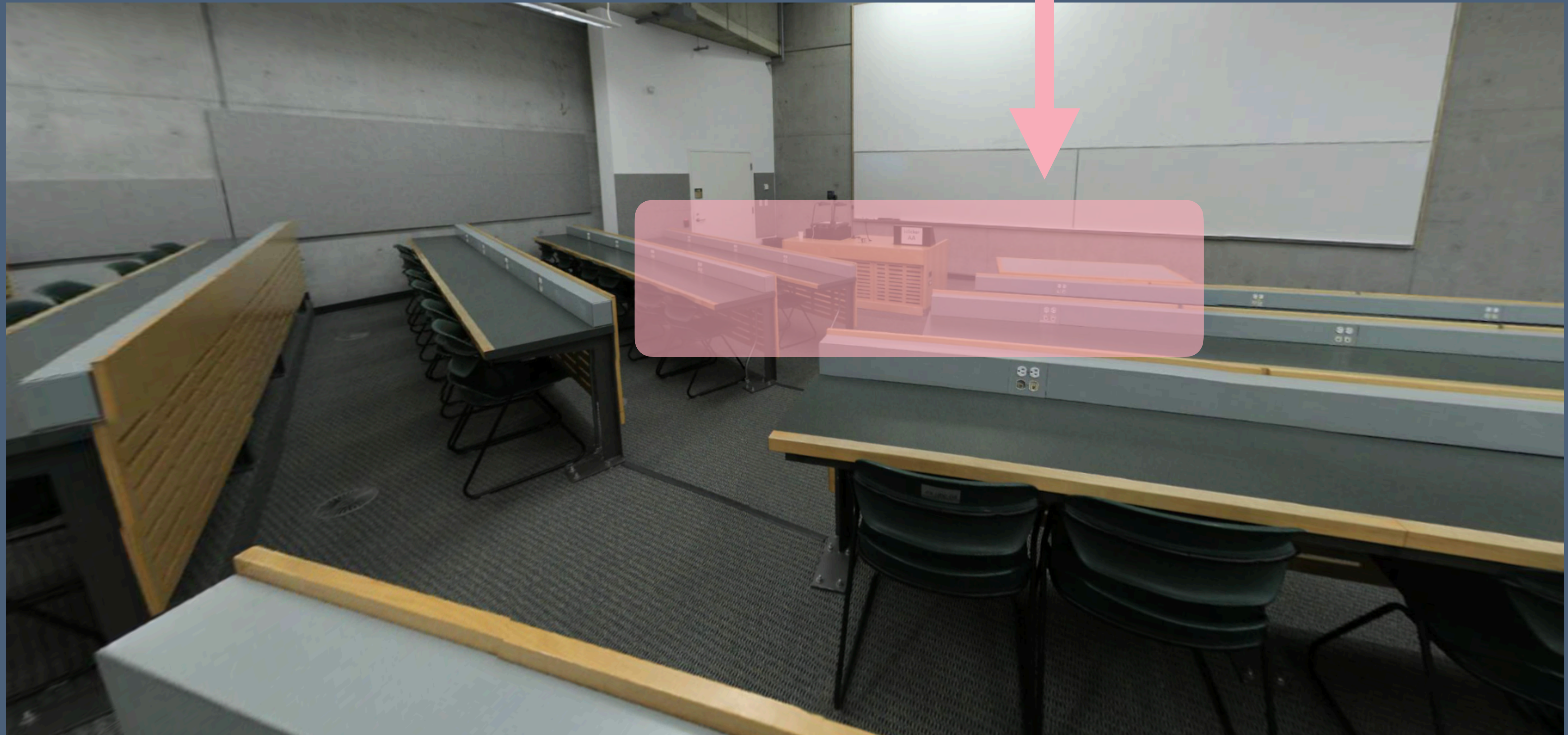If you know you are soft-spoken, sit here so I can give you a mic so you don't have to scream!

CPSC 430
Computers & Society

Dr. Firas Moosvi | 2024_S1

Slides courtesy of Dr. Kevin Leyton-Brown

Class Outline

1. Announcements (10 mins)

2. Kantianism Activity: Companion Bots, Mobile Surveillance (20 mins)

3. Utilitarianism (30 mins)

4. Break (5 mins)

5. Social Contract Theory (25 mins)

6. Virtue Ethics (25 mins)

7. Wrap-up Activity (20 mins)

8. 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.

Kantianism Activity

Breakout discussion: Companion bots

Companion robots are being developed to provide care and therapy to elderly patient

Source: https://www.ge.com/news/reports/a-robotic-companion-for-the-elderly

Use Kantianism to determine whether or not the use of these robot companions is ethical

Source: [Robots in aged care: a dystopian future?](#)

Breakout Discussion: Mobile Surveillance

- "a special investigative team covertly infiltrates the mobile devices of Canadians. The tools, which have been used on at least 10 investigations between 2018 and 2020, give the police access to text messages, email, photos, videos, audio files, calendar entries and financial records. The software can also remotely turn on the camera and microphone of a suspect's phone or laptop."

- **Is it ethical for the Canadian government to use this system?**

Consider from the perspective of Kantianism.

https://bit.ly/3BJUvNX

Utilitarianism

Principle of Utility

- An action is good if it benefits someone

- An action is bad if it harms someone

- Utility: tendency of an object to produce happiness or prevent unhappiness for an individual or a community

- Happiness = benefit = good = pleasure

- Unhappiness = cost = evil = pain

Jeremy Bentham &
John Stuart Mill

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.
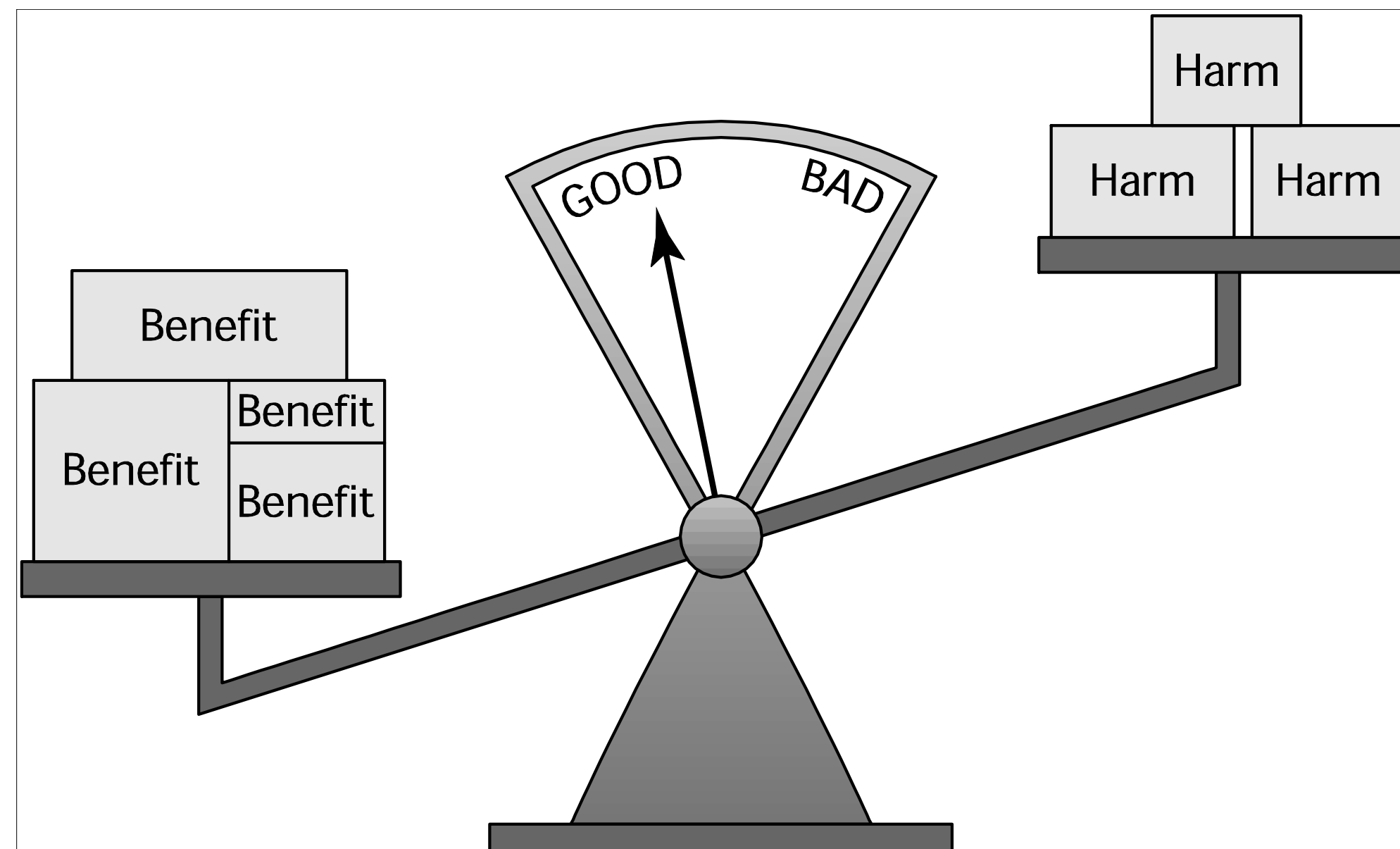
Act Utilitarianism

- ## 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 following from a given action
    - Sum > 0, action is good
    - Sum < 0, action is bad

Discussion

Discuss with the person beside you and report back:

- How useful is act utilitarianism?

- How do we come up with/argue for utility functions?

- How can utilitarianism be useful even if we don't agree on the utility function?

Case for Act Utilitarianism

- Focuses on happiness, which is intuitive

- Down-to-earth (practical)
  - Straightforward to apply
  - Can therefore be helpful in resolving disputes
    - decomposes big issues into lots of little questions

- Comprehensive
  - Allows an agent to trade off different aspects of a situation
  - Contrast with Kantianism: we needed to find one rule

Case Against Act Utilitarianism

- Unclear whom to include in calculations
  - Utilitarians might say you should never exclude anyone…

- Too much work
  - But it's OK to follow a "rule of thumb" most of the time.

- Ignores our innate sense of duty
  - Suppose I make a promise, but can get $1 for violating it.
    - Seems to miss the sense that I care about my word.
  - Quinn claims: "Note that it does no good for an act utilitarian to … say that the hard feelings caused by breaking my word to A will have a negative impact on total happiness of –N units, because then all I have to do is change the scenario so that breaking my promise to A enables me to produce 1 + N units of good for B. We've arrived at the same result."
  - But is this a problem?

- Susceptible to the problem of moral luck
  - Whether an action is moral depends on outcome, which can depend on circumstances beyond your control

Rule Utilitarianism

- 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

Case for Rule Utilitarianism

- Not every moral decision requires utilitarian calculus
  - You only have to work out the morality of rules.

- Moral rules survive exceptional situations
  - A rule utilitarian can reason (a bit like a Kantian) that it's better for everyone to keep their promises than to lie, and so reject lying for a $1 gain

- Avoids the problem of moral luck
  - We look at the overall usefulness of the rule, not individual outcomes

Case Against RU, and Utilitarianism in General

- RU: need to identify a single rule to describe situation

- 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
  - BUT: good arguments from utility theory
  - We have to figure out what this utility function is!

- Utilitarianism ignores problem of unjust distribution
  - Utilitarianism (as defined here) doesn't mean "the greatest good for the greatest number"
    - That requires a principle of justice
  - We can try to combine these ideas
    - However, what happens when a conflict arises between the Principle of Utility and our principle of justice?

Exercise

- In groups of four, identify two ethical issues at the intersection of computers and society:
  - One that is ethical from at least one Utilitarian perspective
  - One that is not ethical from either perspective

- Be prepared to explain your reasoning.

Social Contract Theory

Social Contract Theory

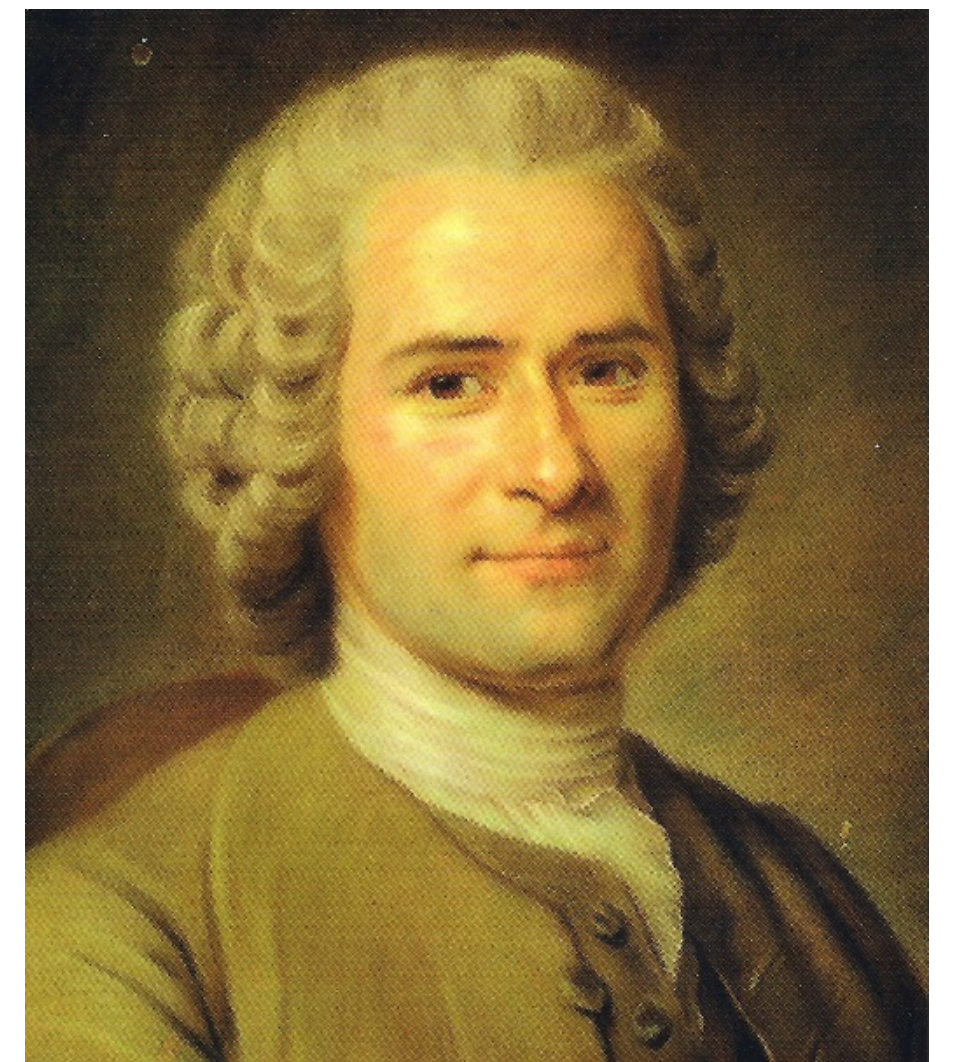- ## Thomas Hobbes
  - "State of nature"
  - We implicitly accept a social contract
    - Establishment of moral rules to govern relations among citizens
    - Government capable of enforcing these rules
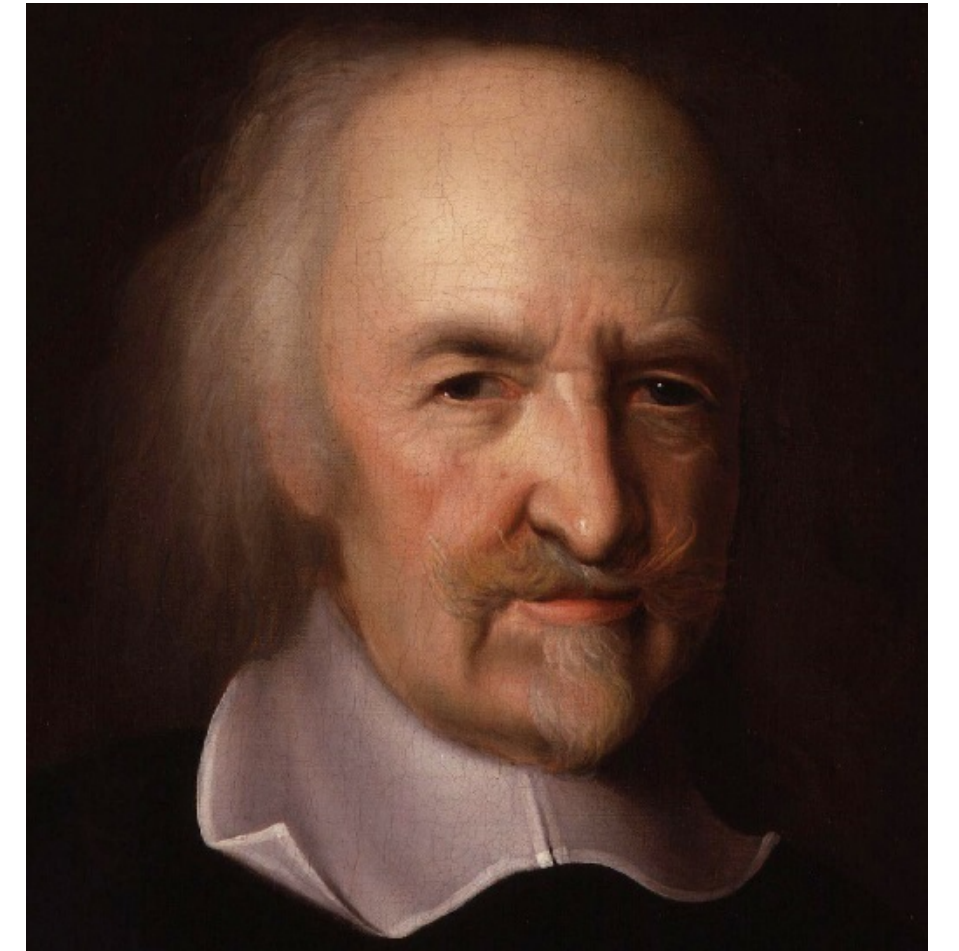
1588-1679

- ## Jean-Jacques Rousseau
  - In ideal society, no one above rules
  - That prevents society from enacting bad rules

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.
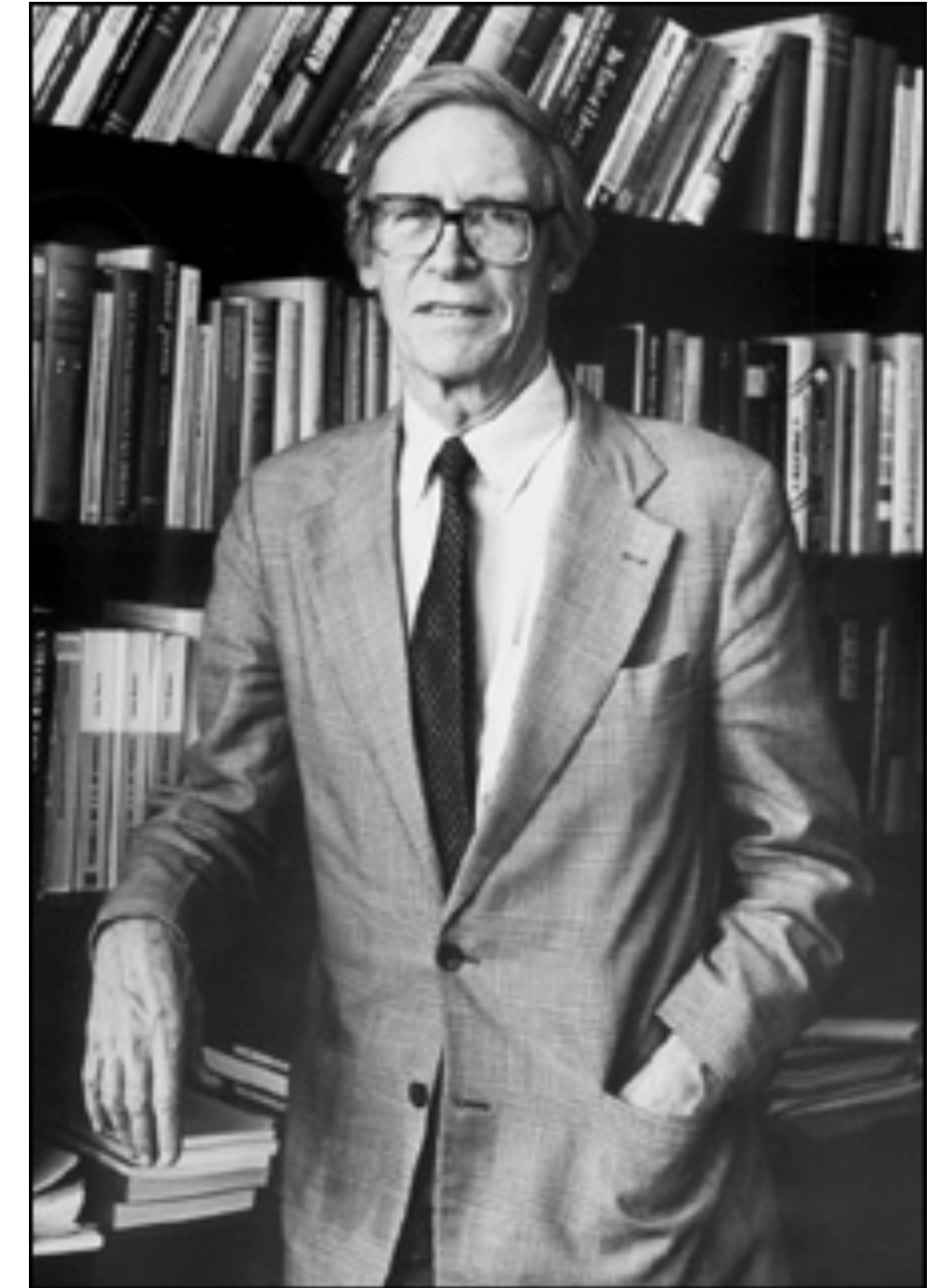
Rawls's Difference Principle
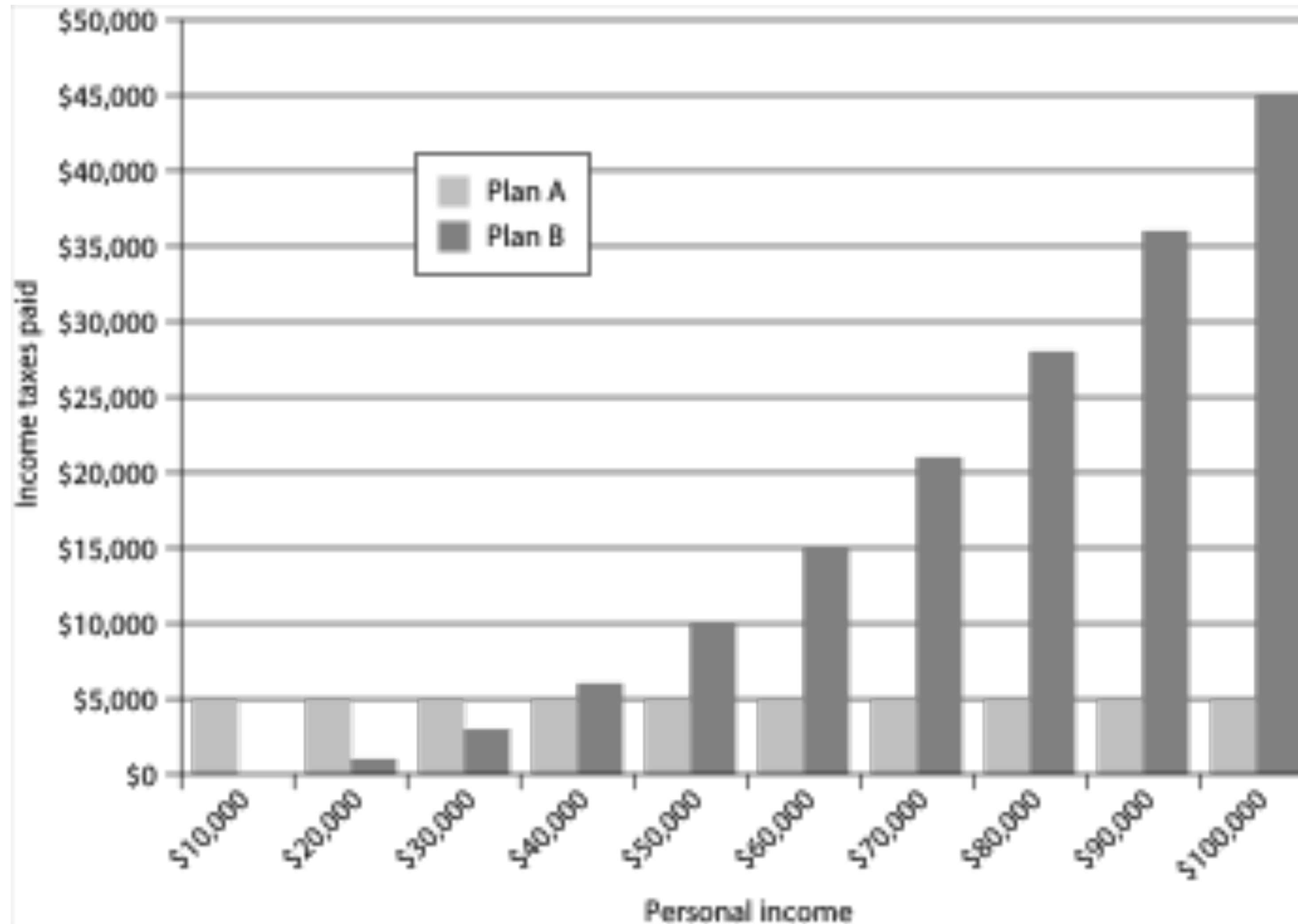
Case for Social Contract Theory

- 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
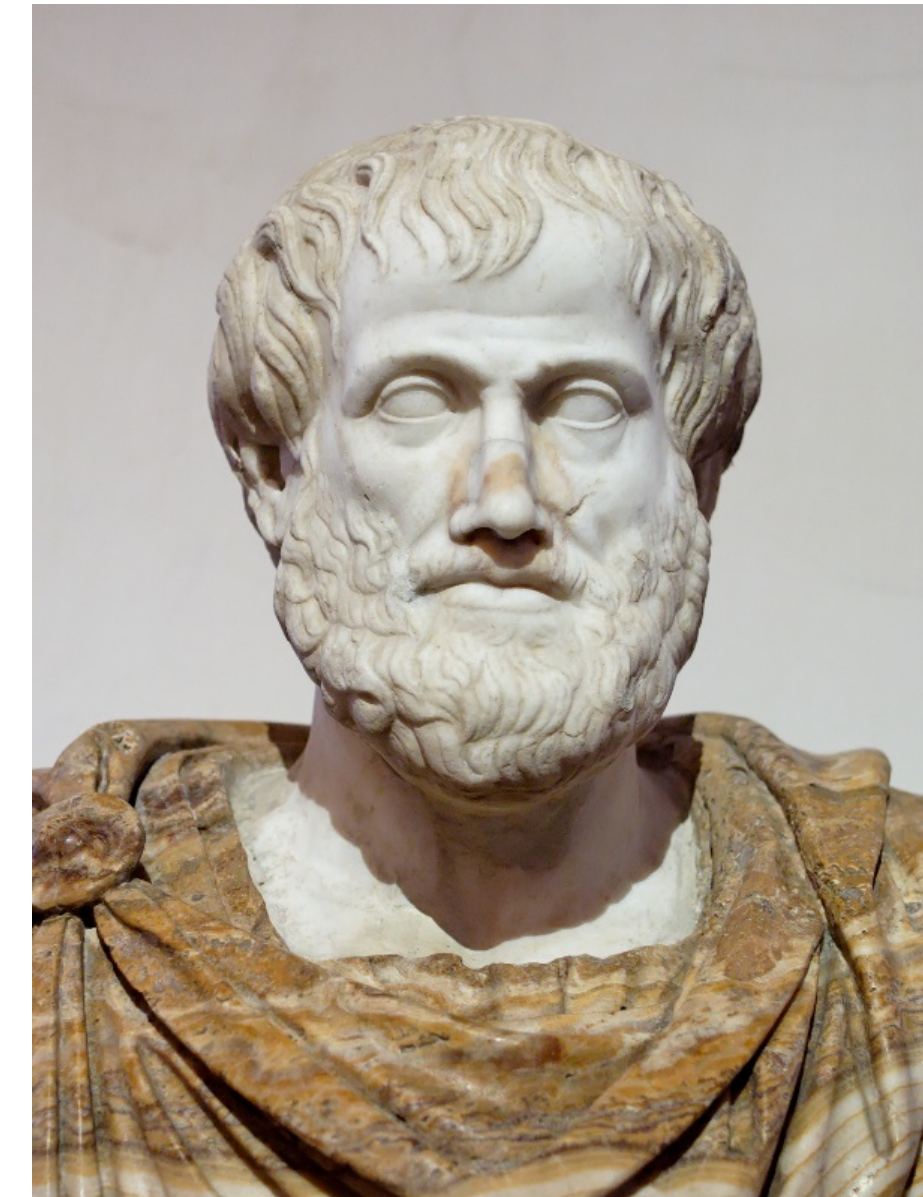
What are the virtues?

- 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
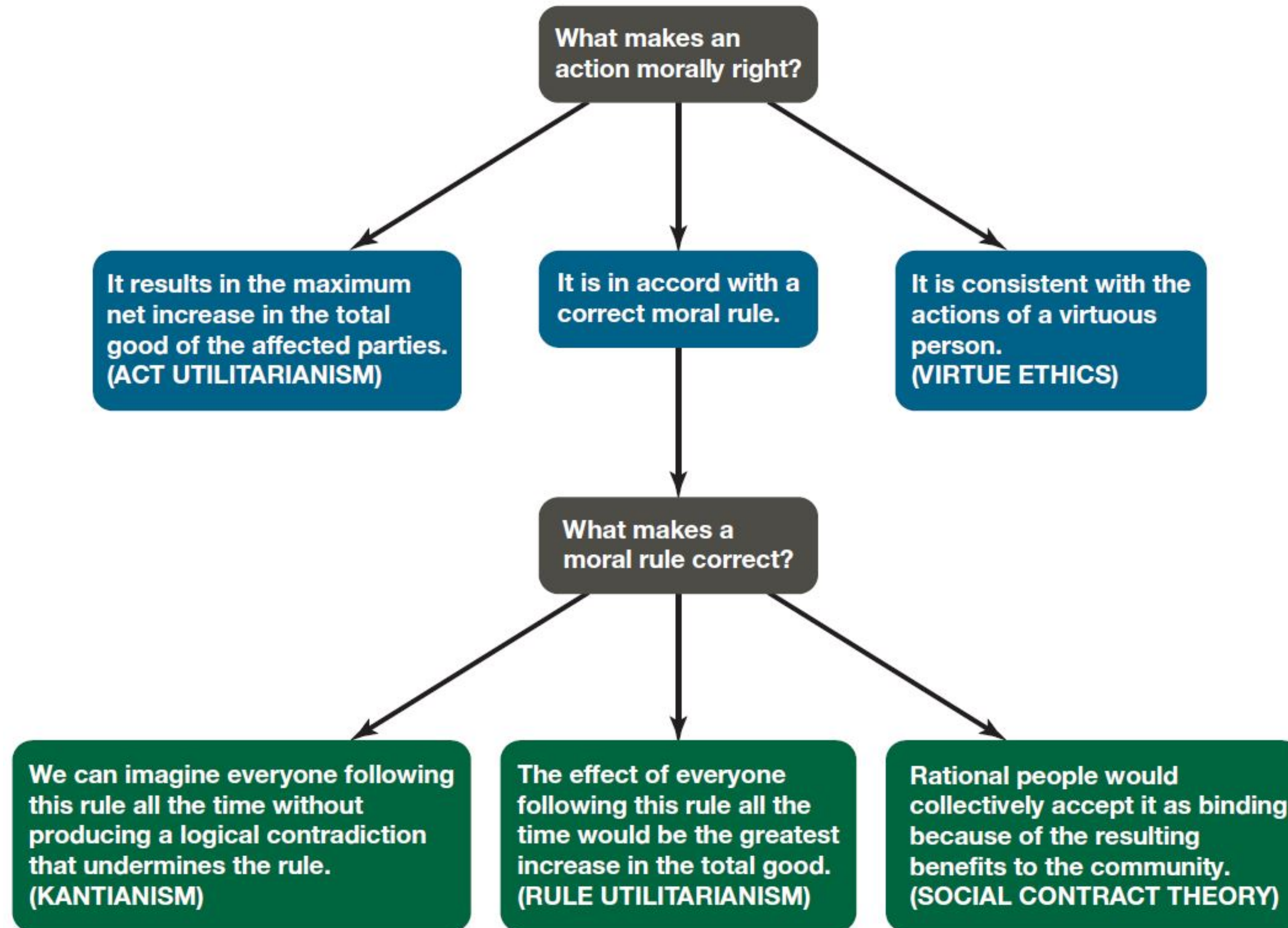
Exercise

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 utilitiarian

- rule utilitarian

- social contract theory

- virtue ethics

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/14/public-faces-mass-invasion-of-privacy-as-big-data-and-surveillance-merge

Reminders before next class