of a moral system.

For example, a sociologist might report that people who live in nations along the Pacific Rim believe that it is morally permissible to make copies of proprietary software for personal use.
Philosophical Studies vs. Scientific Studies

Philosophical studies and scientific studies are similar in that both require that a consistent methodological scheme be used to verify hypotheses and theories.

- These verification schemes must satisfy criteria of rationality and objectivity (or impartiality).

Philosophical studies also differ from scientific studies because scientists typically conduct experiments in a laboratory to confirm or refute a hypothesis.

- Philosophers have no physical laboratory to test ethical theories and claims; they evaluate a claim or thesis by testing it against the rules of logical.
Discussion Stoppers as "Roadblocks" to Moral Discourse

Discussion stoppers can be articulated in terms of the following four questions:

1. People disagree about morality; so how can we reach agreement on moral issues?
2. Who am I/Who are we to judge others and to impose my/our values on others?
3. Isn't morality simply a private matter?
4. Isn't morality simply a matter that different cultures and groups should determine for themselves?
Discussion Stopper # 1: People Disagree on Solutions to Moral Issues

- People who hold this view fail to recognize:
  - (i) Experts in other fields of study, such as science and math., also disagree on what the correct answers to certain questions are.
  - (ii) There is common agreement about answers to *most* moral questions.
  - (iii) People do not always distinguish between "disagreements about factual matters" and "disagreements on general principles" in disputes involving morality.
Discussion Stopper # 2: Who am I to Judge Others?

- We need to distinguish between:
  - (a) “persons making judgments” and “persons being judgmental,” and
  - (b) “judgments involving condemnations” vs. “judgments involving evaluations.”

- Also, we are sometimes required to make judgments about others.
Discussion Stopper # 3: Ethics is Simply a Private Matter

- Many people assume that morality is essentially personal in nature and that morality must therefore be simply a private matter.
- “Private morality” is essentially an oxymoron or contradictory notion.
- Morality is a *public* phenomenon (Gert).
Discussion Stopper # 4: Morality is Simply a Matter for Individual Cultures to Decide

According to this view, a moral system is dependent on, or relative to, a particular culture or group.

There are some very serious problems with this view, which is called ethical relativism.

It is useful to distinguish between two positions involving relativism:

- cultural relativism
- moral relativism.
Discussion Stopper #4
Continued - Cultural Relativism

- At the base of cultural relativism is the following assumption:

(A) Different cultures have different belief systems about what constitutes morally right and wrong behavior.

- Note that (A) is essentially a descriptive thesis.
Cultural Relativism Continued

- Although (A) -- the assumption that different groups have different conceptions about what is morally right and morally wrong behavior -- is widely accepted, some social scientists believe that the reported differences between cultures have been greatly exaggerated.

- Other social scientists have suggested that all cultures may recognize some universal core moral values.
Cultural Relativism
(Continued)

- Even if cultural relativism (Thesis A) is true, we can ask if (A) logically implies the claim

  (B) No universal standard of morality is possible
      (because what is morally right or wrong can only be determined only by some culture or group).

- Note that (B), unlike (A), is a normative thesis.
- Also note that to move from (A) to (B) is to move from cultural relativism to moral relativism.
Moral Relativism

- Moral relativists make a questionable move:
  - **Premise**: Different cultures have different beliefs about what is right and wrong
  - **Conclusion**: No universal standard of morality is possible.

- Many moral relativists also seem to suggest that, in matters of morality, “anything goes.”

- But the moral relativist’s view is essentially incoherent and inconsistent.
Moral Relativism (Continued)

- Does it follow that individuals who reside outside a particular culture, X, can never make any judgments about the behavior of those who live within X?

- Consider that in many tribes in West Africa a ritual of female circumcision is still practiced.
  - While this practice has been a tradition for many generations, some females living in tribes that still perform this ritual on teenage girls have objected.
  - Many people who live outside these cultures condemn this practice. Are they wrong to do so?
Moral Relativism (Continued)

- Assume that the majority of residents in Culture X approve of female circumcision.
- Would it be inappropriate for those who lived outside of West Africa to claim that the treatment of young women in those tribes is morally wrong, simply because they are not members of Culture X?
- If we embrace that view, wouldn’t it follow that a culture can devise any moral scheme it wishes as long as the majority approve it?
Moral Objectivism vs. Moral Absolutism

- We can reject moral relativism without necessarily embracing moral absolutism.

- Moral absolutism claims that there is only one uniquely correct answer to every moral problem.
  - I do not know anybody who believes this, do you?
Moral Objectivism vs. Moral Absolutism

- Moral objectivism asserts that (for at least some moral issues) there can be more than one acceptable answer.
  - While there may not be only one uniquely correct answer to every moral problem, there are can be many incorrect answers to problems.
  - Moral objectivism avoids the relativist’s “anything goes” view.
## Table 2-2  Summary of Logical Flaws in the Discussion Stoppers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stopper #1</th>
<th>Stopper #2</th>
<th>Stopper #3</th>
<th>Stopper #4</th>
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<td><strong>People disagree on solutions to moral issues.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Who am I to judge others?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ethics is imply a private matter.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Morality is simply a matter for individual cultures to decide.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fails to recognize that experts in many areas disagree on key issues in their fields.</td>
<td>1. Fails to distinguish between the act of judging and being a judgmental person.</td>
<td>1. Fails to recognize that morality is essentially a public system.</td>
<td>1. Fails to distinguish between descriptive and normative claims about morality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fails to recognize that there are many moral issues on which people agree.</td>
<td>2. Fails to distinguish between judging as condemning and judging as evaluating.</td>
<td>2. Assumes that people can never reach common agreement on some moral principles.</td>
<td>2. Assumes that a system is moral because a majority in a culture decides it is moral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fails to distinguish between disagreements about principles and disagreements about facts.</td>
<td>3. Fails to recognize that sometimes we are required to make judgments</td>
<td>3. Confuses moral choices with individual or personal preferences.</td>
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Discussion Questions

1) How do religion, law and philosophy each provide different grounds for justifying a moral principle? Which do you think is more comprehensive?

2) What are some examples of contemporary technology issues for which our society’s moral guidelines seem to be nonexistent or unclear?

3) (Ethical vs Legal) Can you give examples where an action may be legal but unethical, or vise versa?
Chapter 2 Overview

- Introduction
- Nine ethical theories
  - First four “unworkable”
  - Last five “workable”
- Comparing workable ethical theories
- Morality of breaking the law
We Live in Communities
(London, England at night from space)

2.1 Introduction

Core Values:
- Life
- Happiness
- Basic rule of law

Two ways to view world
- Selfish point of view
- Ethical point of view
Defining Terms

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

- **Morality**
  - A society’s rules of conduct
  - What people ought / ought not to do in various situations

- **Ethics**
  - Rational examination of morality
  - Evaluation of people’s behavior
Analogy:
Difference between Morality and Ethics

Morality = road network
Why Study Ethics?

- Ethics: a way to decide the best thing to do
- New problems accompany new technologies
- “Common wisdom” may not exist for novel situations brought about by new technologies
Scenario 1

- Did Alexis do anything wrong?
- Who benefited from Alexis’s course of action?
- Who was hurt by Alexis’s course of action?
- Did Alexis have an unfair advantage over her high school classmates?
- Would any of your answers change if it turns out Alexis did not win a college scholarship after all?
- Are there better ways Alexis could have achieved her objective?
- What additional information, if any, would help you answer the previous questions?

Alexis is a gifted high school student who wants to become a doctor. She comes from a poor family and will require a scholarship to attend college. Some of her high school classes require extra research projects in order to earn an A. Her high school has a few, older PCs, but there are often long lines waiting to use them. After school she usually works in a part-time job to help support her family.

One evening she goes to the library of a private college where she finds unused PCs connected to the Internet. She surreptitiously looks over the shoulder of another student to learn a valid login/password combination. Alexis returns to the library several times per week, and by using its PCs and printers she efficiently completes the extra research projects, graduates from high school with straight A’s and gets a full-ride scholarship to attend a prestigious university. [from Quin text]
Scenario 2

- Did the antispam organization do anything wrong?
- Did the ISPs that refused to accept email from the blacklisted ISPs do anything wrong?
- Who benefited from the organization’s action?
- Who was hurt by the organization’s action?
- Could the organization have achieved its goals through a better course of action?
- What additional information, if any, would help you answer the previous questions?

An organization dedicated to reducing spam tries to get Internet service providers (ISPs) in an East Asian country to stop the spammers by protecting their mail servers. When this effort is unsuccessful, the anti-spam organization puts the addresses of these ISPs on its “black list.” Many ISPs in the United States consult the black list and refuse to accept email from the blacklisted ISPs. This action has two results. First, the amount of spam received by the typical email user in the United States drops by 25 percent. Second, tens of thousands of innocent computer users in the East Asian country are unable to send email to friends and business associates in the United States. [from Quin text]
Scenario 3

- Did the East Dakota State Police do anything wrong?
- Who benefited from the actions of the EDSP?
- Who was harmed by the actions of the EDSP?
- What other courses of action could the EDSP have taken to achieve its objectives?
- What additional information, if any, would help you answer the previous questions?

In an attempt to deter speeders, the East Dakota State Police (EDSP) installs video cameras on all of its freeway overpasses. The cameras are connected to computers that can reliably detect cars traveling more than five miles per hour over the speed limit. These computers have sophisticated image recognition software that enables them to read license plate numbers and capture high-resolution pictures of vehicle drivers. If the picture of the driver matches the driver’s license photo of one of the registered owners of the car, the system issues a speeding ticket to the driver, complete with photo evidence. Six months after the system is put into operation, the number of people speeding on East Dakota freeways is reduced by 90 percent. The FBI asks the ESP for real time access to the info collected by the cameras. The EDSP complies with this request. Three months later, the FBI uses this information to arrest five members of a terrorist organization. [from Quin text]
Scenario 4

- Should you recommend release of the product next week?
- Who will benefit if the company follows your recommendation?
- Who will be harmed if the company follows your recommendation?
- Do you have an obligation to any group of people that may be affected by your decision?
- What additional information, if any, would help you answer the previous questions?

You are the senior software engineer at a start-up company developing an exciting new product that will allow salespeople to generate and email sales quotes and customer invoices from their smart phones. Your company’s sales force has led a major corporation to believe your product will be available next week. Unfortunately, at this point the package still contains quite a few bugs. The leader of the testing group has reported that all of the known bugs appear to be minor, but it will take another month of testing for his team to be confident the product contains no catastrophic errors. Because of the fierce competition in the smart phone software industry, it is critical that your company be the “first to market.” To the best of your knowledge, a well-established company will release a similar product in a few weeks. If its product appears first, your start-up company will probably go out of business. [from Quin text]
Relativism and Subjective Relativism

- Relativism
  - No universal standards of right and wrong
  - One person can say “X is right,” another can say “X is wrong,” and both can be correct

- Subjective relativism
  - Each person decides right and wrong for himself or herself
  - “What’s right for you may not be right for me”
Case for Subjective Relativism

- Well-meaning and intelligent people disagree on moral issues
- Ethical debates can be disagreeable and pointless
Case Against Subjective Relativism

- Blurs line between doing what you think is right and doing what you want to do
- Makes no moral distinction between the actions of different people
- SR and tolerance are two different things
- Decisions may not be based on reason
- Conclusion: Not a workable ethical theory
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.
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.
- What if there are no cultural norms?
- It doesn’t account for evolution of moral guidelines.
- It provides no way out for cultures in conflict.
- Existence of many acceptable practices does not imply all practices are acceptable (many/any fallacy).
- Societies do, in fact, share certain core values.
- Only indirectly based on reason.
- Conclusion: Not a workable ethical 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

Stealing is wrong. Exodus 20:15
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
- Society is multicultural, secular
- Some modern moral problems not directly addressed in scripture
- “The good” ≠ “God” (equivalence fallacy)
- Based on obedience, not reason?
- Conclusion: Not a workable ethical theory for our purposes
Ethical Egoism

- Each person should focus exclusively on his or her self-interest
- Morally right action: that action that provides self with maximum long-term benefit
- Ayn Rand, author of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, espoused a theory akin to ethical egoism
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
- Other moral principles are rooted in the principle of self-interest
Case Against Ethical Egoism

- An easy moral philosophy may not be the best moral philosophy
- We know a lot about what is good for someone else
- Self-interest can lead to blatantly immoral behavior
- Other moral principles are superior to principle of self-interest
- People who take the good of others into account lead happier lives
- By definition, does not respect the ethical point of view
- Conclusion: Not a workable ethical theory
Kantianism

- Attributed to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).
- Kant’s conclusion is that the only thing in the world that can be called good without qualification is a good will.
- Founded on the view that all people are fundamentally rational beings, and can derive moral rules from the logic of the situation and act according to the rules.

*Kant’s Criteria:*

- Can the rule be universally applied to everyone?
- Does the rule treat people as ends, not means?
2.6 Kantianism/Deontology

Critical Importance of Good Will/duty

- People’s actions should be guided by moral laws
- Moral laws are universal and are based on reason
- Good will: the desire to do the right thing
- Immanuel Kant: Only thing in the world that is good without qualification is a good will
- Reason should cultivate desire to do right thing
- What we want to do is of no importance
  - Rather what is our duty is important
Categorical Imperative (1\textsuperscript{st} Formulation)

Act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to be universal moral laws.
Illustration of 1st Formulation

- Question: Can a person in dire straits make a promise with the intention of breaking it later?
- Proposed rule: “I may make promises with the intention of later breaking them.”
- The person in trouble wants his promise to be believed so he can get what he needs.
- Universalize rule: Everyone may make & break promises
- Everyone breaking promises would make promises unbelievable, contradicting desire to have promise believed
- The rule is flawed. The answer to the question is “No.”
Another Way to Reason It Out

- 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.
- 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 → evidence that your will to do that action violates the Categorical Imperative
Categorical Imperative (2\textsuperscript{nd} Formulation)

Act so that you treat both yourself and other people as ends in themselves and never only as a means to an end.

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
Plagiarism Scenario

Carla
- Single mother - works full time
- Takes two evening courses

History class
- Requires more work than normal
- Carla earning an “A” on all work so far
- Carla doesn’t have time to write final report

Carla purchases report;

Was Carla’s action morally justifiable?

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 examinations, the professor assigns four lengthy reports, which is far more than the usual amount of work required for a single class. Students must submit all four reports in order to pass the class. 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 time to research and write the final report. Carla uses the Web to identify a company that sells term papers. She purchases a report from the company and submits it as her own work. [from Quin text]
Kantian Evaluation (1st Formulation)

- Carla wants credit for plagiarized report
- Rule: “You may claim credit for work performed by someone else”
- If rule universalized, reports would no longer be credible indicator’s of student’s knowledge, and professors would not give credit for reports
- Proposal moral 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
  - End: passing the course
  - Means: manipulate professor
- What Carla did was wrong
Case for Kantianism

- Treats all persons as moral equals
- Gives all people moral worth as rational, autonomous beings
- Holds everyone to the same standard
- Produces universal moral guidelines
Perfect and Imperfect Duties

- Perfect duty: duty obliged to fulfill without exception
  - Example: Telling the truth

- Imperfect duty: duty obliged to fulfill in general but not in every instance
  - Example: Helping others
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
- Conclusion: Despite weaknesses, a workable ethical theory
2.7 Act Utilitarianism
Principle of Utility

- Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill
- An action is good if its benefits exceeds its harms
- An action is bad if its harms exceed its benefits
- Utility: tendency of an object to produce happiness or prevent unhappiness for an individual or a community
- Happiness = advantage = benefit = good = pleasure
- Unhappiness = disadvantage = cost = evil = pain
Principle of Utility
(Greatest Happiness Principle)

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

[Diagram showing a seesaw with the label "GOOD" on the left and "BAD" on the right. The seesaw is balanced on the right side with two boxes labeled "Harm" and on the left side with two boxes labeled "Benefit" and "Benefit".]
Act Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism
  - Morality of an action has nothing to do with intent
  - 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
Bentham: Weighing Pleasure/Pain

- Intensity
- Duration
- Certainty
- Propinquity
- Fecundity
- Purity
- Extent
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 a good action
Case for Act Utilitarianism

- Focuses on happiness
- Down-to-earth (practical)
- Comprehensive
Case Against Act Utilitarianism

- Unclear whom to include in calculations and how far out into the future to consider
- Too much work
- Ignores our innate sense of duty
- We cannot predict consequences with certainty
- Susceptible to the problem of moral luck
- Conclusion: Overall, a workable ethical theory
2.8 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
- Soon after, Nachi worm appeared
  - Took control of vulnerable computer
  - 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
Evaluation using Rule Utilitarianism

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

- Who would be harmed
  - People who use networks
  - People who’s computers are invaded by buggy anti-worms
  - System administrators

- 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**
- Avoids the problem of moral luck
- Reduces the problem of bias
- Appeals to a wide cross-section of society
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 of the greatest number”
  - That requires a principle of justice
  - What happens when a conflict arises between the Principle of Utility and a principle of justice?

Conclusion: Despite weaknesses, both act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism are workable ethical theories.
2.9 Social Contract Theory
Basis of Social Contract Theory

- **Thomas Hobbes**
  - In a “state of nature” our lives would be “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short”
  - We *implicitly* accept a social contract
    - Establishment of moral rules to govern relations among citizens
    - Government capable of enforcing these rules

- **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**
  - In ideal society, no one above rules
  - That prevents society from enacting bad rules
James Rachels’s Definition

“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

- Negative right: A right that another can guarantee by leaving you alone
- Positive right: A right obligating others to do something on your behalf
- Absolute right: A right guaranteed without exception
- Limited right: A right that may be restricted based on the circumstances
Correlation between Types of Rights

- Positive rights tend to be more limited
- Negative rights tends to be more absolute
John Rawls’s Principles of Justice

- Each person may claim a “fully adequate” number of basic rights and liberties, so long as these claims are consistent with everyone else having a claim to the same rights and liberties.

- Any social and economic inequalities must
  - Be associated with positions that everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to achieve.
  - Be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle).
Rawls’s First Principle of Justice

Just

Unjust

2-68
Rawls’s Difference Principle

![Graph showing income taxes paid for different personal incomes under Plan A and Plan B. The y-axis represents income taxes paid in thousands of dollars, ranging from $0 to $25,000. The x-axis represents personal income in thousands of dollars, ranging from $10,000 to $100,000. The graph compares Plan A (light gray bars) and Plan B (dark gray bars).]
DVD Rental Scenario

- Bill owns chain of DVD rental stores
- Collects information about rentals from customers
- Constructs profiles of customers
- Sells profiles to direct marketing firms
- Some customers happy to receive more mail order catalogs; others unhappy at increase in “junk mail”
Evaluation (Social Contract Theory)

- Consider rights of Bill, customers, and mail order companies.
- Does customer have right to expect name, address to be kept confidential?
- If customer rents DVD from bill, who owns information about transaction?
- If Bill and customer have equal rights to information, Bill did nothing wrong to sell information.
- If customers have right to expect name and address or transaction to be confidential without giving permission, then Bill was wrong to sell information without asking for permission.
Case for Social Contract Theory

- Framed in language of rights
- Explains why people act in self-interest in absence of common agreement
  - Tragedy of the commons
- Provides clear analysis of certain citizen/government problems
  - Why okay for government to deprive criminals of certain rights
  - Why civil obedience can be morally right action
Case Against Social Contract Theory

- No one signed social contract
- Some actions have multiple characterizations
- Conflicting rights problem
- May unjustly treat people incapable of upholding contract
- Conclusion: Despite weaknesses, a workable theory
2.10 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 highest potential
  - Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (4th century BC)
Virtues and Vices

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

- 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
Aristotle: Happiness derives from living a life of virtue.
Summary of Virtue Ethics

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

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.
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 and rashness
  - Generosity between stinginess and prodigality
Case for Virtue Ethics

- It often makes more sense to focus on virtues than obligations, rights, or consequences
- Personal relationships can be morally relevant to decision making
- Theory recognizes our moral decision-making skills develop over time
- With this theory there are no irresolvable moral dilemmas
- Emotions play an important role in living a moral life
Case Against Virtue Ethics

- Reasonable people may disagree on character traits needed for human flourishing
- Cannot use virtue ethics to guide government policy
- Virtue ethics undermines attempts to hold people responsible for their bad actions
- Conclusion: Despite weaknesses, virtue ethics a workable theory
2.11 Comparing Workable Ethical Theories
Ethical Objectivism vs. Relativism

- Ethical objectivism: Morality has an existence outside the human mind
- Relativism: Morality is a human invention
- Divine command theory, ethical egoism, Kantianism, utilitarianism, social contract theory, and virtue ethics examples of ethical objectivism
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 THEORY)

What makes a moral rule correct?
- We can imagine every one following this rule all the time without producing a logical contradiction that undermines the rule. (KANTIANISM)
- The effect of every one 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)
2.12 Morality of Breaking the Law
Social Contract Theory Perspective

- Everyone in society bears certain burdens in order to receive certain benefits
- Legal system supposed to guarantee people’s rights are protected
- Everything else being equal, we should be law-abiding
- Should only break law if compelled to follow a higher-order moral obligation
Social Contract: A Prima Facie Obligation to Obey the Law
Kantian Perspective

- Everyone wants to be treated justly
- Imagine rule: “I may break a law I believe to be unjust”
- If everyone acted according to this rule, then laws would be subverted
- Contradiction: Cannot both wish to be treated justly and allow laws to be subverted
Rule Utilitarian Perspective

- What would be consequences of people ignoring laws they felt to be unjust?
  - Beneficial consequence: Happiness of people who are doing what they please
  - Harmful consequences: Harm to people directly affected by lawless actions, general loss of respect for laws, increased burden on criminal justice system
  - Harms greater than benefits
Act Utilitarian Perspective

- Possible to conceive of situations where benefits of breaking law exceed harms
- Suppose give penniless, bedridden friend copy of CD
- Friend benefits by $15 (value of CD)
- I benefit by $10 (satisfaction of helping friend)
- Harms of $0 (no lost sale, no police involvement)
- With $25 of benefit and $0 of harm, action is determined to be good
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.

- 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?
This course is about ethical issues surrounding the use of cybertechnologies.