

ECS 3361: Social Issues and Ethics in ECS

Lecture 2 Introduction to Ethics Chapter 2

Credits:

Dr. Michael J. Quinn, Author of “Ethics for the information age

The Free Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>

YouTube

Today's Learning Objectives

- Introduction
- Review of nine ethical theories
- Comparing workable ethical theories
- Morality of breaking the law
- Homework 2

Introduction

- We share “innate core values” of
 - Life
 - Happiness
 - Ability to choose and accomplish goals
- Two points of view
 - Selfish: Consider **only your own** self and your values (more subjective)
 - Ethical: Consider **self AND others** and their values (more objective)



Definitions

- **Society**
 - Association of **people under a system of rules** (laws) that benefit members over time
- **Morality**
 - What people should do/Not do in various situations.
 - **Values shared within a community/society**
- **Ethics** is about voluntary choices based on
 - Rational examination of morality
 - **Evaluation of people's behavior**
 - Logical arguments that are persuasive to an open-minded audience

What is Ethics?

- Ethics refers to the study and development of standards of right and wrong, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, or specific virtues.
- Ethics is also the continuous effort of studying our own moral beliefs and conduct to ensure that we live up to standards that are reasonable and solidly-based.
- Video (4 min)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7B-52oOUpM>

What is NOT Ethics?

- **Ethics is not religion.** Ethics is based on logic and reason, not just belief.
- **Ethics is not the law.** A good system of law incorporates many ethical standards, but law can deviate from what is ethical.
- **Ethics is not following cultural traditions.**
- **Ethics is not science.** Something may be scientifically or technologically possible, but not ethical to do.



Why Study Ethics?

- A way to decide the right thing to do
 - We are faced with decisions all the time
 - You may get fired for ethical violations
 - Man made disasters happen because of ethical violations
- New situations brought about by new technologies
 - New problems accompany new technologies
 - No precedents or “common wisdom” to refer to
- Think logically and independently about moral issues
 - Rational analysis of facts, shared values, logic



Ethical Theories: Relativism

- Subjective Relativism

- Each person decides what is wrong and right. **No universal norms.**
 - Intelligent people disagree on moral issues and ethical debates are pointless (arguments for)
 - Not workable, chaos. **No distinction between right and desire.** Tolerance and SR are not the same (arguments against)

- Cultural Relativism

- Right and wrong depends on society's moral guidelines
- Guidelines **vary from place to place** and from time to time
 - Social contexts require different guidelines (case For)
 - Societies do share certain core values. **Does not explain how moral guidelines are determined** (case against) . Not workable.



Ethical Theories: Objectivism

- Kantianism

- Put forward by German philosopher Immanuel Kant: Only thing in the world that is good without qualification is a good will. **Good will is the desire/intent to do the right thing.** There are two formulations
 - First: **Act only from moral rules that can be universal moral laws** (without contradiction)
 - Second: **Act so that you treat yourself and other people as ends in themselves and never only as a means to an end.**
- Rational. **Produces universal guidelines** (arguments for).
- **Hard to resolve conflicts between rules/duties.** Perfect duties prevail.
- **Does not allow for exceptions** to perfect duties (arguments against)
 - Example of perfect duty is telling the truth (must do every time)
 - Example of imperfect duty is helping others (must do in general but not in every instance)

Kantianism

- Plagiarism Scenario

- Carla works full time, takes care of her kids and taking two evening classes. Has an A so far in History class and does not have time to write a final report.
- Carla purchases a report and submits it as her own work. Evaluate her decision under first and second formulation of Kantianism

- Under first formulation, her action rules that you may claim credit for work performed by others. If rule becomes universal law

- Reports would no longer be credible indicator of student's knowledge and professors would not give credit for reports
 - Rule is self defeating and Carla's action is wrong

Kantianism

- Under second formulation, her action is deceiving. She treated the professor as a means to an end
 - End is passing the course
 - Means is manipulating the professor
 - Carla's action is wrong
- Kantianism is a workable theory based on logical reasoning
 - Culture neutral
 - Treat all humans equally



Ethical Theories

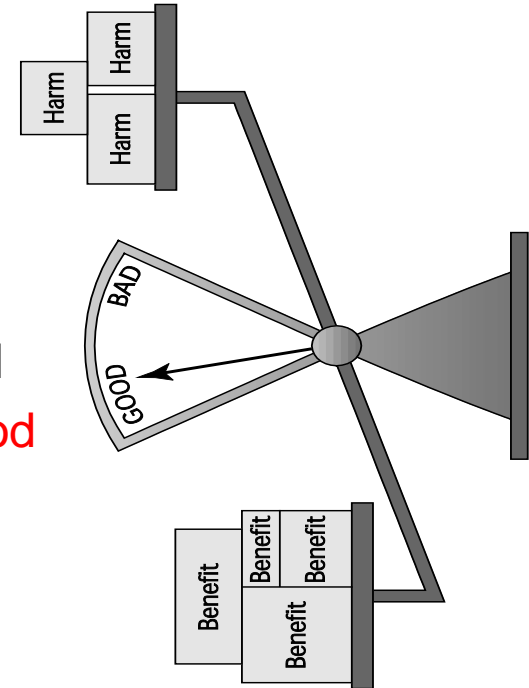
- Divine Command Theory

- Good and Bad actions defined by God through the holy books
 - God is the Creator and ultimate authority (arguments for)
 - Holy books are used as decision-making guides
 - God is all-good and all-knowing. Objective/Universal
- Based more on obedience/faith rather than logic (arguments against)
- Differences in holy books.
- Modern problems not addressed in scriptures
- Not workable in this course

Ethical Theories: Consequentialism

• Ethical Egoism

- Right action is that which provides one's self with maximum long term benefit. **Focus on self-interest (tune to WIIFM station)**
 - Better to **let others take care of themselves**. Practical
 - Self interest can lead to immoral behavior. **Doing good to others lead to happier lives. Not compatible with ethical point of view** (cases Against). Not workable



• Act Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism **focuses on the consequences** and not on intent.
 - More benefits than harm: action is good, happy, pleasurable
 - More harm than good: action is bad, costly, evil, painful
- **Uses principle of utility**: Right increases happiness and wrong decreases happiness of all affected parties.



Act Utilitarianism

- Arguments for Act Utilitarianism are
 - **Practical**. Focuses on happiness which we all pursue.
 - Comprehensive
- Arguments against
 - **Requires too much work**. (what factors to include, for how long, what cost to assign...)
 - Ignores sense of duty or obligation (keep a promise for example, credibility is critical in the workplace)
 - Pledge to help a charity but not follow through after cost/benefit analysis
 - The **problem of moral luck** (when consequences are not under our control)
- **It is our second workable, rational theory.**



Act Utilitarianism

- Highway routing scenario
 - State considers replacing a curvy stretch of highway
 - Highway segment is 1 mile shorter
 - 150 houses would have to be removed
 - Some wildlife habitat would be destroyed
 - Should the state go ahead using the principle of utility?
- Evaluate cost and benefits
 - \$20 millions to compensate homeowners
 - \$10 million to construct the highway segment
 - Lost wildlife habitat is worth \$1 million
 - Benefit is \$39 million savings in driving costs over life of highway.
- Benefits exceeds costs. Good action by the state



Ethical Theories

- Rule Utilitarianism

- Turn action into a moral rules that, if followed by everyone, will lead to increase in total happiness
 - Act Utilitarianism applies principle of utility to individual actions
 - Rule Utilitarianism **applies principle of utility to moral rules**
 - Like Kantianism, it focused on rules
- Arguments for include
 - Easier to perform.
 - **Moral rules survive exceptional situations** (sending flower to a sick in a hospital).
- Arguments against
 - Hard to quantify some actions (wildlife habitat...)
 - **Conflict may arise between principle of justice and principle of utility**



Rule Utilitarianism

- Anti-Worm Scenario
 - In August 2003, Blaster worm infected thousands of windows computers. It caused a reboot every few minutes.
 - Soon after, Nachi worm was released to take control of computers infected and destroy Blaster. But it also used computer as launching pad to look for other computers. **Is releasing Nachi a good action?**
- The moral rule used by whoever released Nachi is that If I can write a helpful worm, I should do so.
 - It helps people who do not protect their computers. However, if applied as a rule, networks would slow down
 - System administrators, would be harmed by having to spend more time fighting worms (even good worms may have bugs).
 - **Harm outweigh benefits. The release of Nachi was wrong.**



Ethical Theories

- **Social Contract Theory**
 - A social contract with **moral rules governing relations among citizens. Government enforces the rules** (Thomas Hobbes in 1600's)
 - People should have basic rights (John Locke)
 - **No one is above the rules prevents society from enacting bad rules** (Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 1700's)
 - Like Kantianism, it is based on universal moral rules derived through rational process.
 - Arguments for include
 - **Uses language of Rights and contracts/agreements**
 - **Provides clear analysis** of certain citizen or government problems (jail)
 - Arguments against
 - **Conflicting rights problems** (abortion)
 - May unjustly treat people who cannot uphold contract (hungry stealing to eat)



Ethical Theories: Social contract

- 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 satisfy 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**)

Social Contract

- Kinds of Rights
 - **Negative right**: A right that another can guarantee by leaving you alone (free expression)
 - **Positive right**: A right obligating others to do something on your behalf (education K-12)
 - **Absolute right**: A right guaranteed without exception (right to life)
 - **Limited right**: A right that may be restricted based on the circumstances (higher education)
- Positive rights tend to be limited
- Negative rights tends to be more absolute

Social Contract

- Rights are considered to be ethically correct and valid since a large or ruling population endorses them.
- Individuals may also bestow rights upon others if they have the ability and resources to do so.
- Social contract theory is our fourth workable ethical framework to use in analyzing an ethical situation.

Virtue Ethics is about character

- Kantianism, utilitarianism, social contract theory focus on
 - Actions (single or rule)
 - Consequences, duties, rights
- **Virtue ethics considers**
 - Moral wisdom
 - Family and social relationships
 - Emotions
 - Moderation

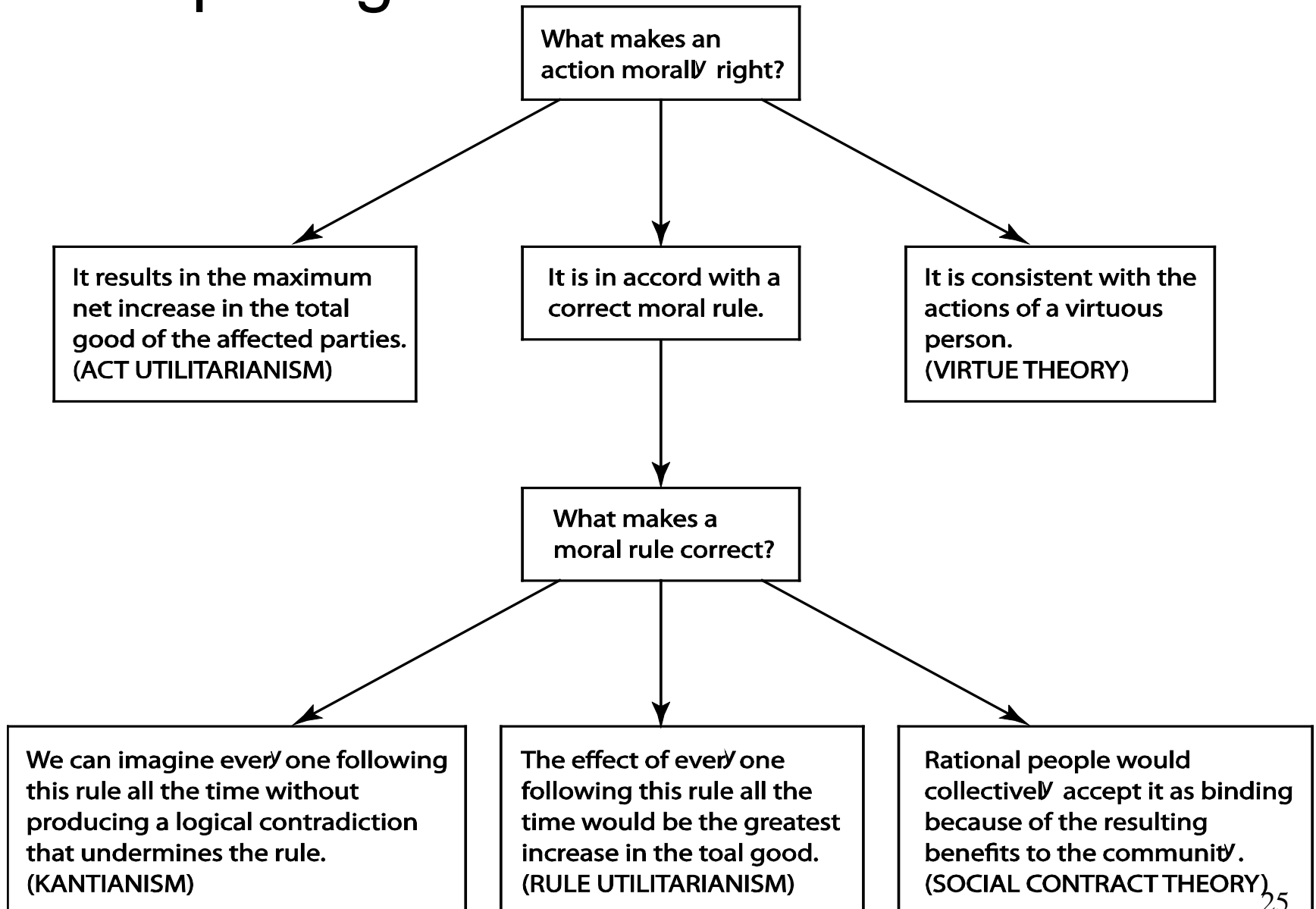
Virtue Ethics

- Aristotle
 - Happiness results from living a life of virtue
 - Intellectual virtue: developed through reasoning (applying science/art)
 - Moral virtue: developed by repeating virtuous acts (virtues)
 - Some virtues: courage, fairness, generosity, honesty....
 - Deriving pleasure from a virtuous act is a sign that the virtue has been acquired (a skill that can be acquired)
- Virtue Ethics is based on imitation of moral examples (persons of strong moral character).
 - possesses and lives out many virtues
 - knows right thing to do in many situations
 - Character traits used to decide what is right

Virtue Ethics

- Provides a balanced approach.
 - Often, a virtue is situated between two extremes (vices)
 - Courage between cowardliness and rashness
 - Generosity between stinginess and prodigality
 - Provides a solution to impartiality
 - Some virtues are partial (e.g., generosity)
 - Other virtues are impartial (e.g., fairness)
- Weakness
 - Does not provide a process for decision making
 - May undermine attempts to hold people responsible
- It is a workable theory and is a good complement to other workable theories (utilitarianism)

Comparing Workable Ethical Theories



Morality of Breaking the Law

- Under social contract theory (**Abiding by the law**)
 - Legal system is supposed to protect people's rights
 - Everyone bears certain burdens in order to receive certain benefits
 - **Should only break law to follow a higher order moral obligation**
- Under Kantianism (**contradiction**)
 - I may break a law I believe to be unjust. Laws would become subverted if everyone uses that rule
 - Contradiction: wish to be treated justly and allow laws to be subverted.
- Under Utilitarianism (**Harm greater than benefits**)
 - Benefit: happiness of people doing what they please
 - Harms: Loss of respect for laws, increased burden on justice system. Harm to people affected by lawless actions.
 - Act Utilitarianism may justify breaking a law (give a poor person a copy of a CD).

Summary

- **Kantianism: categorical imperative** (First and/or second formulation)
 - Can the moral rule be a universal law without contradiction?
 - Are we using people as a means to an end?
- **Utilitarianism:** You should consider the **consequences** of an action before deciding whether it's right or wrong (Principle of utility: **Harms and benefits to all stakeholders**). Act and/or rule utilitarianism.
- **Social contract theory:** We should promote **collective rights and the principle of justice**. Honor laws and contracts.
- **Virtue theory:** Does the act helps us acquire a virtue?

Homework #2

- On e-learning