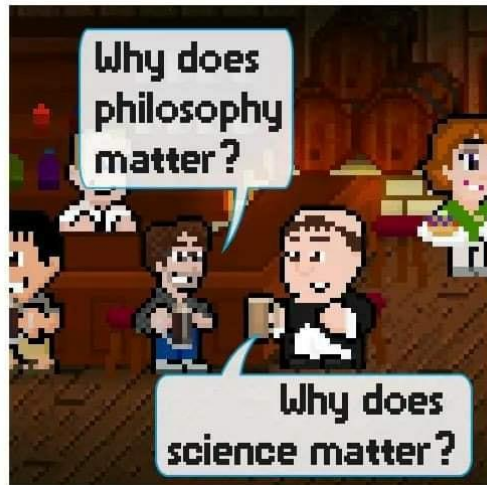# Moral Thinking

PHI 447A

What will we be doing in "PHI 447A"?

- A Philosophical investigation of Morality

- What is it to do Philosophy?

- What is Morality

Can you guess what is it to be doing philosophy?

" The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher. "

- Wittgenstein

What is Philosophy?

- Philosophy
  - is interested in general questions;
    - Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology emerged out of Philosophy
  - deals with questions of central importance;
    - What is there? How do we know? What should we do?
  - works in areas with no agreed upon method
    - Gets messy
    - No easy answers; No trodden path

- "Understand how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together, in the broadest possible sense of the term" - Sellars

- Working out the right way to think about things

Morality

- Concerns what we consider to be 'good' and right'
- Asks questions such as
  - What makes for a good life?
  - How should you treat others around you?
  - What is nature of morality? Are there moral facts?
- Should businesses hike the prices of   their products during times of crisis?

- Should a doctor provide oxygen to a young individual rather than an elderly person if there's a shortage?

- Is it ethical to lie to a close friend such that I get a job and he doesn't?
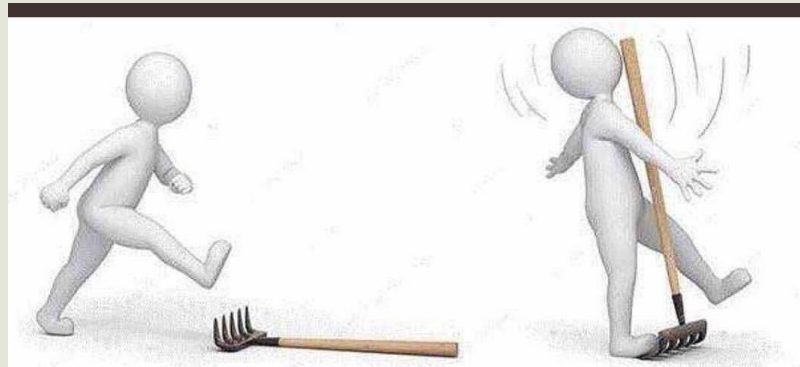
Aim

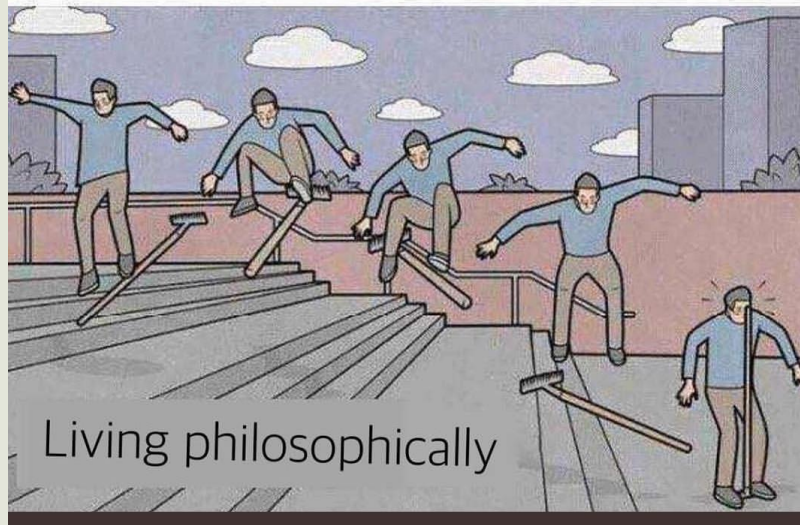- To help you understand <u>some</u> of the main traditions of moral thinking so that you can
  - Recognize moral issues when they arise in your personal and professional lives
  - Develop conceptual resources and thinking skills to decide how you ought to act
  - Deal with your own moral dilemmas better

Lest we take ourselves too seriously!

Living without philosophy

Living philosophically

What is Morality?

- When we say something is moral/ethical we generally seem to suggest that the act is aligned towards that which is good or that which is right.
- But what is good?
- As an institution, morality seems to enjoy an authority and commands us to do/abstain from certain actions.
- Perhaps it's easier to begin with candidates that come close to commanding such an authority
  - Is morality equal to or derived from
    - Law?
    - Religion?
    - Society?

Is Morality derived from Law?

- Not all laws are moral
  - Rowlatt Act, Criminal tribes' act 1871 were required by law but we would not consider moral
  - Article 377 in the Indian Penal Code (formerly)
  - The rule, which prohibited women from driving in Saudi Arabia, and which mandates women in Iran to mandatory wearing of Hijab (Headscarf)
- Neither are all moral standards in the form of laws
  - Being courteous to your neigbours isn't required by law
  - Being considerate towards parents, friends isn't required by law
- Law should be based on the firm foundation of morality but often is not.
  - Law = Common minimum morality; Codified morality

Is Morality derived from Law?…

Co-operation,
Paying taxes,
Peaceful
protest

Moral & Legal	**Moral but Illegal**
Immoral but Legal	**Immoral & Illegal**

Indians manufacturing salt before independence

Hitler's actions

Murder, Robbery….
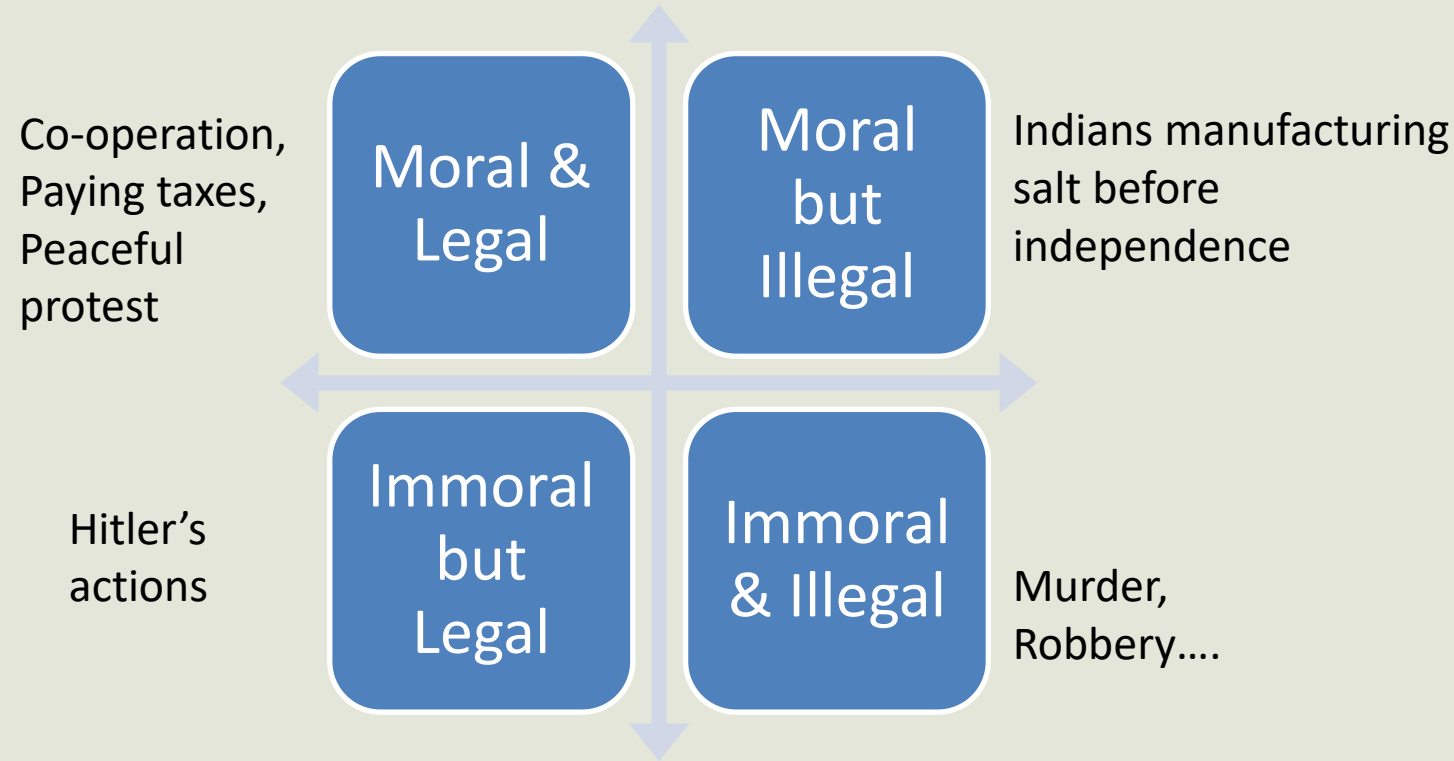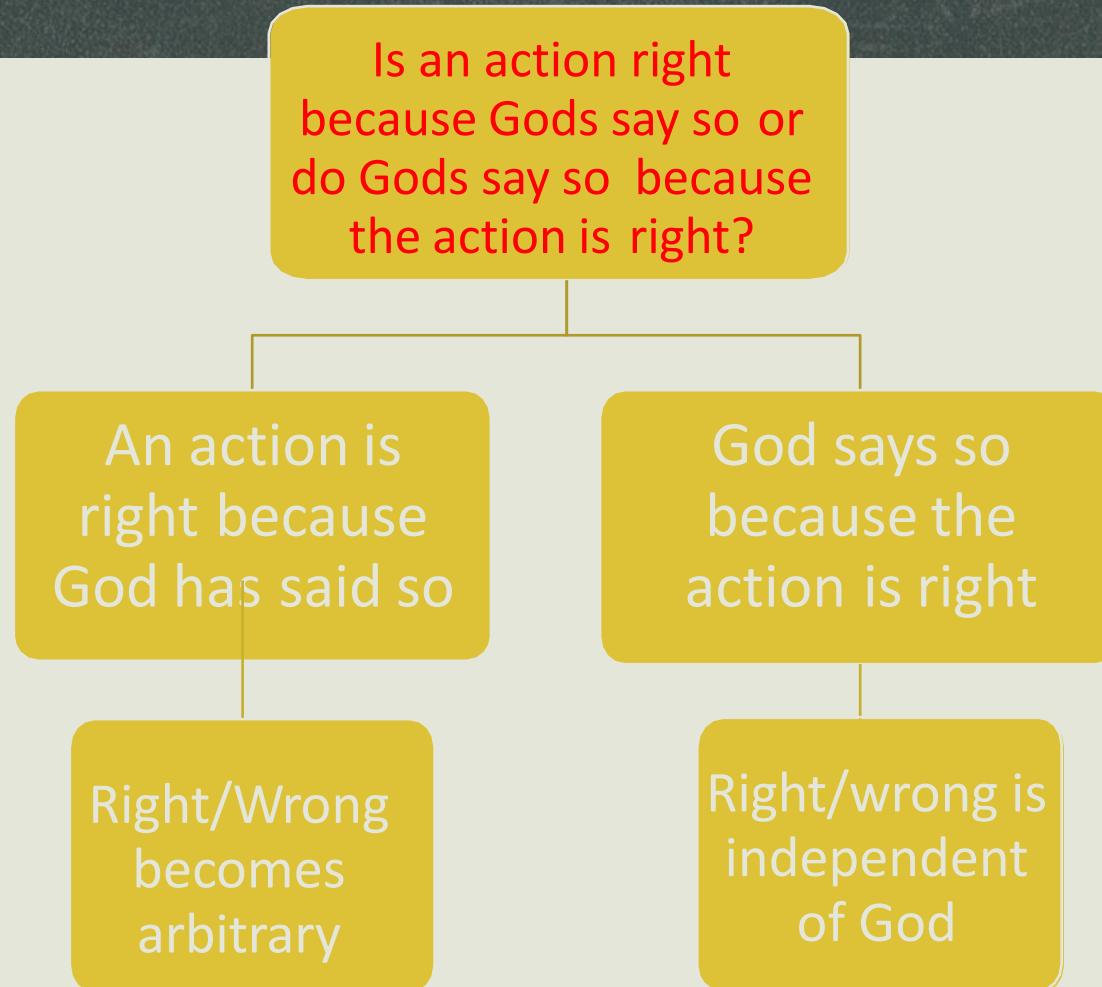
Is morality derived from Religion?

- Divine Command Theory is the view that Morality is derived from religion

  - Religions often spread moral ideas through religious books, customs, and practices.

  - Rules are often taken as a matter of faith (for instance Manusmriti, in the Hinduism, Quran in Islam)

- However, everything, which religions preach might not have an moral framework and thus they are open to scrutiny.

  - Religions too have perpetrated patriarchy, casteism, racism

- Similarly, certain moral prescriptions might not have nothing to do with religious affiliations

  - Empathy, Fairness are values that can be binding on people

- Universal religion? Atheists?

Challenge to Deriving Morality from Religion

- Euthyphro Dilemma: Is an action right because Gods say so or do Gods say so because the action is right?
  - What is the correlation between right actions and God's commands?
- If right actions come prior to God's saying so, then Divine Command theory might fail in spirit
- If God comes before right actions,
  - How do we explain God's goodness?
  - Any action could be right/wrong
  - How do we explain reasons for God's commands?

Challenge to Deriving Morality from Religion

Is an action right because Gods say so or do Gods say so because the action is right?

An action is right because God has said so

Right/Wrong becomes arbitrary

God says so because the action is right

Right/wrong is independent of God

Is Morality derived from Customs?

- Customs are culture-specific, time-specific phenomenon. For e.g
  - 'Sati', was accepted custom in the 17th century India, but not in the 21st century
- Foundations of morality do not rest on culture
- Morality might require us to deviate from the past in cases where inequality or injustice has been perpetrated at the social and individual level.
- No reform would ever be possible otherwise

Is Morality derived from Science?

- Moral enquiry is not equivalent to a scientific enquiry.
  - Testing on humans might be scientifically appreciable but not morally
  - Certain aspects of a decision might be morally important but not scientifically
- Neither is a moral dilemma, a scientific dilemma.
- Science focuses on the 'empirical aspects'
  - explores the question of 'what is' but
- Morality explores the possibilities of 'normative aspects' of any human social interaction which explores the question of 'what ought to be'.
- Science doesn't necessarily capture values

Is Morality derived from Emotions?

- Emotions have no necessary connection with ethics
  - Emotions and feelings are often response mechanisms
  - Emotions could be unethical and non-ethical as well.
  - E.g. killing some person in anger cannot be explained as an ethical act. Crying at the loss of loved ones cannot be termed as ethical or unethical.
- Hence, emotions cannot set the foundations of the ethics.
- However, ethics can be an indicator through which an individual can regulate, analyze his/ her own emotions, and shape them
  - Similarly, emotions are often indicators of moral/immoral actions

Lessons from Cognitive Ethology and Developmental Psychology
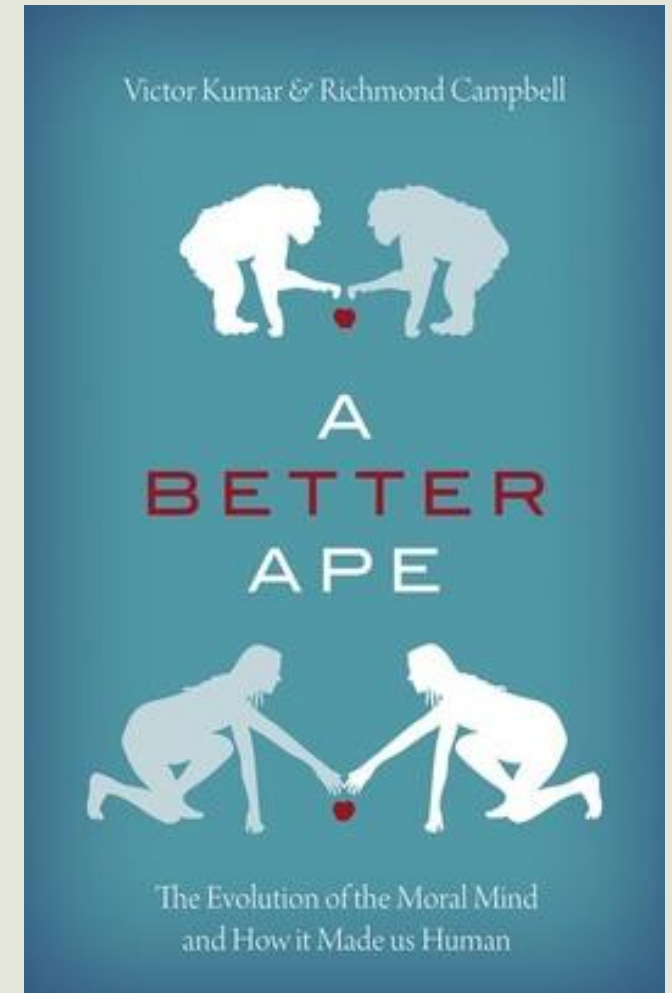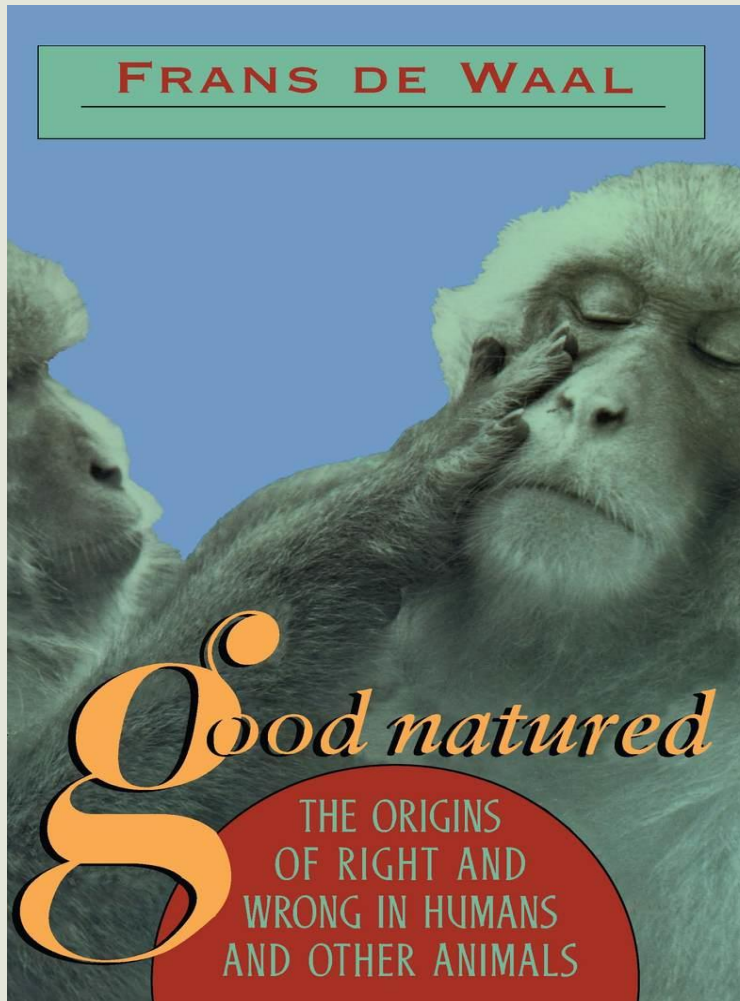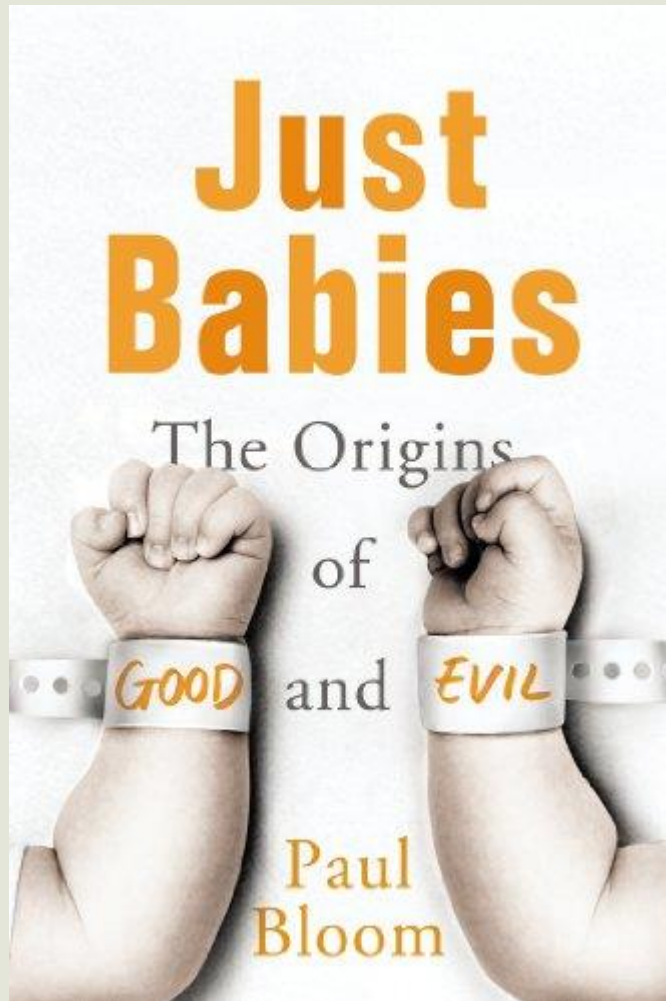
Morality as an Evolutionary Adaptation

- What we call morality among humans evolved from animals.

- Apes and other higher vertebrates also display "reactive emotions": sympathy, loyalty, and some version of altruism.

- The component elements of mature human morality—emerged gradually and piecemeal through many iterations of group selection
  - in response to adaptive pressures inherent in the increasing size and complexity of hominin social groupings.

- Collaboration emerged in response to the need for non-violent means of resolving intra-group conflict

- Cultural software was added to the old bio-cultural hardware