Lecture 2

Conventional morality

Conflicts of interest

Conflict of Interest

Company's interests & your own duties

Interests of oneself, family & friends

Examples of conflicts of interest – be loyal to the company or serve your own interest?

1. Offering paid services on the side to a client of your company
2. Accepting a favour from another company for information about your employer
3. Failing to investigate a subordinate's wrongdoing because they are a friend
4. Working for your company, you purchase software to boost another business that you have a stake in
5. Accepting consulting fees and providing advice to a competitor of your company
6. Sharing information in a job interview about your current employer's market strategy
7. Taking advantage of confidential information learned on the job for your own benefit
8. Taking advantage of a business opportunity learn while at work that your company may have pursued
9. Starting a competitor company that provides services similar to your employer
10. Making arrangements to work for a client at a future date while your company continues to do business with them

Ethics and convention

What is best to solve the moral dilemma?

1. Ask your co-workers what they usually do

2. Figure out what your boss does. It should be OK to do the same

3. What is more likely to get you in trouble, considering past situations in the company (who got in trouble for what)

4. ?

Today

Now we know there is genuine moral action.

But how do we know how to act morally?

Convention? Do existing social norms define what's moral? Is learning ethics the *memorization* of current rules?

Maybe not - Kohlberg's levels of moral development

(suggests moral knowledge requires cognitive development, not complying with convention)

All animals are equal (and machines will have rights, too!) – Singer rejects convention

First, some quick revisions before we proceed

- A quick point about philosophy and definitions

- Revisions – genuine moral action and related concepts (Q&A)

- Revisions – validity and soundness of arguments
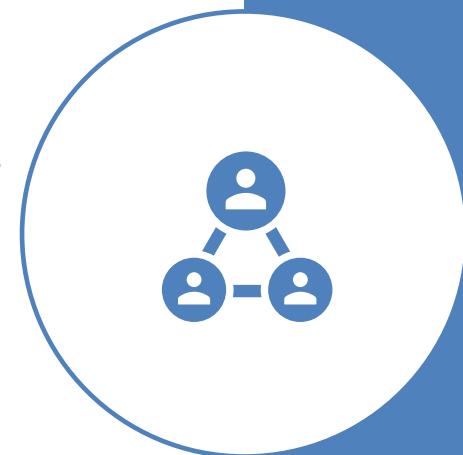
Definitions
1. Googling/using AI for definitions often fails
2. using the dictionary typically not a good starting point to solve philosophical problems

- 1. In the sciences, terms often have a single well-defined definition (e.g. sequoia - *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, or prime number)
- Not the case in philosophy
- Example - Google "objectivism" and you'll likely get Ayn Rand
- 2. Look up "happiness" in the dictionary to write an essay on happiness
- The dictionary isn't meant to solve philosophical problems but just tell us about common usage of the word
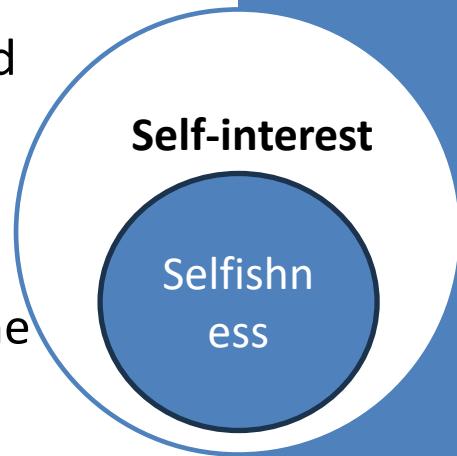
Revisions

- **What's Psychological egoism?**
- The (radical) descriptive/motivational **theory** that states that *everyone* **is** an egoist (i.e. everyone is *exclusively* concerned with their self-interest)
- Psychological/Motivational theories are **descriptive**. They describe our psychology/motivation – make claims about what IS the case

- **What's Normative egoism?**
- The (even more radical) prescriptive/normative **theory** that says that everyone **ought** **to be** an egoist.
- Normative theories are **prescriptive**. They prescribe norms – make claims about what OUGHT to be *done*

What's self-interest and selfishness?

- **Is it wrong to care for one's self-interest?**
- It depends, as self-interest includes both justified and unjustified actions to serve oneself.
- A) Eating is caring for one's self-interest
- B) Eating someone else's lunch is also self-interested
- So being self-interested is not always wrong. Everyone is self-interested at least some of the time, and that can be justified depending on what they are doing and why.

- **What is selfishness?**
- Selfishness is not a mere concern with self-interest. Selfishness is *excessive* concern with self-interest.

Self-interest

Selfishness
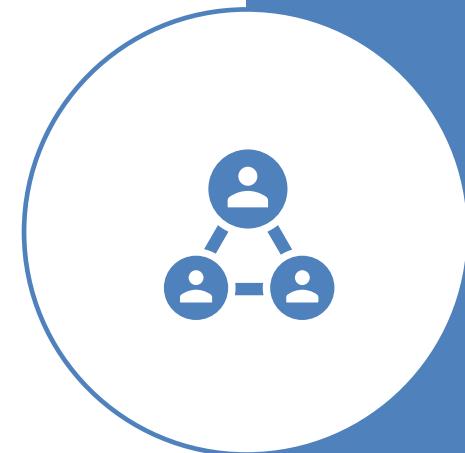
Revisions

- **Is a person self-interested when they satisfy their *own* desires?**

- Williams: Don't assume this. We inevitably satisfy our own desires, sure. What makes that *self-interested or not* is whether they always serve ourselves or *sometimes* also others.

- **If an action looks moral but the actor actually *enjoys it*, isn't the action then self-interested (done out of pleasure)?**

- Aristotle: Isn't that what we should hope for? The truly virtuous enjoys moral action! That's evidence of *greater* virtue, not less.

- If *the primary or single reason for acting is the enjoyment*, however, then this may not be a genuinely moral action, but that's a specific case, and not all cases.

Revisions

- **"Altruistic motivations are the result of evolutionary adaptations, so kindness is just programmed in us rather than a real choice. There is no real moral action"**

- It would follow from this:

- Love is an illusion, hatred is an illusion

- Sunsets have no beauty (our animal brains evolved to like warmth)

- Careful not to conflate:

- 1. the origin of motivations (the history of how moral emotions came to be)

- 2. the genuineness of motivations (the psychology)

- In order to avoid the loss of such useful values due to this *reductive* perspective, separate the genuineness of the motivations (e.g. is it really a concern for the welfare of others?) *from the reasons why the human species is capable of such emotions*.

Revisions

- Suppose that an argument is valid. Are the premises true?
- Suppose that an argument is valid but not sound. Is the conclusion true?
- Suppose that an argument is valid and the conclusion is true. Are the premises true?
- Suppose that an argument is sound but not valid. Are the premises true?
- Provide an example of a valid premise
- Provide an example of a true argument.

Piaget's 2 stages of moral development inspired Kohlberg

- Children younger than 10/11 – rules are fixed and absolute, handed down by parents or God. Judgment **based on consequences** of actions.

- Children older than 10/11 – rules can be changed if everyone agrees, and are tools for getting along. Judgment **based on intentions** behind actions.

- "When, for example, the young child hears about one boy who broke 15 cups trying to help his mother and another boy who broke only one cup trying to steal cookies, the young child thinks that the first boy did worse." (Piaget, 1932, p. 137).

Moral maturity seems to be about acquiring cognitive abilities, not memorizing conventions
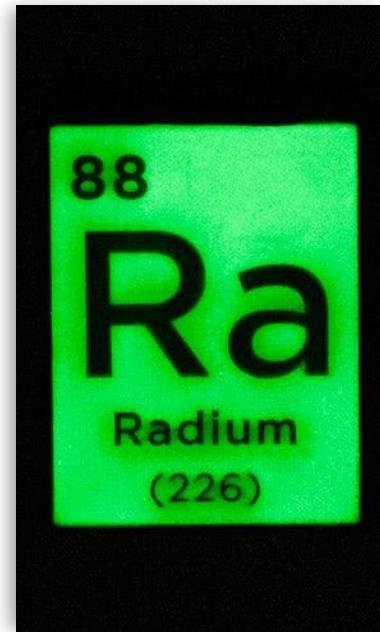

- Saying there are stages of moral development suggests that the ability of being moral is not the ability of memorizing certain claims (e.g. "lying is wrong")
- This suggests: moral knowledge could be know-how/a skill rather than knowing-that
- Capuchin monkeys, for instance, seem to be able to acquire a sense of fairness – a know-how

A moral dilemma used by Kohlberg
Heinz Steals the Drug

- In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered.

- The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid $200 for the radium and charged $2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about $ 1,000 which is half of what it cost.

- He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug-for his wife. Should the husband have done that? (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 19)

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Radium

(226)

Kohlberg

- Kohlberg found 6 stages of moral development – how morality is perceived at each stage (grouped in 3 main levels):

- I. Premoral/Preconventional a) (obedience and punishment)
- 2. Premoral/Preconventional b) (individualism and exchange)

- 3. Conventional role conformity a) (good boy/ good girl)
- 4. Conventional role conformity b) (law and order)

- 4.5 The cynic – questions the conventional, no belief in the postconventional – everything's relative

- 5. Postconventional a) (social contract and individual rights)
- 6. Postconventional b) (universal moral principles)

1. Preconventional - obedience and punishment

- Similar to Piaget's stage 1. Moral norms are handed down from figures of power. Stealing is bad "because you'll get punished" (Kohlberg, 1958b).

- Toddlers react to punishment. They don't have their own sense of right or wrong. They just know they get punished if they do certain things. They behave simply to avoid being punished.

- Punishment is seen as *proving* the action is bad - "Might makes right"

- If there is punishment, the action is seen as wrong. The action being wrong means to them simply that if you try it you get punished.

- **For each stage, can you think of an everyday example of how it would be unfortunate to be caught thinking like this?**

2. Preconventional – instrumental exchange (normative egoism + mutually beneficial exchange)

- Children realize there are many views on what is right and wrong, so they become relativists, thinking that it's right *whatever* suits one's interests - **normative egoism**

- Example: One boy said that Heinz might steal the drug if he wanted his wife to live, but that he doesn't have to if he wants to marry someone younger and better-looking (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 24)

- Despite the individualism, there is a sense of **fair exchange**: To the Heinz story, subjects often say that Heinz was right to steal the drug "because the druggist was unwilling to make a fair deal"

3. Conventional morality, tribal morality, "Good Boy/Nice Girl morality"

- In both stages of conventional role conformity, individuals react to rewards. They want to be **praised**.
- Children learn how a good boy or girl are supposed to act.
- Older individuals seek to fulfill the expectations of peers to be admired by them. We want to live up to expectations of others, typically family members and close friends.
- We no longer just want to avoid punishment and seek rewards, we want to be **worthy** of the praise we get, and not be blamed for doing wrong things.
- Can you think of an example of how it could go wrong?

4. Conventional morality, "law and order"- the good citizen

- Concern with society as a whole

- Some subjects now worry about the consequences of theft for society, and say Heinz is wrong to steal.
- Preconventional morality: something is wrong because it breaks the law/rules
- Conventional morality: same as above but adds justification - laws are useful for social order
- Example: "Crime requires punishment. Must pay debt to society."
- Authority figures are seldom questioned. Many adults never reach the third level (stages 5 and 6) of moral development.

- Example of how it could go wrong?

4.5 The cynic, stuck between conventional and postconventional

- Conventional morality seen as socially constructed, relative and arbitrary. Conventions and tradition are questioned. But no alternative is known.
- May drop into a hedonistic ethics of "do your own thing."
- Example: Hippies were against the "law and order" type of thinking.
- Contemporary example: Uncritical cynicism – "all politicians are liars" (blanket generalization, repeated because others say it – ironically both rebellious and conventional).
- "Why should I believe anything?"

- Wise enough to question it all, not wise enough to find answers….

5. Postconventional / autonomous / principled – social contract and individual rights (democracy, human rights, questioning law)

- We can **question justifications**, even if they are widespread/popular. Why should I blindly accept what my parents/teachers/bosses/the law says? What is a good society?

- Laws are not good simply because they are laws. Laws can be improved, if necessary. **There is a commitment to the social contract and to** changing laws through **democratic** agreements.

- Example of stage 5: beyond "Justice demands punishment", these individuals think about **human rights**, and deterrence. For instance: "Is any point served by punishing?"

- A stage 5 subject on the Heinz thought experiment: "It is the husband's duty to save his wife. The fact that her life is in danger transcends every other standard you might use to judge his action. Life is more important than property. [...] Usually the moral and legal standpoints coincide. Here they conflict. The judge should weigh the moral standpoint more heavily but preserve the legal law in punishing Heinz lightly." (Kohlberg, 1976, p. 38)

- Example of how it could go wrong?

- Why do we need another level beyond this?
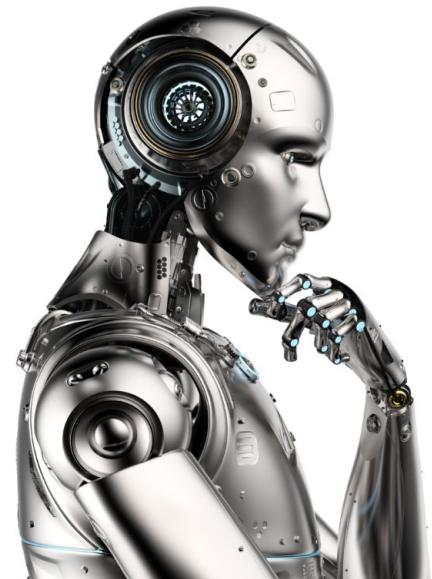
6. Postconventional morality –
universal ethical principles (beyond democracy, civil disobedience, creating/rewriting constitution)

- Few reach this stage. The "prophet" stage.
- Lists of moral rules may be abandoned in favour of deeper wisdom. Example: realization that **even democratic processes may fail** (e.g. Trump, Brexit, rising popularity of far right leaders) – suppose that a majority decides to elect someone who hurts a minority, the so-called "tyranny of the majority" (John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson)
- The Aristotelian question is: does the **majority** rule for its own advantage, or for the common advantage?
- One distinguishing issue - **Possibility of justification of civil disobedience**. If a law cannot be changed by democratic processes, disobedience can be morally justified.
- Martin Luther King, for example, argued that laws are only valid insofar as they are grounded in justice, and that a commitment to justice carries with it an obligation to disobey unjust laws. (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 43).

Peter Singer – "all animals are equal"
Challenging convention/tradition

- Utilitarian - Argued for equal rights for animals based on "equal consideration of interests"

- What is relevant for this course is his rejection of convention.

- Example: Conventions in computing in the 90s - hacking is exciting/getting pirated software is cheaper/getting copyrighted movies is smart/"it's not illegal if you don't get caught". Has anything changed since then?

- Recently Singer has argued that machines may one day also deserve equal rights, if conscious

- Do you agree?

- **Equal consideration of interests** is a central feature of utilitarianism, as we will see in two weeks

Peter Singer

- Singer: It can sound ridiculous to argue for the rights of a group that, by ***convention***, has no (recognized) rights.

- When Mary Wollstonecraft (18th century, mother of Mary Shelley - Frankenstein) argued for the rights of women, philosopher Thomas Taylor joked: "Then why don't we also argue for the rights of brutes!" (animals)

- Singer:

- Equality extends to both women AND animals because in both cases empirical **fact is not the basis for equality** (we shouldn't evaluate facts about individuals to determine whether they are equal in rights) – note his "no ought from is" argument

Rights equality doesn't mean everyone should have exactly the *same* rights, just *equal* rights.

- Singer: Equality extends to women **not because men and women are the *same in every physical respect***. They are not

- And because men and women are not the same, we don't need to have the *same* rights, just equal rights. (for instance: men cannot have children, so we don't need to defend their right to have an abortion)

- Pigs cannot vote, so it's meaningless to speak of their right to vote. No, we're not asking for the *same* rights.

- **Singer's conclusion:**

- a. Sure, there is an obvious difference between animals and humans (as there is also a difference between men and women)

- b. It doesn't follow from a. that we should reject equality in either case!

- So where does equality comes from? What should it be based on?
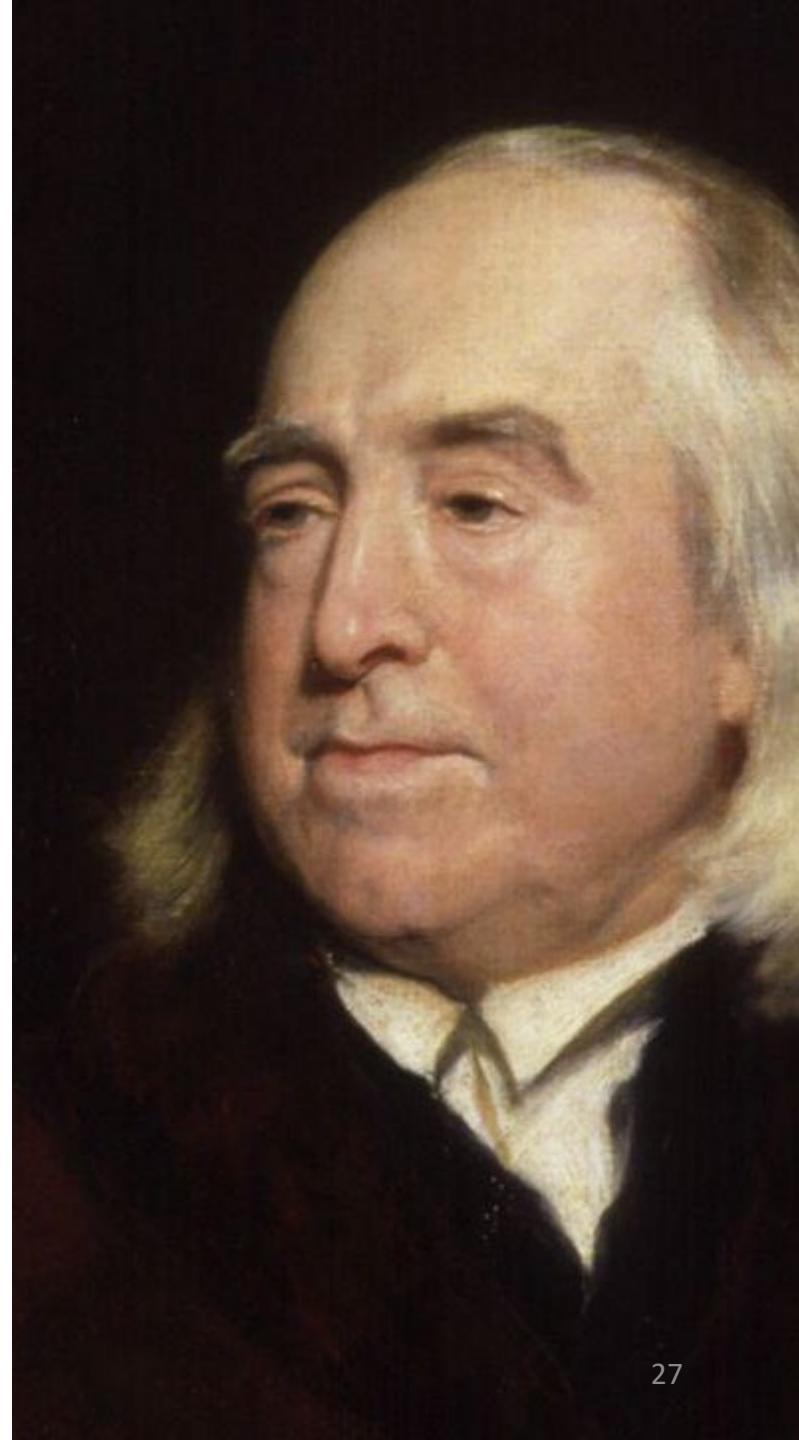
What is equality? Equality as equal consideration of interests.
Not a statement of fact (we are obviously not the same!)
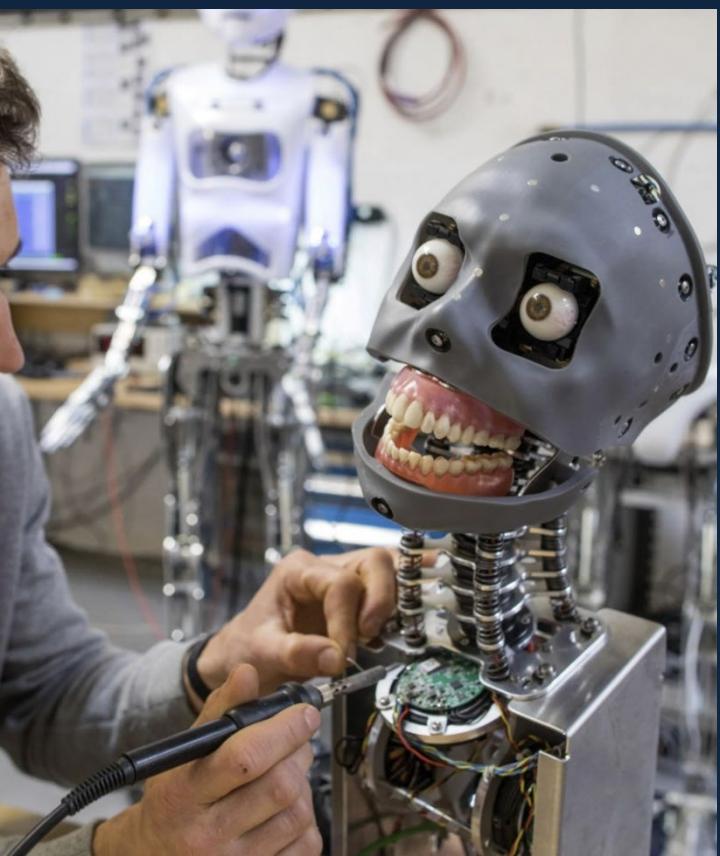
- "**Equality is a moral ideal, not a statement of a fact**" Singer

- The ideal is impartiality (utilitarianism's "equal consideration of interests"): "**The good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other**.' utilitarian Henry Sidgwick

- But why should we hold this ideal? (how can we justify it?)

Justifying equality not on merit but on ability to suffer

- Equality should **not be grounded on any kind of merit.**
- Possessing a higher degree of intelligence does not entitle one human to use another for his own ends. It should also not entitle humans to exploit nonhumans.
- **But if not merit, then what?** Singer quotes Bentham: The question is not: can they talk or reason, but… "Can they suffer?" Bentham

- "In this passage Bentham points to the **capacity for suffering** as the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration." Singer

Speciesism

- Look at how we treat animals: the way we rear them, we eat them, we experiment on them

- The experimenter shows a bias towards his own species when he refuses to test on an infant, but will test on a guinea pig.

- Singer: we should **question the assumptions of our age** (i.e. we mustn't allow mere convention to dictate our ethics)

- Left: Engineered Arts humanoid robot factory
- Top: Kicking Big Dog (Boston Dynamics)

Response to Frankena's "good life" counter-argument

- Frankena: basing social justice on merit leads to inegalitarian results. So humans are to be treated as equals, not because they are equal, in any respect, but **because they are human**.

- Frankena: They are human because they have emotions and desires, and are able to think, and **hence are capable of enjoying a good life in a sense in which other animals are not**

- Note this is Frankena's way of justifying an anthropocentric morality – it's because we are humans + humans are special and uniquely deserving of rights!

Singer - *Every* being is capable of having a good life!

- Singer: Frankena's wrong! ***Every*** being is capable of having a good life

- We **cannot simply say that all and only humans have some intrinsic digni**ty. We are different from one another, and some humans – say humans with severe cognitive impairments (he uses the expression "permanently retarded" – not meant as an insult as it was technically accurate at the time) – are below the intelligence, sentience, etc. of many non human animals.

- Singer: intellectually disabled humans do have the same rights

- We cannot simply fall into the speciesism trap – we simply prefer animals of our species. Most of us are speciesists.

Discussion
Singer, convention

- 1. Is Singer right? Are we speciesists in the empirical sense - Do we rank ourselves as more deserving than animals?

- 2. Are we speciesists in the moral sense that we are making a moral *mistake* (akin to racism)? Is it wrong to have that hierarchy and should we strive to change?

- 3. What are the most problematic moral conventions in computing today? Among your co-workers/students… How hard is it to resist those conventions?

- 4. From your reading: "**duty of loyalty**… requires that an employee refrain from acting in a manner contrary to the employer's interest." Do you agree now that what should be done can't just depend on what is usually done (the convention) in our industry/country/company? Why/why not?

- Conclusion – aren't we all speciesists, even the ones who said things could change? (rat vs person) We go on and do this without asking ourselves why, and perhaps in part because the idea is so dominant