

Critical Reasoning & Moral Theory (Part 2)

Professional Ethics in Computing Lecture 03

Largely based on lecture by Dr John Cartlidge

Last Week (a *review*)

- Two theories we need to know, but won't use:
 - Divine Command Theory
 - Cultural Relativism
- Three theories we will use throughout this course:
 1. Virtue Theory
 2. Act Utilitarianism
 3. Rule Utilitarianism
- ...and in the workshop and discussions you applied them
 - To real world ethical situations, well done!

Group 3 will be taking notes for the wiki this week

- Also, remember, that you can ***all edit*** the wiki notes...
- it is a ***collaborative resource*** to help you all learn and revise
<http://www.virtualdiceroll.com/1/en/one-die>

This week

- We are going to learn 4 more theories
 - *Some with long, difficult to say, names!*
- Learning outcomes:
 - To understand the principles of 4 moral theories:
 1. Deontological Ethics
 2. Contractarianism
 3. Ethics of Justice
 4. Ethics of Caring
- *We have around 10 minutes to introduce each...*
 - *This is not long, so you should also read textbook*

DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS

Deontological (Duty-Based) Ethics

- Concerned with **what people do**, **not** with consequences of actions
 - *Deon – duty in Greek*
 - Do the right thing
 - Do it because it's the right thing to do
 - Don't do wrong things
 - Avoid them because they are wrong
- Very different to utilitarian (and other consequentialist theories)
 - The **reasons** more important than the **ends**
 - Focuses on rights, duties, obligations, rules
 - Some rules must be followed, *even if following it results in a bad end*
- We will focus on one form of deontological ethics:
 - Moral theories of German philosopher *Immanuel Kant* (1724-1804)

Utilitarian vs. Deontological

- Compare Utilitarian:
 - *happiness* is the only thing inherently good
- Kant's Duty-Based Ethics:
 - nothing is good *except good will*
 - ...the will of a person to act solely according to a code of morality *based purely in reason*

Kant's *Categorical Imperative*

- **Rule** that must *always* be followed by *all* rational beings
 - **Categorical:** absolute / unconditional / an end in itself
 - **Imperative:** a command

1. *Universal law of nature*

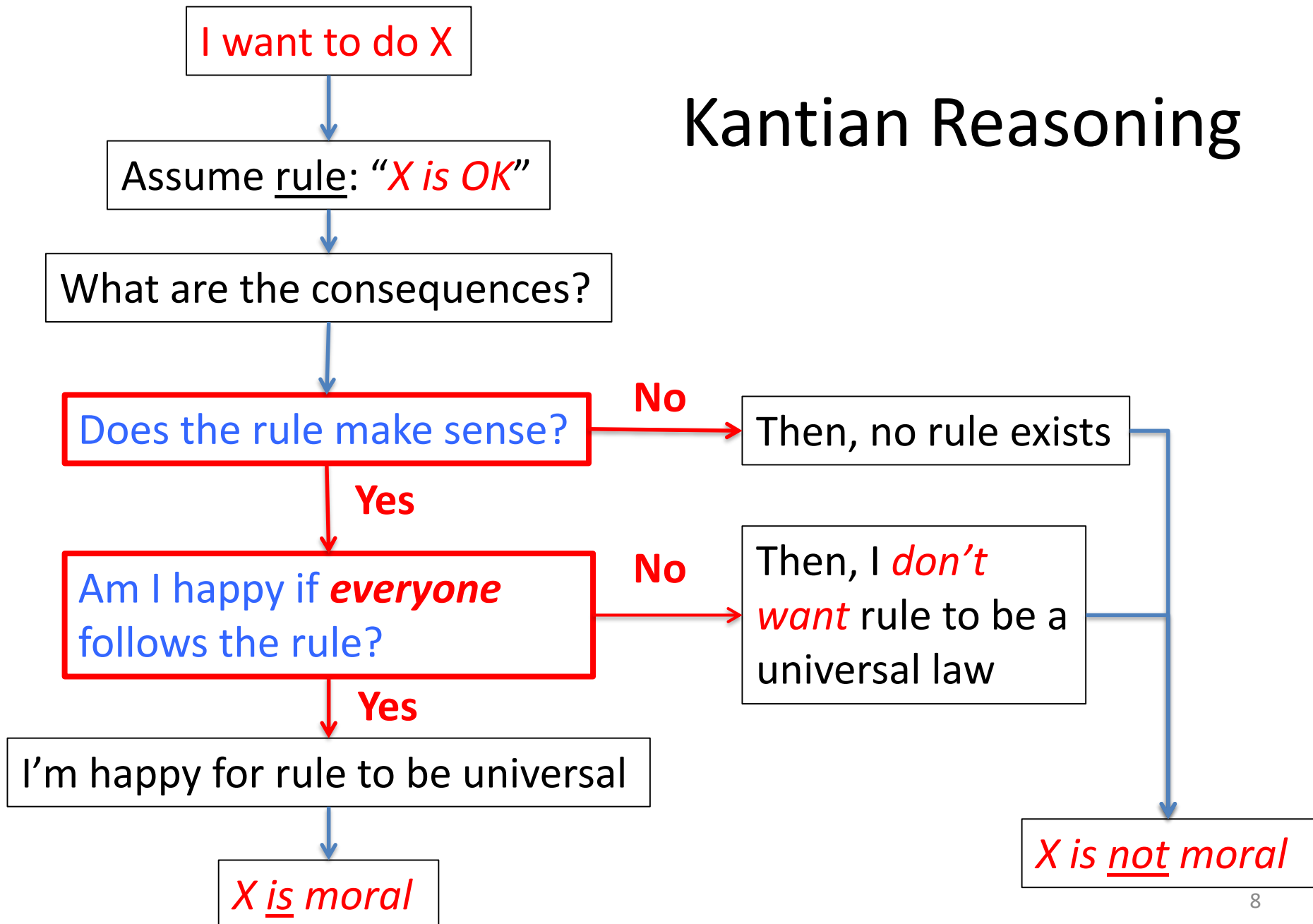
- Act only according to maxims (principles) that could be adopted as universal laws

2. *Principle of the end in itself*

- Treat humans (yourself and others) always as ends in themselves, never as means to an end

Universal Law: If I claim that something is a valid moral rule, I can't make an exception to it for myself and my family and friends

Kantian Reasoning



Is it OK to steal?

- Assume a universal rule: “It is OK to steal”
- Consequences:
 - We should *not expect* to have any *personal property*
 - But, if there is no such thing as personal property, then there is no such thing as “stealing”
- Hence, maxim is logically invalid (contradiction)
 - *Either* there is no such thing as stealing
 - *Or* stealing is wrong
- Therefore, no rule exists: “It is OK to steal”
- So, *stealing is immoral*

Is it OK to break a promise?

- Assume rule: “It is OK to break a promise”
- Am I happy if everyone follows this rule?
 - Since I would not like people to break promises they make to me, I would not want such a rule
- So such a rule should *not exist*
- Therefore, *breaking promises is immoral*

Scenario: *killer at the door...*

- **Scenario:** A woman comes to your door and asks to hide from a killer who is pursuing her. You allow her to hide in your closet. There is then a knock on your door and you open. It is the killer. He asks you if she is in the house.
Qu: What should you do/say?
- Kant says you cannot lie! “Do not lie” is a universal law. There are no exceptions – it is a categorical imperative.
- Some view this as *a serious flaw!* ...*Do you?*

Principle of the end in itself

“Act so that you treat humanity, both in your own person and in that of another, always as an end and never merely as a means.”

[Kant]

- People should not just be used in order to achieve something else
- They should not be tricked, manipulated or bullied into doing things.
- Here are three examples of treating people as means and not ends:
 1. treating a person as if they were an inanimate object
 2. coercing a person to get what you want
 3. deceiving a person to get what you want

Qu: From workshop 1 scenario: When John asks Alice if he can borrow her account, is he using Alice as a means to an end? When Alice agrees, is she treating herself as a means to an end? Who violated the principle?

[John/Alice/Neither/Both]?

CONTRACTARIANISM

Contractarianism

- Both a *political* and a *moral* theory
 - Initially from writings of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)
 - Can be merged with *consequentialist*, or *deontological* theories
- **Premise:**
 - People are rational and wish to promote self-interests
 - The best way of doing that is to promote the common interests of society

Qu: Is a person's self-interest really maximised by acting for the public good?

Contractarianism (2)

- Originally, we were in a *state of nature*
 - Human lives “*solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*” [Hobbes]
- The only way to overcome this “state of nature” is to come together with others for *mutual benefit*
- We enter into *contracts* in which *each party agrees* to certain *obligations* in exchange for other *benefits*
- Contracts are often *implicit* (i.e., not written down, or spoken about); but they are enforced by *social norms* and *political institutions*

Contractarianism (3)

- View *moral behaviour* as a *type of cooperation* that, in the long run, *benefits everyone*
- But, *people will not stick* to the social contract *simply out of self-interest*
- Establishing a powerful *institution* (church, government, etc.) *to enforce adherence* to the moral social contract *is necessary*

Qu: Think of an example where self-interest may not be aligned with the social contract?

RAWLS' ETHICS OF JUSTICE

The “*Problem*” of Impartiality

Most ethicists (inc. deontological and consequential) are in search of theories that have two qualities:

1. **Impartiality:** Everyone treated equally; no one given preferential treatment
 2. **Universality:** Decision reached is correct for everyone
- But, impartiality is problematic when we apply ethical theories to real problems...
 - Qu: Is it morally permissible to award college scholarships based on academic merit?
 - Qu: Is it morally permissible to award college scholarships based on financial need?

Rawls's Principles of Justice as Fairness

American contractarian moral and political philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002), *A Theory of Justice* (1971) – introduced to overcome the impartiality problem

Rawls's principles:

1. Each person should have as *extensive a set of basic freedoms as possible* as long as it *does not prevent others* from having the *same freedoms*
2. Social and economic *inequalities* are justified *only if*:
 - a. Everyone has a *fair chance* to obtain the better position
 - b. Such inequalities provide the *greatest benefit to the least advantaged*:
the difference principle

Must be applied in strict order of precedence

Qu: Should we accept these principles?

Veil of Ignorance

- What *if*, before you were born, you got to choose a social contract...
 - Qu: What kind of contract would you choose?
- You must decide this contract in complete ignorance of what qualities you will have when you are born...
 - You do not know how smart, rich, or healthy you will be – it will be “randomly assigned”
 - Qu: Now, what kind of contract would you choose?

Rawls argues: any *rational person's* choice would include his *two principles*, which guarantee that *no matter where you start out, you have a fair opportunity to improve your lot in life*

Theory of Justice (Summary)

- Contractarian
- Not a moral theory for individuals
 - A way of evaluating various possible social contracts
- **Difference principle**
 - often used as the basis for arguments about *how technologists should factor the plight of disadvantaged groups* into their decision-making
 - E.g., disabled users, children, ...

NODDINGS' ETHICS OF CARING

Noddings's Ethics of Caring

Nel Noddings, American feminist and philosopher (bn.1929)

- Critical of Utilitarian and Kantian approaches
- Believes logic/maths not helpful for moral philosophy
 - *“The hand that steadied us as we learned to ride our first bicycle did not provide propositional knowledge” [Noddings]*
- A single moral ideal virtue: **caring for other individuals**
 - **Goodness** is whether or not we take care of **people around us**
 - **One-caring**: someone who fulfils the role of a care-giver
- To act morally, we need to make ourselves one-caring for those with whom we have relations

Components of Caring

- Caring characterised by **feeling of engrossment in the needs of another person** and by **acting to care** for that person
- For caring to happen, it is **necessary for the cared-for person to be receptive**
- We can “care about” everyone, but **we cannot “care for” everyone**. Hence, it **is morally acceptable (and necessary) to only care for a small number of individuals**
- Since caring involves the specific situation of the specific individual, it **does not lead to universal moral rules**

Caring vs. Justice

Theory of Justice	Ethics of Caring
Rawls focuses of institutions and what a just institution should look like	Noddings rejects any approach to ethics that does not focus on the individual
Rejects individuals and individual relationships	How we relate to other individuals is our fundamental morality
Not a moral theory; used to compare social contracts for fairness	To be moral is to care for (and receive caring from) those we relate to

Caring by Computer Professionals

- It's not possible to “**care for**” all (millions of) users of a software application; but, software *can* help people
- *Computer professionals* can *ask* important *questions* related to the *ethics of caring*:
 - Does the action *enhance the ideal of myself as one-caring*, or *detract* from it?
 - Will the product that I am creating *allow its users to enhance* their ideals of *themselves as one-caring*, or *detract* from it?
 - Is the person I am trying to help actually *receptive* to my help?
 - Is my mental attitude one of *engrossment* in the *cared-for* person's needs, or am I mentally distant?

ETHICAL REASONING

Aristotle's Deliberative Reasoning

- Intelligent, knowledgeable and well-intended people who think carefully and rationally may disagree on ethical issue
 - Often after thoughtful and informed discussion, people who disagree will ultimately agree
 - But, sometimes common judgement will not occur
 - Still, all parties should have greater insight into own/others' position
- There is no “winner”
 - Goal: to understand others' position and help others' understand yours
- In discussion, resolution may not be possible:
 - Disagreement on facts
 - Disagreement on reasoning
 - Disagreement on values

The Importance of Context

- Ethical argument *similar* to legal argument
 - Evidence presented, arguments disputed, exceptions to rules are common
- But, also *different*:
 - Legal arguments related to single set of statutes
 - Ethical arguments *may involve several* moral theories / codes of ethics
 - Also, person's ethical position often based on intuition
- Context:
 - Determine facts that are *relevant/irrelevant*
 - In **practice**: *supposedly irrelevant* can become *relevant*

Reasoning by Analogy

Causistry: “*the determination of right and wrong in questions of conduct or conscience by the application of general principles of ethics*”

[American Heritage Dictionary]

- Approach ethical problems by looking at various cases and using them as paradigms
 - *Complex issues can be verbally manipulated*
 - *So, discussion and constant re-examination of reasoning important*
- Ethical arguments are *not contests* between *positions*
 - *Investigations that seek to establish truth to the extent possible*

SUMMARY: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Deontological (*Kant's* Duty-Based Ethics)

- **The Categorical Imperative** (Universal Law & End-in-itself)

2. Contractarianism (regards institutions, not individuals)

- **Self-interests best promoted by promoting interests of society**
 - People originally in “state of nature”. Institutions (government, religion, ...) needed to enforce contracts
- Can be merged with consequentialist &/or deontological theory

3. Rawls' Theory of Justice (a form of contractarianism)

- Inequalities **only** justified if everyone has fair chance to obtain better position and least advantaged benefit most (**the difference principle**)

4. Noddings' Ethics of Caring

- Opposed to consequentialism and deontological (logic unrealistic)
- Opposed to contractarianism (individuals not institutions)
- **Single moral virtue**: caring for others (**one-caring**)