Critical Reasoning & Moral Theory (Summary)

Professional Ethics in Computing

MORAL THEORIES:

KEY ISSUES FOR & AGAINST

Moral Theory	Proponents' Arguments	Critics' Arguments
Divine Command Theory	• Presents no possible conflict with religious belief • Is not assailable via rational argument	• **Does not directly address questions of modern life** that is not spiritually relevant • Does not include people outside of the religion
Cultural Relativism	• No objective way to evaluate cultures; morality must therefore be evaluated relative to a given culture; promotes tolerance	• Empirical evidence suggests that **universal moral principles do exist**; does not provide guidance for cross-cultural interaction
Virtue Ethics	• Acts committed by people, so the best way to have moral acts is to have moral people • No set of rules or principles for action can cover all situations	• **No rational way** of deciding the best course of action in a difficult situation • **Set of virtues seems incomplete** and lacks rational basis

Moral Theory	Proponents' Arguments	Critics' Arguments
Act Utilitarianism	• The only way to judge an act is to examine the consequences of the act • When examining the consequences of an act, one should use the overall impact on human happiness as the measure of goodness	• There are **numerous problematic cases** in which act utilitarianism conflicts with intuition and/or religious norms • **Calculating consequences** and happiness is **complex** and highly **prone to error**
Rule Utilitarianism	• Rules can make the evaluation of an act less prone to calculation errors • Rigorous compliance with the rules (except for compelling reasons to violate) will maximise happiness providing rules are selected properly	• It is still difficult to determine whether a set of rules will **truly maximise** overall happiness

Moral Theory	Proponents' Arguments	Critics' Arguments
Deontological Ethics	• Categorical imperatives, (e.g., the universal law of nature and the principle of the end in itself), tend to be simple to state and easy to apply • Acknowledges the importance of motivation in determining whether an act was good or not • Because the principle is categorical, there are no exceptions	• **Lack of exceptions** leads to cases where the consequences are unacceptable according to intuition and/or religious norms
Contractarianism	• A rational theory that an individual's best interest is served by acting for the common good • Major premise, that an individual's interest is best served by acting for the common good is supported by empirical evidence	• **Major premise may be incorrect** • Even if premise correct, there will always be possibility for greater advantage to an individual for immoral behaviour if that individual can **avoid retaliation** by those wronged by the justice system

Moral Theory	Proponents' Arguments	Critics' Arguments
Rawls' Theory of Justice	• Makes it easy to understand why we may not necessarily be obligated to do away with all economic inequalities • Encourages people to help the less fortunate	• **Justification** is much more **complicated**, **and controversial**, than those for utilitarianism or Kant's principles. Therefore**, unlikely to be widely accepted**.
Noddings' Ethics of Care	• Many moral heroes (e.g., Mother Teresa) are characterised by their capacity for caring for others, not their abilities to follow rules or calculate how acts affect others • Unlike utilitarianism, it explains why it's OK to focus energies on caring for those close to you, rather than in far-away places	• Because of focus on **close relationships**, ethics of caring does not easily lead to **universal rules or judgements** of the kind needed by **computing professionals**.

DELIBERATIVE DISCUSSIONS:
DIFFERENCES & RECONCILIATIONS

Reasons for different conclusions		Reconciliation Strategies
Different perceptions of the world		• New direct observations • Reports from mutually trusted source • No remedy if insufficient evidence to establish one perspective definitively
Different Beliefs	Factual	• Refutation of false belief • Appeal to a mutually trusted source
	Convictional	• Conversion (unlikely) • No remedy if disagreement is fundamental
Faulty Reasoning	Mistake	• Demonstration of fallacy
	Ignorance	• Edification
	Insufficient Intellect	• No remedy; rare to occur on this course!