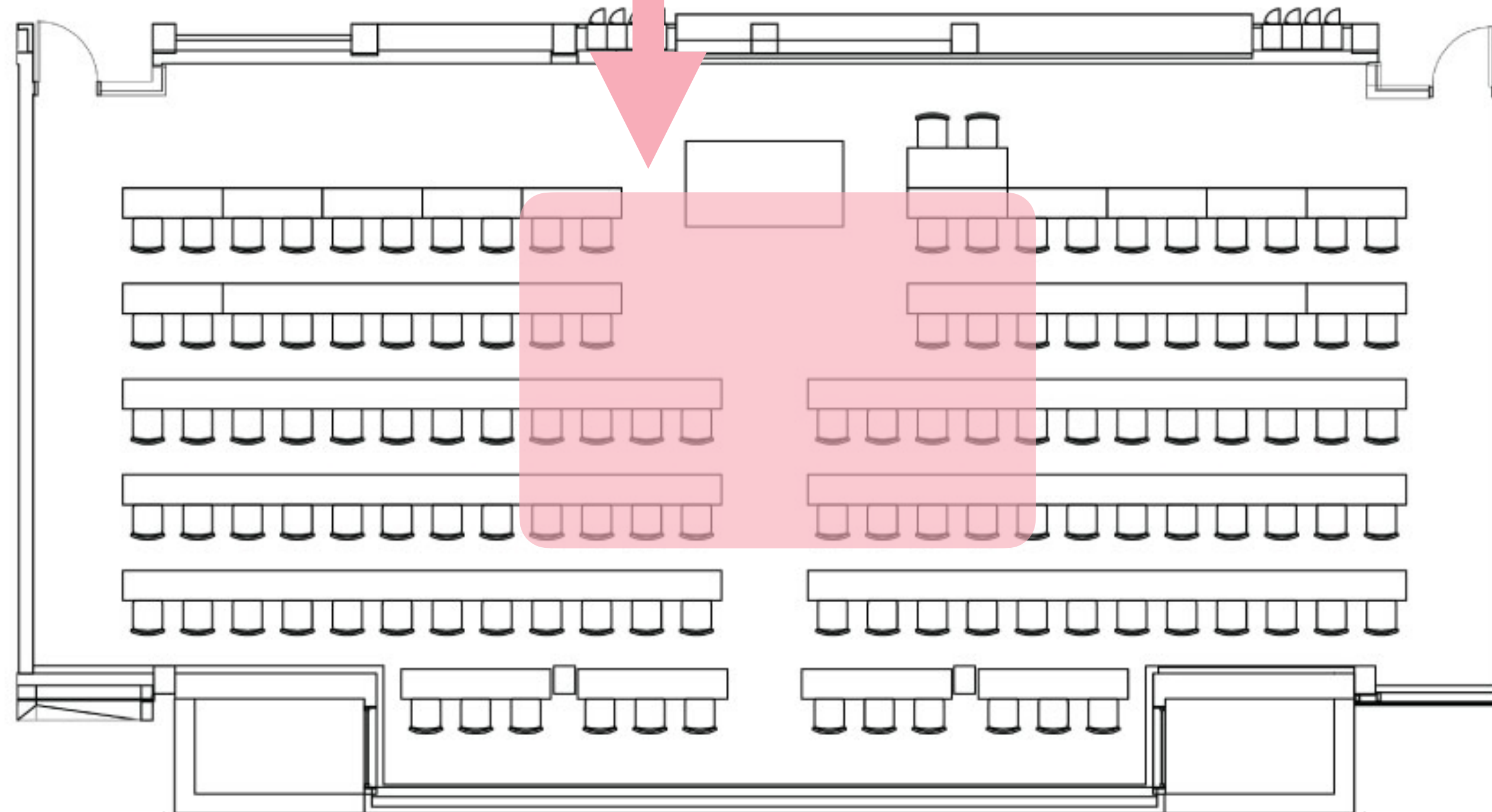


**If you know you are soft-spoken, sit here so I can give you a mic so you don't have to scream!**



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

MCLD 2018



# CPSC 430

# Computers & Society

Dr. Firas Moosvi | 2024\_S2

Slides courtesy of Dr. Kevin Leyton-Brown

# Class Outline

1. Announcements (5 mins)
2. Social Contract Theory (40 mins)
3. Break (10 mins)
4. Virtue Ethics (40 mins)
5. Break (10 mins)
6. Wrap-up Activity (30 mins)
7. Reminders before next class (5 mins)

# Announcements

# Reminders

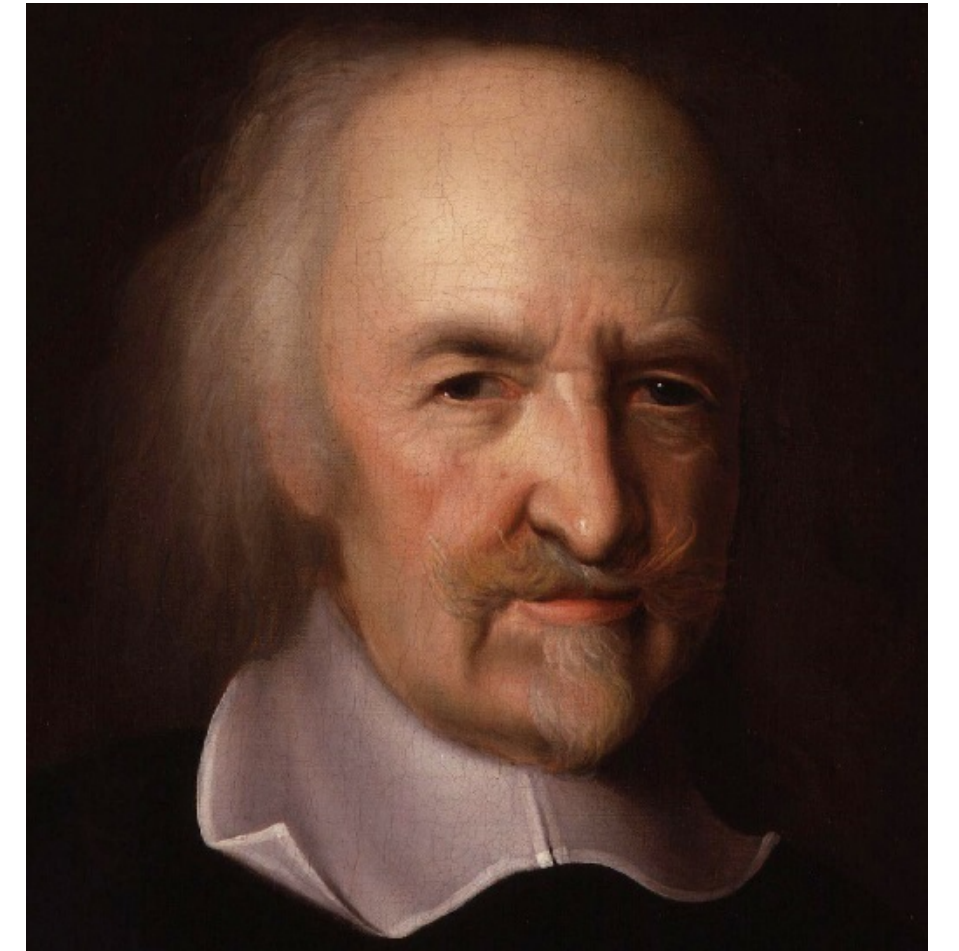
- Reading Quiz 3 was about Chapter 2 readings because we “lost” one class on May 20th.
- Reading Quiz 3.5 was just released on Chapter 3 readings, it is due May 24th at 6 PM
  - This used to be RQ4 but was renamed to RQ 3.5 so that RQ4 and EQ4 line up from here on out...
- Apologies for the rough start to due-dates in this course!
  - Things should be smoother from here on out.

# Social Contract Theory

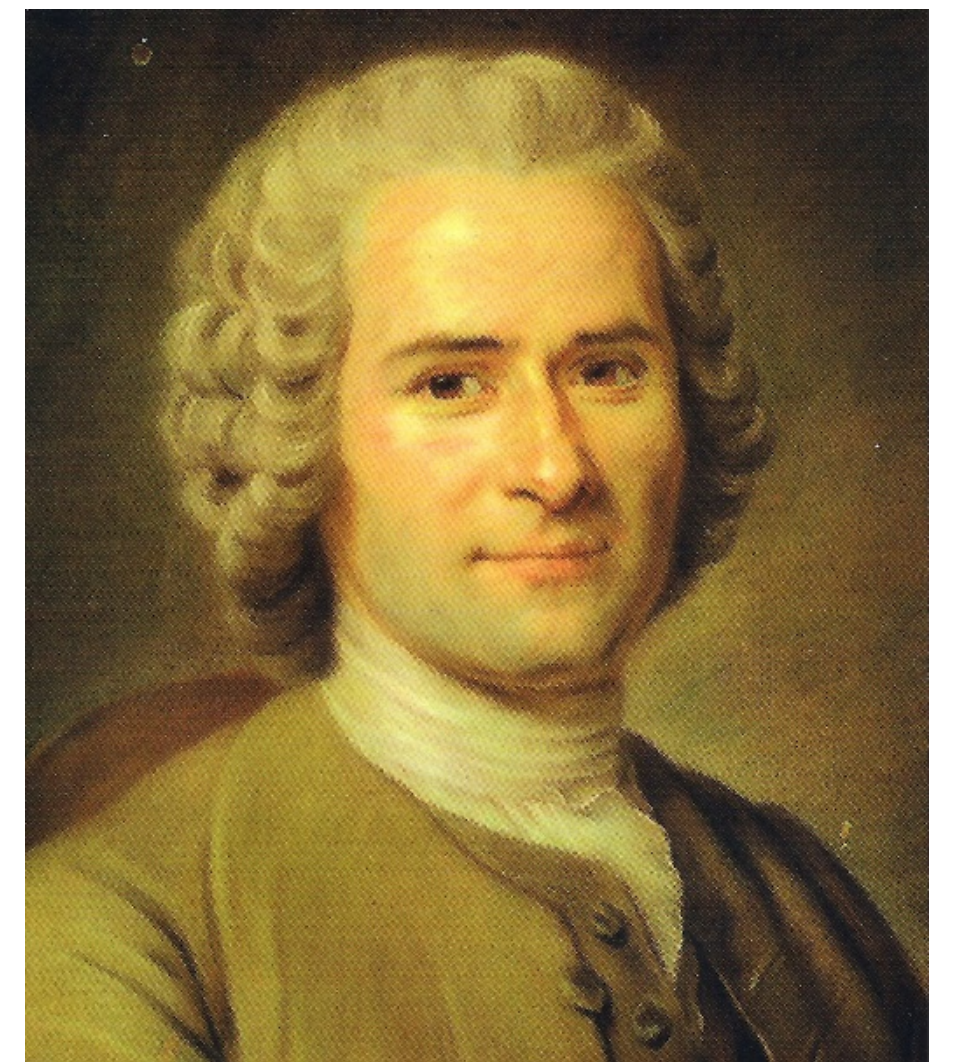


# Social Contract Theory

- Thomas Hobbes
  - “State of nature”
  - 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



1588-1679



1712-1778

# Social Contract Theory Definition of Morality

James Rachels:

“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.”

*If you're an econ geek:*

*“every Nash equilibrium in sets of social rules is morally right.”*

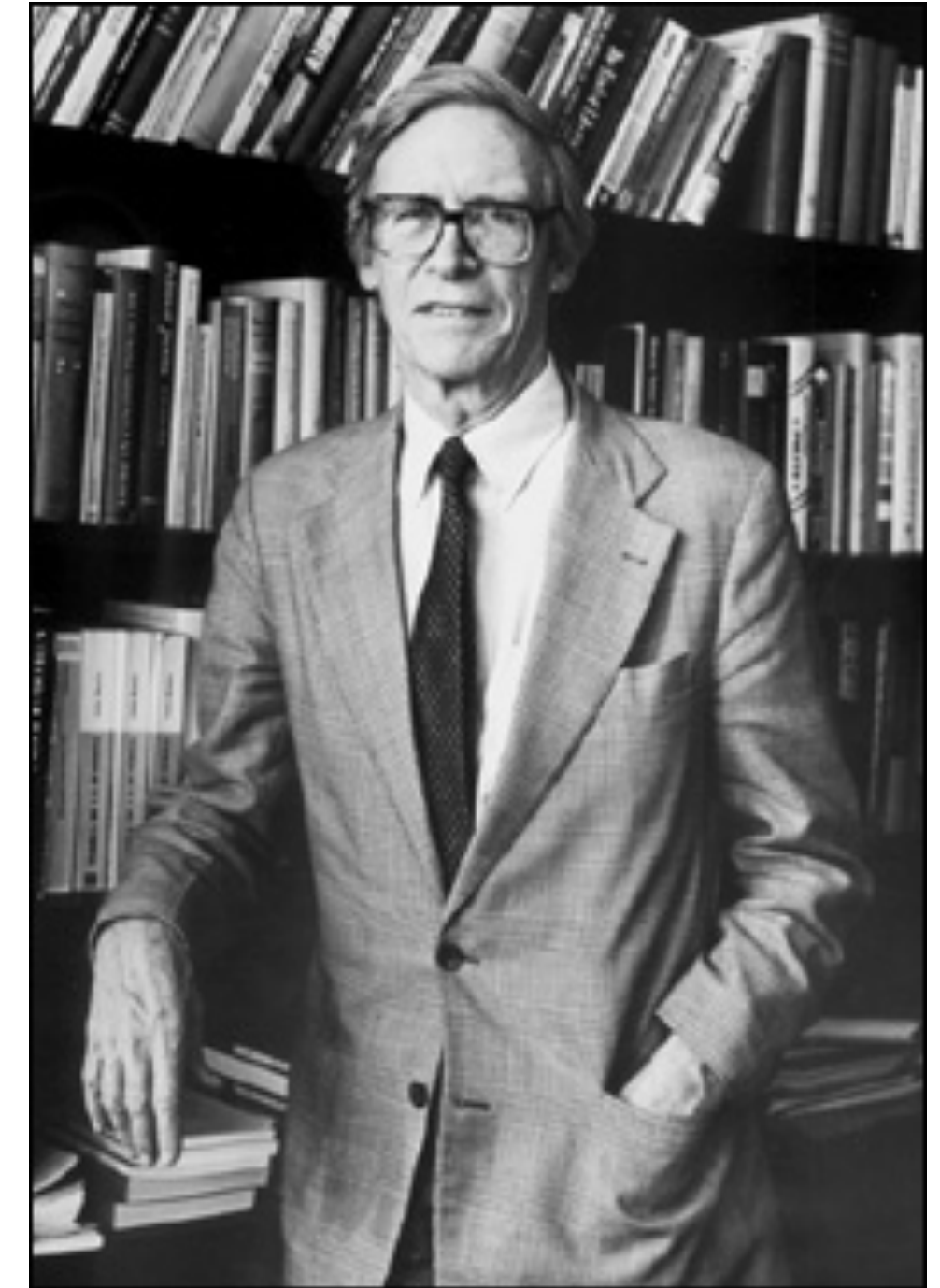


# Kinds of Rights

- **Negative right:**
  - A right that another can guarantee by leaving you alone
- **Positive right:**
  - A right obliging 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
  - Positive rights tend to be more limited
  - Negative rights tends to be more absolute

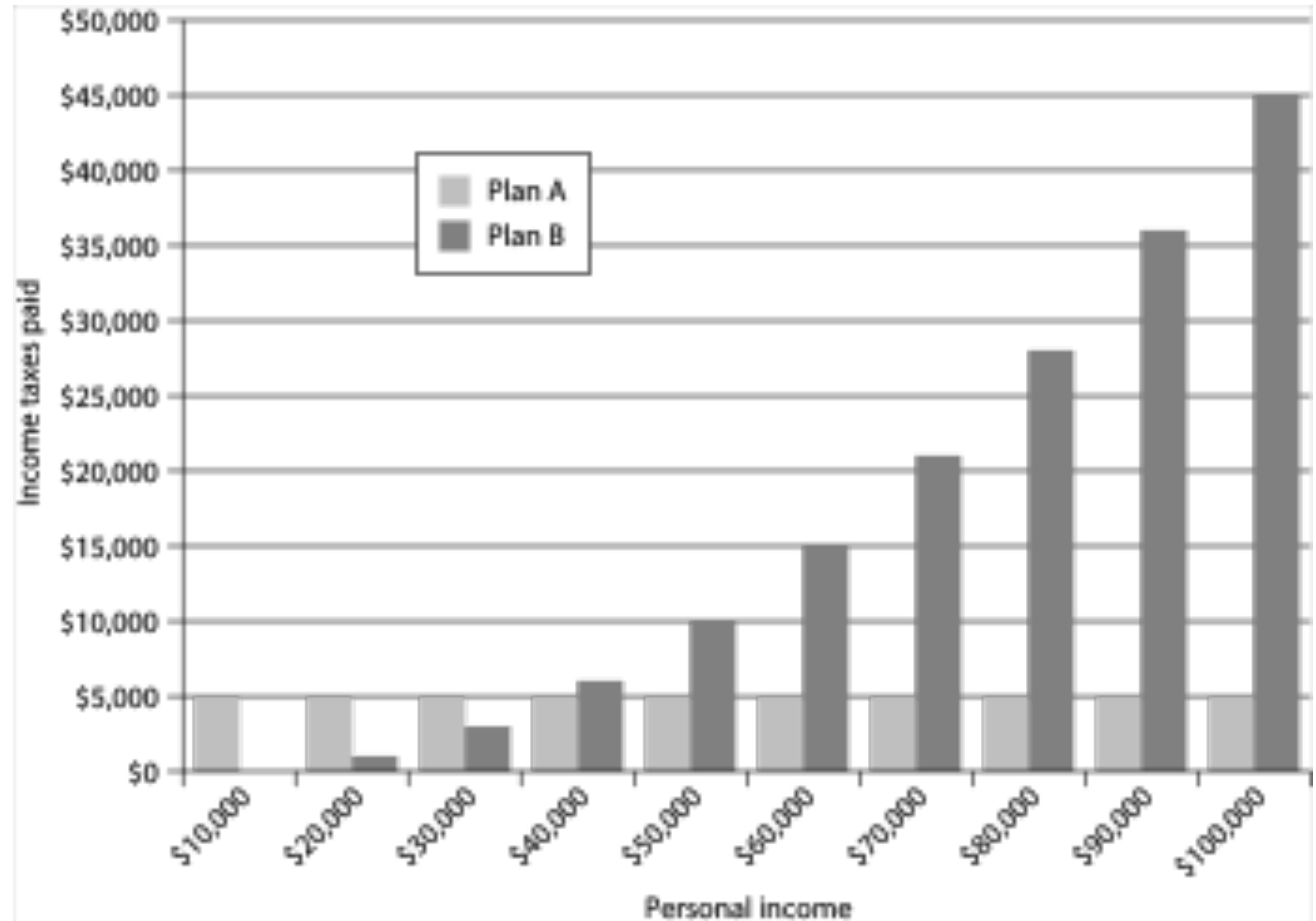
# John Rawls's Principles of Justice

- 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 is saying more than just that every Nash equilibrium is moral.



# Rawls's Difference Principle

“any inequality that is permitted in society should only be permitted on the basis that it benefits the least favoured in society”



# Case for Social Contract Theory

- Framed in language of rights
  - Intuitive and natural
- Explains why people act in self-interest without common agreement
  - Logically, it's the best thing to do
- Provides clear analysis of certain citizen/government problems
  - Why is it right to punish someone for a crime?
  - Why is civil disobedience justifiable?

# Case Against Social Contract Theory

- No one signed contract
- Some actions have multiple characterizations. In such cases, we don't learn how to make trade-offs between these conflicting rights.
  - Same problem we saw with Kantianism, though phrased in terms of duties instead of rights.
- May unjustly treat people who cannot uphold contract
  - In principle, we should distinguish between people who can't follow the contract, and those who choose not to.
  - In practice, this can be hard to do.



# Movie Download Scenario

- InterMovies is a site that streams TV series and movies for a flat monthly fee
- Collects information about media choices from customers
- Constructs profiles of customers
- Sells profiles to direct marketing firms
- Some customers happy to receive more emails; others unhappy at increase in “junk mail”

# Evaluation (Social Contract Theory)

- Consider rights of InterMovies, customers, and other companies
- Do customers have the right to expect contact info to be kept confidential?
- If customer watches a show using InterMovies, who owns information about transaction?

# What do you think about InterMovies?

Let's explore both scenarios. Working in groups of 3 consider whether each point of view can be justified using social contract theory.

OPTION A: Customer doesn't have the right to privacy

OPTION B: Customer does have the right to privacy

- Try to construct a system of rules that rational people would accept as beneficial, given that others would accept these ideas as well.

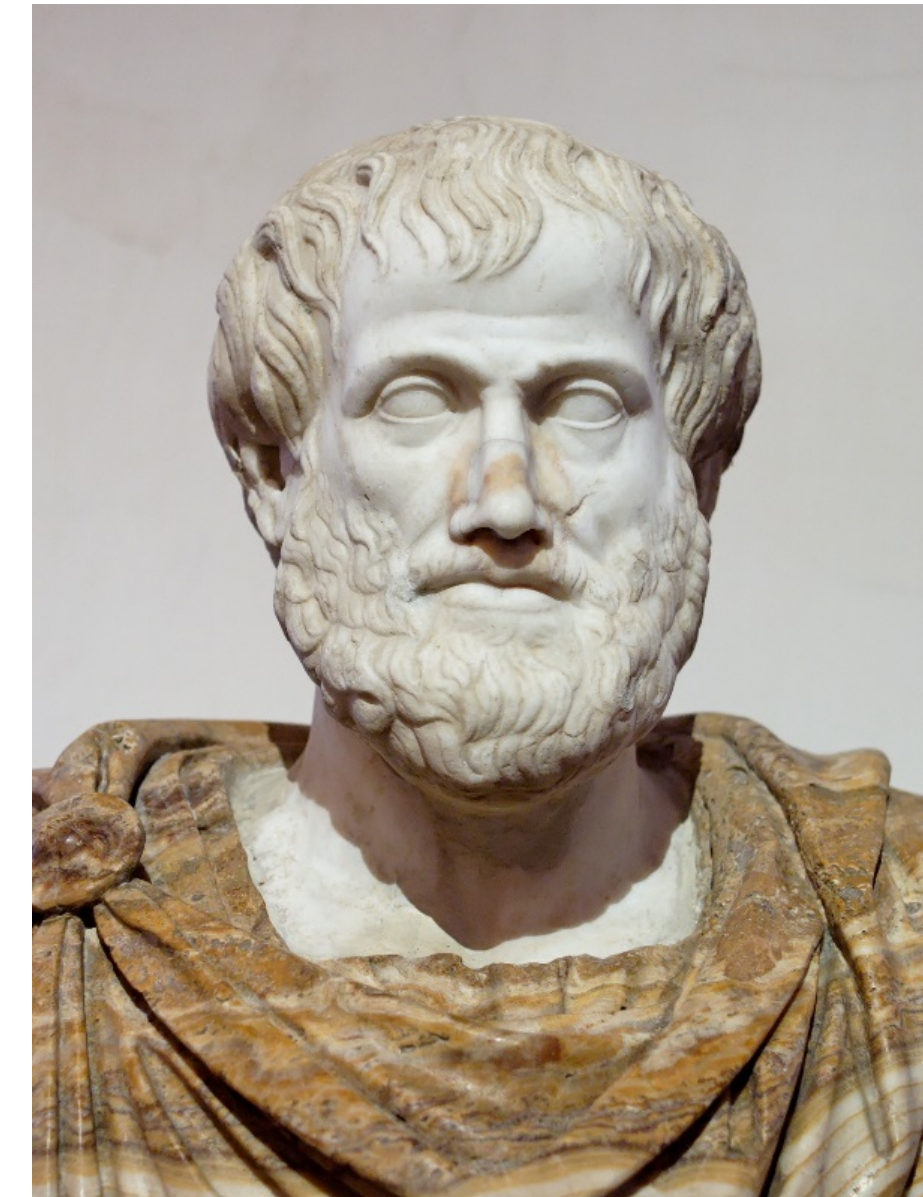
# Virtue Ethics

# Virtue Ethics

- Aristotle: true happiness and human flourishing lies in living a life of virtue

*“The virtues are those character traits human beings need in order to flourish and be truly happy. A virtuous person is a person who possesses and lives out the virtues. A right action is an action that a virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the same circumstances.”*

- virtues are not just dispositions towards action, but towards feeling
- you develop virtues by habitually repeating the relevant virtuous actions
  - e.g., develop honesty by telling the truth





# What are the virtues?

- Different virtues are emphasized in different cultures, but most cultures seem to prize the same things.
- Vices are the opposites of virtues
  - often there are two vices associated with the same virtue
  - e.g., courage lies between cowardice (too much fear) and rashness (too little fear)

# Case for Virtue Ethics

- Reasoning from virtue may be more intuitive
  - e.g., stealing is bad because it is dishonest, not because it decreases utility
- We don't have to treat all other people equally
  - we can be partial towards our friends, family
- Recognizes that we mature morally over time
- “There are no irresolvable moral dilemmas”
  - not entirely clear how we're supposed to resolve everything
  - we're told “the right action can always be determined by a person with sufficient moral wisdom”
- Recognizes the importance of emotion

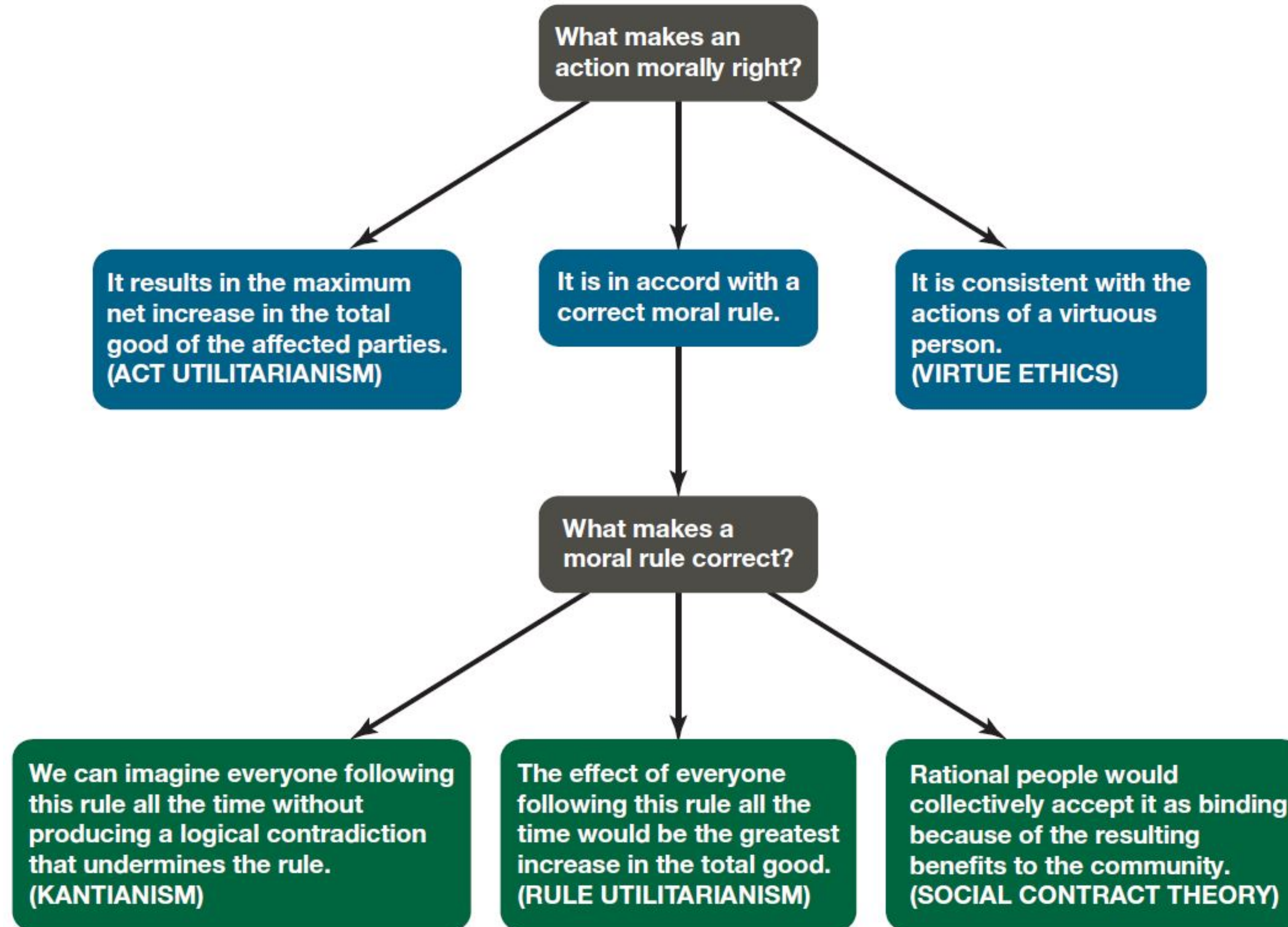
# Case Against Virtue Ethics

- Disagreement over the virtues
  - our other workable theories are universal
  - virtue ethics can only be applied given a set of virtues—and reasonable people disagree
- Cannot be used to guide government policy
  - focus on moral actors, not on making good decisions
  - e.g., should we build a highway?
- Undermines attempts to hold people responsible
  - we develop over time, and we're the product of our environments
  - how can we say someone's responsible for acquiring vices instead of virtues?

# Wrap-up Activity



# Comparing Workable Ethical Theories





# Exercise

The British government has placed hundreds of thousands of cameras in public places and runs face recognition software that allows the tracking of individuals across cities. The resulting data is used by police to deter and prosecute crimes, and also by the intelligence services for purposes that are not disclosed publicly. The British public is broadly supportive of this initiative, but a substantial minority disagrees.

Is this initiative ethical from the following perspective:

- act utilitarian
- rule utilitarian
- social contract theory
- virtue ethics



Reminders before next class