ETHICS

ETH271

ETHICS 271

DURATION

1

week

ASSESSMENTS

1 Test

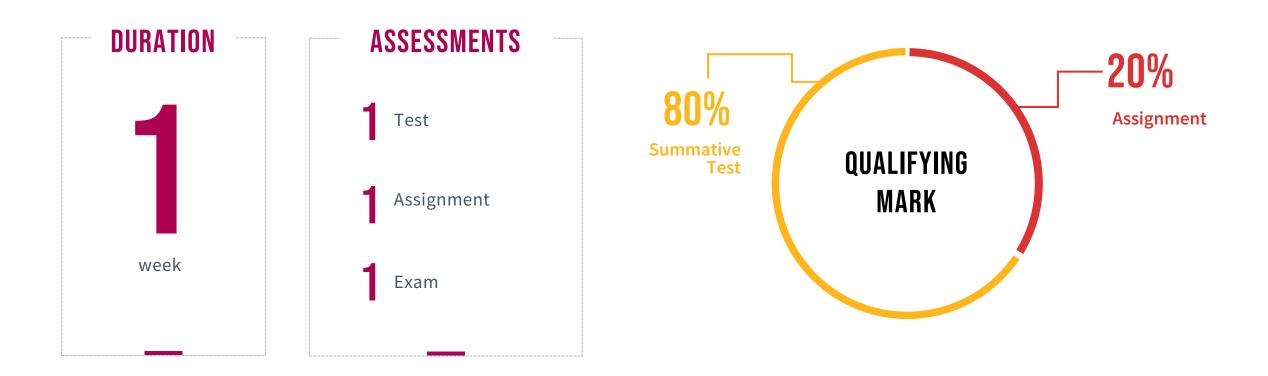**1** Assignment

1 Exam

80%
Summative Test

QUALIFYING MARK

20%
Assignment

Throughout this module, you will find terms in red and bold. These terms you should know. They are explained in class, but their definitions are not in these slides.

Your assignment also talks about various types of moral distance. You should also be able to explain and apply these.
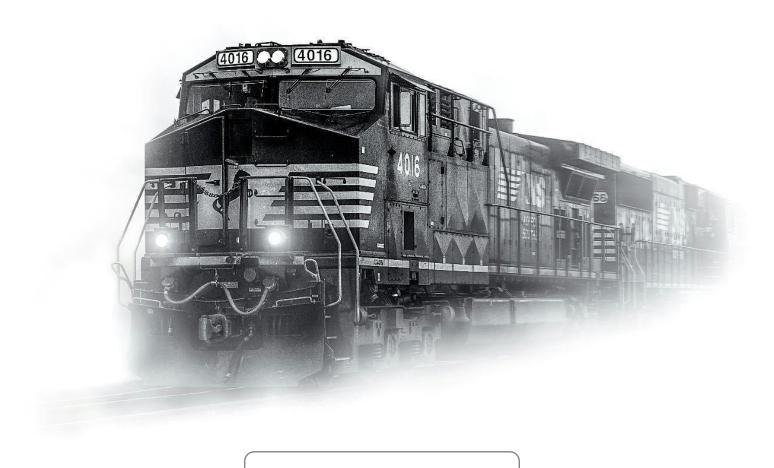
THE WEALTHY

If you can prevent suffering, are you morally obligated to do so?

Singer (2018) wrote that if all life has equal value, and inaction will lead to suffering, those who can help have a duty to do so.
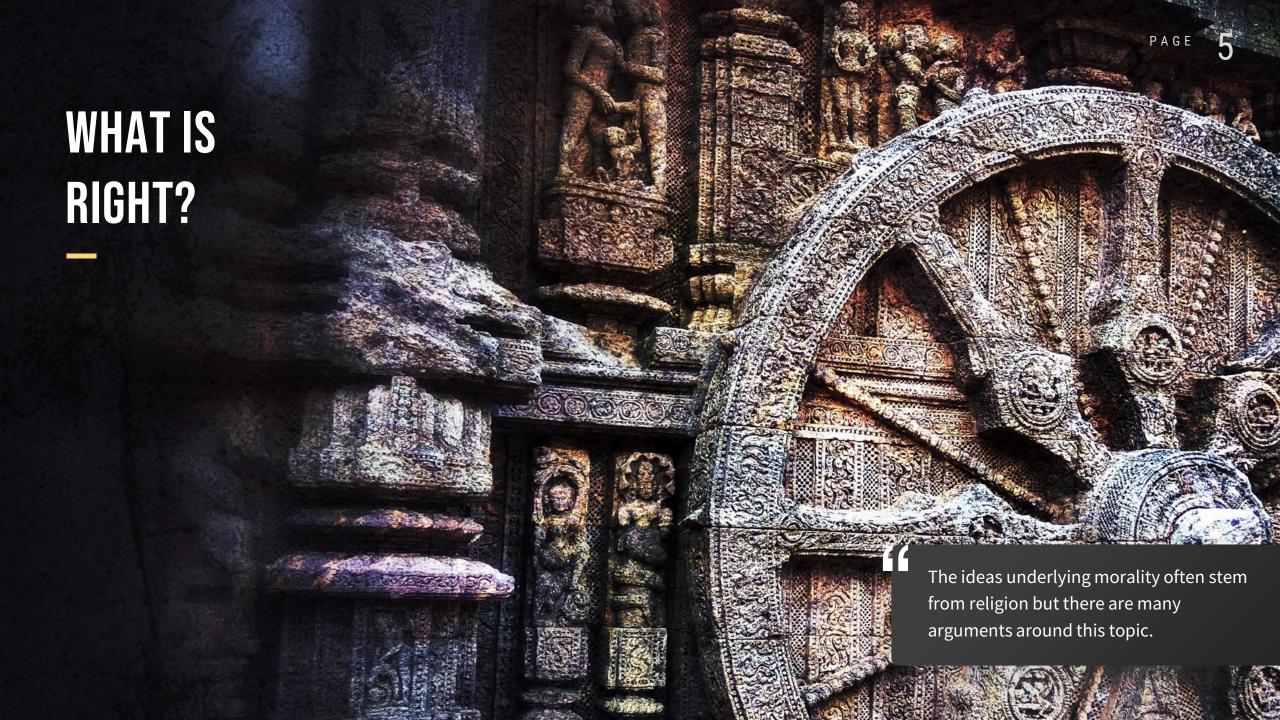
Is that premise flawed though? Is all life equal in value?

THE TROLLEY PROBLEM

BE THE JUDGE

WHAT IS RIGHT?

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> The ideas underlying morality often stem from religion but there are many arguments around this topic.

WHAT IS THE GOLDEN RULE?

Could you apply this when deciding on the right thing to do?

ETHICS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

In Ancient Greece some of the best-known philosophers were Socrates, Plato, and Homer. They all had something to say about being a good person.

"

According to the poet Homer, to be good is to provide help to your friends and harm to your enemies. This is vague and broad, and the context of Ancient Greece needs to be kept in mind. There were many skirmishes and wars occurring during that time.

Socrates stated: "No person should ever willingly do evil". This sounds like common sense. However, when you consider that he also viewed not doing a good thing as equivalent to an evil act, it becomes a bit more interesting.
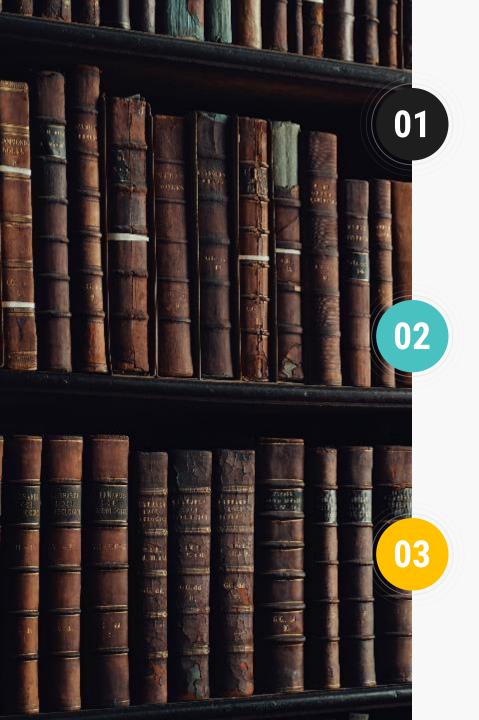
WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING ETHICAL DILEMMA:

An Armageddon level event is going to occur at some point in the future. They can only save one third of the human population. How should people be chosen?

ETHICAL DILEMMAS

In the previous example, you were presented with an ethical dilemma (also referred to as a moral dilemma). The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2022) defines an ethical dilemma as a case or scenario where two or more options are presented, each presenting an ethically undesirable outcome, but only one choice is possible. The key aspect of an ethical dilemma is the conflict between the choices presented. No matter the choice that is made, the consequences will be unethical. By definition, an ethical dilemma therefore has no right answer.

What is the purpose of an ethical dilemma?

SOME OF THE MAIN TERMS IN ETHICS.

01
MORALITY

Principles regarding the distinction between right and wrong.

02
ETHICS

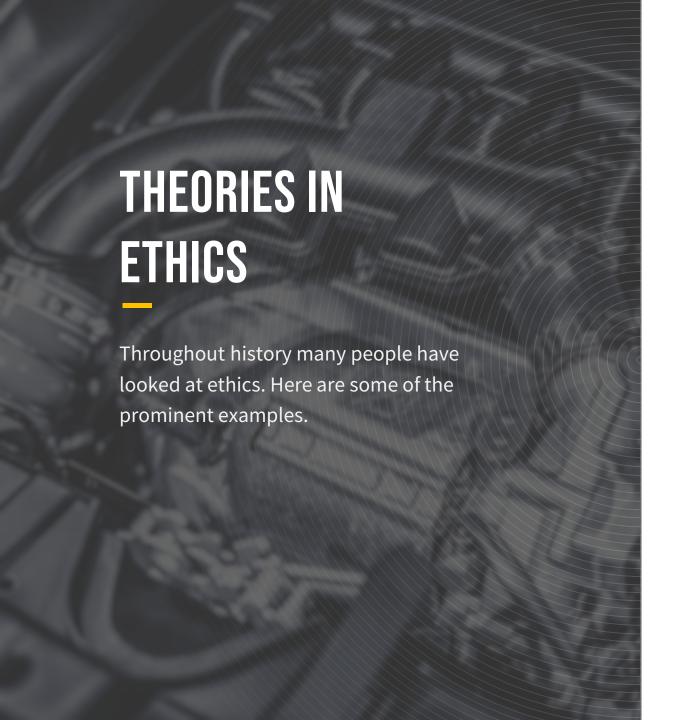The *study* of what is good and bad. It also refers to attempts at building ethical frameworks.

03
NORMATIVE ETHICS

A branch of ethics that focuses on the principles and morals governing what is right and wrong.

THEORIES IN ETHICS

Throughout history many people have looked at ethics. Here are some of the prominent examples.

THEORIES

In the study of ethics there are many theories. These theories are usually based on a certain individual or individuals such as Descartes, Mill, Nietzsche, etc., but can also come from a movement or social group such as feminism.

We will be looking at 3 theories that form part of the fundamental theories originated by philosophers such as Plato and Kant. All the theories we will look at fall under normative ethics since they look at what is right/wrong, good/bad, and allowed/not allowed.

THEORIES IN ETHICS

Throughout history many people have looked at ethics. Here are some of the prominent examples.

01 RELATIVISM

According to relativism, morality is relative to time, place, and culture. Different cultures view morality differently. If a culture viewed slavery as right, then that would be what is right for them. We should respect their views on morality. There is therefore no such thing as a universal good.
The opposite of this would be cultural absolutism which holds that some moral values are the same in all cultures such as condemning lying or stealing (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2014).

DOING THE RIGHT THING

Why was Susan Brownell arrested?

THEORIES IN ETHICS

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02 DEONTOLOGY

Based on the work of Immanuel Kant (1997), Deontology states that by following the rules, you are doing the right thing. His theory also provides the foundation for Judeo-Christian morality. Kant believed there were certain universal moral laws such as don't kill, don't lie, and don't steal. These laws could never be broken.

THE GREATER GOOD

In war, soldiers are required to take lives. If you were drafted, what would you do?

THEORIES IN ETHICS

Throughout history many people have looked at ethics. Here are some of the prominent examples.

03 UTILITARIANISM

What is good is that which would bring maximum pleasure to the most people. This theory could be summed up as "happy consequences". John Stuart Mill (1863) argued that most people strive for happiness and therefore the majority rules. But several counters to this theory prevent it from being "the answer".

What flaws can you identify? Which situations would utilitarianism be more suited to?

LIVING A GOOD LIFE

Create 4 rules that, if followed, mean you are a good person.

THEORIES IN ETHICS

There are many other theories e.g., hedonism, nihilism, consequentialism.

01 RELATIVISM

02 DEONTOLOGY

03 UTILITARIANISM

A BRIEF TANGENT

Which ethical theory is the **right** one?

Life is far too complex to be reduced down to a few rules. Sometimes philosophers appear to create problems simply to have something to argue about.

For example, do you believe in fate?
If so, are you a proponent of determinism?
Are you then therefore also in support of Nietzsche's concept of "*amor fati*", the idea that happiness lies in accepting your destiny – the good and the bad (Nietzsche, 1995).

A BRIEF TANGENT

Something we do not cover in this module is Eastern philosophy. Buddhist philosophy and the concept of mindfulness have become quite popular. Some of their aphorisms are quite beautiful.

This quote by Buddhist philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) is rather poignant: "The seed of suffering in you may be strong, but don't wait until you have no more suffering before allowing yourself to be happy."

Another is by Pema Chödrön: "You are the sky. Everything else – it's just the weather."

For all the unanswerable questions, philosophy brings, it can also bring peace.

DISCUSSION

In addition to the 4 theories we've discussed, do research on the following theories and firstly, explain which theory is best suited to your own belief system, and secondly, critically evaluate each theory.

- Consequentialism
- Ethical Egoism
- Divine Command Theory
- Social Contract Theory
- Moral Intuitionism
- Ethics of Care

Those highlighted in red may be asked in a test or examination. Ensure you understand.

MORAL REASONING

We've had several ethical dilemmas. The process of thinking through an ethical issue and deciding what should be done is known as **moral reasoning**. Some theorists, however, do not believe it is possible to apply reasoning to morality and believe that morality does not subscribe to any universal laws (e.g. non-cognitivism).

However, the moral reasoning process does allow us to investigate our own responses and provides us with important moral insights into our own thought processes.

The philosopher JS Mill (1863) stated that we are generally not able to do the calculations required of utilitarianism but that human experience continually builds upon itself and brings a deeper awareness of morality to each successive generation. Do you agree?

ACHIEVING MORAL REASONING

If you consider the cognitive development of humans: from infancy to adulthood, how does morality develop? How does a toddler distinguish right from wrong compared to a teenager or an adult? Is this development consistent across all countries and cultures?

ACHIEVING MORAL REASONING

The most well-known theory was proposed by Kohlberg (1981). He proposed three levels of cognitive development in terms of morality with each level broken down into two stages. Of these levels, which level is the minimum acceptable level for a typical working person? What kind of situations could push a software developer who is at that stage?

WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER?

Overall, being a software engineer requires ethical considerations that go beyond just technical proficiency. It is important to consider the impact of software on users, society, and the environment and to design and develop software with ethical considerations in mind.

WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER?

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WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER?

Privacy & security

Software engineers often have access to sensitive user data and must ensure that this data is protected from unauthorized access or misuse. They must also be transparent with users about how their data is collected and used.

WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER?
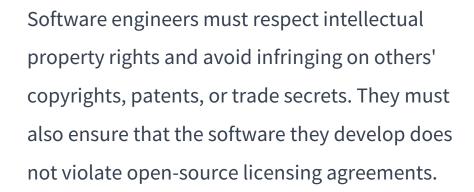
Bias and discrimination

Software engineers have the power to design and develop software that can perpetuate biases and discrimination. They must ensure that their software is designed with fairness and inclusivity in mind and consider the impact their technology can have on marginalized communities.

WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER?

Intellectual property
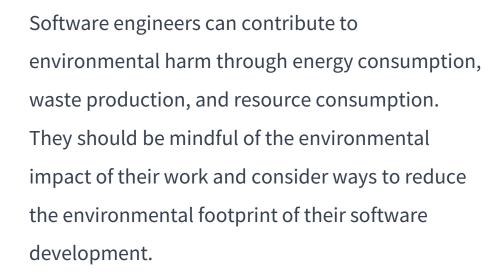
Software engineers must respect intellectual property rights and avoid infringing on others' copyrights, patents, or trade secrets. They must also ensure that the software they develop does not violate open-source licensing agreements.

WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER?

Environmental impact

Software engineers can contribute to environmental harm through energy consumption, waste production, and resource consumption. They should be mindful of the environmental impact of their work and consider ways to reduce the environmental footprint of their software development.

WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER?

Transparency and accountability

Software engineers are required to produce high-quality code with proper documentation, using version control systems to track changes, conducting thorough testing and quality assurance, ensuring security and privacy measures, complying with legal and regulatory requirements, and maintaining effective communication and collaboration with stakeholders. These practices promote ethical and responsible development.

DISCUSSION

Answer the questions on the right. Take a few minutes and think about these questions carefully.

1. What are the ethical responsibilities of software developers, and how do these responsibilities differ from those of other professions?

2. What ethical implications arise from the collection and use of user data, and how can software developers ensure that users have informed consent and control over how their data is used?

3. What ethical implications arise when software developers are asked to work on projects that conflict with their personal values or beliefs, and how should they handle these situations?

4. What are the ethical implications of using and contributing to open-source software, and how can these projects ensure that their work aligns with ethical principles?

5. What ethical responsibilities do software developers have to ensure that their software is accessible to users with disabilities, and how can they address issues of accessibility in their work?

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CLASS EXERCISE

1. **What is Humanitarian ethics as defined by J Thiroux**?

2. Why did Thiroux develop this theory? What gap did this theory try to fill?

3. What are the five basic principles and provide an example for each.

4. Choose one of these scenarios and apply each of the principles to determine whether it is the "right" thing to do:

   a. A couple wants to live together without getting married. Their parents do not approve. Is the couple committing an immoral act?

   b. A 45-year-old person is irreversibly paralysed from the neck down after a car accident. They request euthanasia.

   c. Snapchat wants to implement a facial recognition feature that will determine a user's age with 99% accuracy to prevent exploitation of minors.

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