AE 1

- Applied Ethics
- This course will introduce students to some of the fundamental debates in Applied Ethics. Applied Ethics offers a way to comprehend and analyse the fundamental moral and ethical problems of our times and generate arguments to justify ethical claims. The course will begin by introducing students to the major ethical theories like consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. It will then demonstrate how these theories can be used to both understand and address some of the major ethical issues. Broad topics to be covered in this course include debates in environmental ethics, ethics of information technology, business ethics, bio ethics, animal rights, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, affirmative action, distributive justice and global poverty, abortion, torture, punishment, terrorism, privacy, surveillance, security, whistleblowing, civil disobedience etc.

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Foundations of Moral Philosophy and Argumentation

This source introduces moral philosophy by exploring foundational theories and the structure of philosophical arguments. It begins with Plato's "Ring of Gyges" thought experiment, which questions why individuals should be moral if they face no consequences, setting the stage for discussions on relativism and divine command theory. The text then examines Aristotle's virtue ethics and the subsequent natural law theory, which connects morality to inherent purposes in nature. Transitioning to modern thought, the source presents Hobbes's social contract theory, defining morality as rules people agree upon for mutual benefit, and utilitarianism, which advocates for actions that maximize overall happiness. Finally, it addresses Kant's categorical imperative, emphasizing actions based on universalizable maxims and treating humanity as an end in itself. The document concludes by explaining the components of sound arguments, distinguishing validity from truth, and demonstrating how to critique arguments through a discussion of moral skepticism. Here are comprehensive notes on the key concepts and arguments presented in the provided source material, "A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy" and "Some Basic Points about Arguments" by James Rachels:

I. Introduction to Moral Philosophy: The Challenge of Gyges's Ring

The field of moral philosophy seeks to understand what morality is, why it's important, and what justifies our belief in acting one way over another.

- **The Legend of Gyges:** An ancient legend tells of Gyges, a shepherd who finds a magic ring that grants invisibility. He uses this power to seduce the queen, murder the king, and seize the throne, demonstrating how one might act without fear of detection or reprisal.
- **Glaucon's Challenge (Plato's *Republic*):** Glaucon uses Gyges's story to argue against Socrates. He asks us to imagine two such rings, one given to a "virtuous" man and one to a "rogue". Glaucon suggests that both would behave similarly, acting solely to increase their own wealth and power, freed from moral constraints by invisibility.
    - **The Question:** Glaucon asks why, without fear of reprisal, a person shouldn't simply do what they please or what they think is best for themselves, questioning the very necessity of

"morality".

II. Ancient Philosophical Theories of Morality

A. Relativism

- **Definition:** Relativism is the theory that **right and wrong are relative to the customs of one's society**, suggesting that morality is nothing more than social convention.
- **Historical Example (Herodotus):** Herodotus, a Greek historian, illustrated this view with anecdotes like that of the Massagetae tribe. They practiced unique customs such as sharing wives, sacrificing and eating their elderly, and worshipping the sun by sacrificing horses. Herodotus believed their customs were neither better nor worse than others, just different, and that everyone believes their own society's customs are the best.
- **Criticisms:**
    - **Conservatism:** Critics argue that relativism is **"exceedingly conservative"** because it endorses whatever moral views are current in a society, implying that reformers who disagree with dominant social views (e.g., on capital punishment, homosexuality, animal treatment) are inherently wrong.
    - **Socrates' Deeper Problem:** Socrates highlighted that while some customs are arbitrary (e.g., funerary practices like burning versus eating the dead), others are not. It's possible to give **"good reasons"** why some practices are superior (e.g., honesty and respect for human life are socially desirable, while slavery and racism are undesirable). These rational arguments suggest judgments can be more than "merely" expressions of a society's moral code.

B. Divine Commands

- **Definition:** This ancient idea posits that **moral living consists in obedience to divine commands**.
- **Addressing Gyges's Ring:** If this were true, even with invisibility, individuals would still face divine retribution, making it impossible to "get away with" doing whatever they wanted.
- **Socrates' Critique (Plato's *Euthyphro*):** Socrates questioned whether "right" is the same as "what the gods command".
    - **Practical Difficulties:** It's hard to know what gods command (claims of divine communication can be dubious, scripture/tradition are ambiguous and contradictory, and offer little guidance for contemporary issues like environmental preservation or AIDS research).
    - **The Euthyphro Dilemma:** Socrates argued that if gods issue commands, either they have reasons for them, or they don't.
        - If commands are arbitrary, gods are like petty tyrants, which is an impious view.
        - If gods have good reasons, then there is an **"independent standard of rightness"** to which the gods themselves refer.
    - **Conclusion:** Even in a religious worldview, the rightness or wrongness of actions cannot be understood *merely* by conformity to divine prescriptions, because we can always ask *why* the gods command what they do, revealing a deeper basis for morality.

C. Aristotle (Virtue Ethics / Teleological View)

- **Focus on Virtues:** Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (ca. 330 b.c.) offered a systematic account of **virtues—qualities of character (e.g., courage, prudence, generosity, honesty) necessary for people to do**

well in life.

- **Answer to Gyges's Ring:** Virtue is essential for human happiness, making the virtuous person ultimately better off.
- **Teleological Worldview:** Aristotle believed **everything in nature exists for a purpose**.
    - **Examples:** Teeth are for chewing, eyes for seeing. Even inanimate things like rain fall "so that plants can grow," because "it is better so".
    - **Hierarchy:** Nature is an orderly, rational system where each thing serves a purpose in a hierarchy: rain for plants, plants for animals, and **"all things specifically for the sake of man"**. This is a "stunningly anthropocentric" view.

D. Natural Law (Christian Adaptation)

- **Integration with Christianity:** Christian thinkers found Aristotle's teleological view congenial and incorporated God as the Creator who intended these purposes.
- **Ethical Consequences:**
    - **Supreme Value of Human Life:** This view affirmed human life as sacred and justified human domination over nature, establishing a "Natural Order of Things".
    - **"Laws of Nature" and Morality:** The "laws of nature" not only describe how things are but also how they **"ought to be."** Things are good when they serve their natural purposes; defective when they don't.
    - **"Natural" vs. "Unnatural" Acts:** Moral rules are seen as laws of nature. "Natural" acts are right, "unnatural" acts are wrong.
        - **Beneficence:** Considered natural because humans are social creatures with affections.
        - **Sexual Activity:** The purpose of sex organs is procreation. Therefore, any use for other purposes (masturbation, gay sex, contraception) is "contrary to nature" and impermissible according to traditional Christian teaching.
- **Developed by Aquinas:** The Theory of Natural Law was most fully developed by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).
- **Decline:** Natural-law theory has few adherents outside the Catholic Church today because the Aristotelian worldview it depends on has been **"replaced by the outlook of modern science"**.
    - **Modern Science (Galileo, Newton, Darwin):** These thinkers explained natural phenomena without "purpose-involving notions." Rain, for instance, has no purpose; plants evolved to thrive where water is available. The appearance of design is an illusion of natural selection.
    - **Moral Implications:** This new worldview transformed ethics, meaning **right and wrong could no longer be deduced from the nature of things**. The natural world itself does not manifest value or purpose. Values are generated by the needs and desires of its inhabitants.
    - **Hume's Conclusion:** David Hume famously stated in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) that there are **"no moral facts"** in the world itself, only "passions, motives, volitions and thoughts" within us. He also countered Aristotle, saying, "The life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster".

III. Modern Philosophical Theories of Morality

From the 17th century onward, moral philosophy has sought to understand ethics as a "purely human phenomenon"—the product of human needs, interests, and desires.

A. The Social Contract Theory (Thomas Hobbes)

- **Secular Basis for Ethics:** Hobbes (17th century) provided a secular, naturalistic foundation for ethics, assuming "good" and "bad" are simply names for things we like and dislike, but our fundamental psychological makeup is self-interested.
- **Core Idea:** Ethics arises when people realize they are **"enormously better off living in a mutually cooperative society"** than trying to survive alone. Social cooperation provides vast benefits like schools, hospitals, infrastructure, communication, economy, and security.
- **Necessity of Rules:** To obtain these benefits, society requires rules of behavior (e.g., truth-telling, promise-keeping, respecting life and property). These rules prevent social collapse by enabling communication, division of labor, and security.
- **The "Social Contract":** Morality is a **"bargain"** where each person agrees to obey these rules, provided others do likewise, with enforcement mechanisms (legal sanctions, etc.).
    - **Definition of Morality:** Morality is **"nothing more or less than the set of rules that rational people will agree to obey, for their mutual benefit, provided that other people will obey them as well"**.
- **Appealing Features:**
    - **Practical and Down-to-Earth:** It removes the mystery from ethics, making it about practical social living rather than divine dictates or abstract rules.
    - **Answers Gyges's Ring:** It explains *why* we should care about ethics—it is to our advantage to live in a moral society. Accepting moral restrictions is a rational bargain for mutual benefit.
    - **Sensible Duties:** It focuses on duties necessary for social cooperation, largely disregarding private matters like sexual activities, which are not directly relevant to maintaining social order.
    - **Minimal Assumptions about Human Nature:** It assumes humans are self-interested but shows how moral obligations and even altruistic behavior emerge from this self-interest, as cooperation is necessary for individuals to live well.

B. Utilitarianism (Hume, Bentham, Mill)

- **Critique of Hobbes's Egoism:** Modern thinkers, including Hume, suggest that humans have **"at least some altruistic feelings,"** for family and friends, and have evolved as social creatures. Caring for kin and group members is natural.
- **Hume's "Social Sentiments":** Hume believed moral opinions are expressions of our feelings and "social sentiments" that connect us to others. Right and wrong are measured by **"the true interests of mankind"**.
- **Principle of Utility:** Utilitarianism states that we should **"always do whatever will produce the greatest possible balance of happiness over unhappiness for everyone who will be affected by our action"**.
    - **Three Core Ideas:**
        1. **Consequences:** Actions should be guided by their expected consequences, aiming for the best outcome.
        2. **Happiness:** The "best" consequences are those that cause the most happiness or least unhappiness.
        3. **Impartiality:** Each individual's happiness is equally important.
- **Key Figures:**
    - **Jeremy Bentham (late 18th/early 19th c.):** Leader of philosophical radicals who applied utilitarianism to legal reform (e.g., prison reform, child labor restrictions).

    - **John Stuart Mill (*Utilitarianism*, 1861):** Provided the most popular and influential defense of the theory.
- **Controversies and Replies:**
    - **"Godless Doctrine":** Critics condemned it for ignoring religious notions. Mill replied that if God desires creatures' happiness, utilitarianism is profoundly religious.
    - **Subversive Theory:** It challenged traditional moral ideas:
        - **Criminal Justice:** Punishment should aim at identifying causes, reforming lawbreakers, and deterring others, not just "paying back" wrongdoers.
        - **Equality:** By insisting everyone's happiness is equally important, it rejected elitist notions of group superiority (e.g., Mill's *The Subjection of Women*).
    - **No Absolute Rules:** Utilitarians see traditional rules (against killing, lying, breaking promises) as **"rules of thumb"**—generally useful, but to be broken if doing so yields better results for everyone (e.g., voluntary euthanasia). It implies harmless activities like masturbation or homosexuality, if they cause no harm and bring happiness, are not wrong.
- **Justification (Mill's Answer to Gyges's Ring):** Beyond "external sanctions" (law, public opinion), the "internal sanction" of morality is **"a feeling in our minds."** For Mill, it's the **"social feelings of mankind"**—the desire to be in unity with fellow creatures—that forms the "firm foundation" of utilitarian morality.

C. Impartiality: A Point of Divergence (Social Contract vs. Utilitarianism)

- **Duty to Help Strangers:** This is a major difference between the two theories.
    - **Utilitarianism:** Argues for an **"extensive moral duty to help other people."** The example of spending $1000 on a carpet vs. donating to UNICEF to save children clearly favors UNICEF, as the medicine brings more overall happiness than the carpet.
    - **Social Contract Theory:** Denies such an extensive duty. Based on self-interest, rational people would agree not to harm strangers and possibly to offer easy aid, but not **"virtually unlimited aid to strangers, even at great cost to themselves"**.
        - **Jan Narveson's View:** People pursue their own interests, which don't necessarily include much concern for others. It's rational to agree not to harm others but not to go "very far out of our way to be very helpful to those we don't know". He argues it's morally permissible to prioritize a daughter's birthday party over saving strangers, as people "count equally" only for some, and normal people care more for those close to them.
- **Reconciling Impartiality:**
    - **Mill's "Conscientious Feelings":** Mill believed that "thoughtful and reflective" people, when considering trivial benefits for loved ones versus the lives of strangers, would not approve of prioritizing the trivial benefit.
    - **Contemporary Utilitarians (Peter Singer):** Argue that while we care more for those close to us, our **"rational capacities"** allow us to think objectively. From **"the point of view of the universe,"** our personal perspective (where our interests are central, family next, strangers last) is no more privileged than anyone else's. Reason shows us the possibility of detaching from our personal perspective and acknowledging that **"our own perspective... has no special status"**.

D. Kant (Deontology)

- **Ethics from "Pure Reason":** Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) sought to explain ethics without divine commands or moral facts, seeing morality as a product of **"pure reason,"** binding on us just as desires

bind us to act.

- **Emphasis on Duty, Not Consequences:** Kant believed morality could be summed up in one ultimate principle, but unlike utilitarians, he **"did not emphasize the outcomes of actions."** What mattered was "doing one's duty," which is not determined by calculating consequences.
- **The Categorical Imperative:** Kant's ultimate moral principle, given two formulations:
    - **First Formulation (Universal Law): "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"**.
        - **Procedure:** To determine if an act is permissible, identify the rule (maxim) you'd be following. Then, ask if you'd be willing for *everyone* to follow that rule *all the time*. If yes, permissible; if no, impermissible.
        - **Basis:** The Moral Law is binding because rationality requires consistency. It's inconsistent to act on a maxim you wouldn't want everyone else to adopt. This leads to **absolute prohibitions** (e.g., against lying, suicide).
    - **Second Formulation (Humanity as an End): "So act that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as means only"**.
        - **Treating as a "Means Only":** This means manipulating someone. For example, lying to a friend for a loan you can't repay uses them as a means to your goal.
        - **Treating as an "End":** This means respecting a person's rationality and autonomy. If you told your friend the truth about needing money and being unable to repay, they could make a free, autonomous choice based on their own values, thereby making your purpose their own if they choose to help.

IV. Evaluating Philosophical Arguments

- **The Nature of Philosophy:** Philosophical ideas, though abstract, must be supported by **"sound arguments"** to be acceptable.
- **Definition of an Argument:** In logic, an argument is a **"chain of reasoning designed to prove something,"** consisting of one or more **premises** and a **conclusion**, with the claim that the conclusion follows from the premises.
- **Validity:**
    - A conclusion **"follows from"** the premises if a certain logical relation exists: **if the premises are true, then the conclusion *must* be true also.** Equivalently, it's impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false at the same time.
    - An argument is **valid** if its conclusion follows from its premises.
    - A conclusion can follow from premises even if those premises are actually false (e.g., "All people from Georgia are famous; Jimmy Carter is from Georgia; Therefore, Jimmy Carter is famous" is valid, but the first premise is false).
- **Soundness:**
    - An argument is **sound** if two conditions are met: **it must be valid, and its premises must be true**.
    - An argument can be unsound even if its premises and conclusion are all true, if the conclusion does not follow from the premises (e.g., "The earth has one moon; John F. Kennedy was assassinated; Therefore, snow is white").
- **Two Questions for Evaluation:** When evaluating any argument, one must ask two separate questions: **"Are the premises true? And, does the conclusion follow from them?"**.

A. Moral Skepticism and Its Arguments

- **Definition of Moral Skepticism:** The idea that **"there is no such thing as objective moral truth."** It asserts that morality is subjective, merely a matter of opinion, and that values exist only in our minds.
- **1. The Cultural Differences Argument (CDA):**
  - **Premises:** Different cultures have different moral beliefs (e.g., Eskimo infanticide vs. our society's view).
  - **Conclusion:** Therefore, infanticide (or any moral matter) is neither objectively right nor wrong; it's merely a matter of cultural opinion.
  - **Critique:** The CDA is **invalid**. The conclusion (about what *is* immoral) does not follow from the premises (about what people *believe* is immoral). People or entire societies can be mistaken (e.g., the shape of the earth).
  - **Common Mistakes to Avoid:**
    - Don't confuse rejecting an argument with impugning the truth of its conclusion; an unsound argument simply provides no reason for thinking the conclusion is true.
    - Don't conflate the CDA with arguments about the provability of moral claims; these are separate issues.
- **2. The Provability Argument:**
  - **Premises:** If objective truth existed in ethics, we could prove moral opinions true or false. But we cannot prove them true or false.
  - **Conclusion:** Therefore, there is no objective truth in ethics.
  - **Critique:** The conclusion *does* follow from the premises, so the crucial question is whether the premises are true. The second premise – that we cannot prove moral opinions – is **questionable**.
    - **Counter-examples:** We can often provide good reasons and "proofs" for moral judgments in simpler cases (e.g., proving a test was unfair, that someone is a bad person, an irresponsible doctor, or an unethical salesman). Such judgments are not "mere opinions" if backed by reasons.
    - **Reasons for its Appeal:**
      1. **Focus on Difficult Issues:** People tend to focus on complex, divisive issues like abortion, making "proof" seem impossible. However, like physics, ethics has simpler matters where agreement and proof are possible.
      2. **Confusing "Proving" with "Persuading":** It's easy to mistake a stubborn refusal to accept logic for an inability to prove a point. A proof can be impeccable even if the other person is unwilling to accept it.
- **Overall Conclusion on Moral Skepticism:** Both the Cultural Differences Argument and the Provability Argument, two significant arguments for Moral Skepticism, are deemed **unsound**. While Moral Skepticism *might* still be true, it would require better arguments to support it.

Summary of Argument Evaluation Principles:

1. Arguments provide support for theories; a theory is acceptable only with sound arguments.
2. An argument is sound only if its premises are true and its conclusion logically follows.
   - A conclusion follows if, assuming premises are true, the conclusion *must* be true (impossible for premises true and conclusion false).
   - Conclusion can follow from false premises.

    - Conclusion can be true but not follow from given premises.
3. Always ask: Are the premises true? Does the conclusion follow?.
4. Avoid common mistakes:
    - Keep arguments separate and avoid confusing issues.
    - Don't overvalue an argument simply because you agree with its conclusion.
    - An unsound argument only means it fails to prove its conclusion; the conclusion might still be true, but this argument offers no support.

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The Ethics of Torture: Ticking Bombs and Dirty Harry

The provided texts explore the complex ethical debate surrounding the use of torture, particularly in "ticking bomb" scenarios where lives are at stake. Alan Dershowitz advocates for the controlled use of nonlethal torture, suggesting judicial torture warrants to ensure accountability and prevent greater harm, drawing parallels to other morally difficult but accepted actions like the death penalty or shooting down a hijacked plane. David Luban critically challenges this "liberal ideology of torture," arguing that ticking bomb hypotheticals are unrealistic intellectual frauds that, if embraced, would inevitably lead to a normalized "torture culture" with devastating psychological and societal consequences. Conversely, Uwe Steinhoff supports the moral justification of interrogative torture in rare, extreme cases like the "Dirty Harry" scenario, even without absolute certainty, but firmly opposes Dershowitz's idea of legalizing torture warrants due to concerns about institutionalization and the brutalization of enforcers.

Here are comprehensive notes on the debate surrounding torture, drawing from the provided sources:

The Debate Over Torture: A Comprehensive Overview

The debate over the use of torture has been profoundly shaped by events like September 11, 2001, and often centers on hypothetical "ticking bomb" scenarios. While traditionally incompatible with American values and human rights, the post-9/11 era saw a shift in public and political discourse, with many, including liberals, considering torture in extreme cases.

I. Arguments in Favor of Torture (Proponents: Bentham, Dershowitz, Steinhoff)

Proponents of torture, particularly in the ticking bomb scenario, often employ a utilitarian, cost-benefit analysis.

- **Utilitarian Justification (Bentham & Dershowitz)**:
    - Jeremy Bentham posited a hypothetical: if torturing one criminal could prevent 100 innocents from suffering equal or greater torture, it would be justified. This logic extends to preventing thousands of deaths in a ticking bomb scenario.
    - **Dershowitz** applies this simple cost-benefit analysis, arguing it is better to inflict nonlethal pain on one guilty terrorist to save many innocent lives, as pain is a lesser and more remediable harm than death.
    - He illustrates this with hypotheticals:
        - **Zacarias Moussaoui case variation**: If authorities knew Moussaoui was part of a plan to destroy buildings but lacked details, and all lawful interrogation methods failed, nonlethal torture (e.g., sterilized needle under fingernails, dental drill) might be justified to prevent imminent attack.

        - **Nuclear Bomb in NYC**: If a captured terrorist knew the location of a nuclear weapon poised to detonate in New York City, and all other methods failed, nonlethal torture would be the "last, best hope".
- **Argument from Analogy (Dershowitz)**:
    - Dershowitz questions what moral principle could justify the death penalty for past murders while condemning nonlethal torture to prevent future mass murders.
    - He draws analogies to:
        - The death penalty for convicted murderers.
        - Use of deadly force against fleeing felons who pose future dangers.
        - Military retaliations causing collateral civilian deaths.
    - He suggests that opposition to nonlethal torture, for those who justify killing based on cost-benefit analysis, is often rooted in historical and aesthetic considerations rather than moral or logical ones. He notes the visceral reaction to torture compared to "aestheticized" death penalty methods.
- **Steinhoff's "Dirty Harry" Case**:
    - **Uwe Steinhoff** argues that interrogative torture is morally justified in the "Dirty Harry" case, where a police officer tortures a kidnapper to save a child's life.
    - He extends this to the ticking bomb case, even if certainty about the information or the person's guilt is lacking. He sees no moral difference between shooting a man about to shoot the president and torturing a potential bomber.
    - Crucially, Steinhoff distinguishes between moral justification in rare cases and making torture legal.

II. Arguments Against Torture (Opponents: Luban, Twining & Twining, Rule Utilitarianism)

Opponents raise significant concerns about the practical and moral implications of allowing torture, even in extreme cases.

- **Slippery Slope Objection (Rule Utilitarianism)**:
    - This is considered the strongest argument against any resort to torture.
    - While case utilitarianism might justify isolated acts, rule utilitarianism considers the implications of establishing a **precedent**. Legalizing torture, even for limited use, could lead to its widespread adoption and abuse globally.
    - Bentham scholars W. L. Twining and P. E. Twining argue that no government can be trusted not to abuse such power, supporting an absolute prohibition against institutionalized torture.
    - A "simple-minded quantitative case utilitarianism" lacks inherent limiting principles and could justify increasingly horrific acts, such as lethal torture, torturing family members, or even targeting innocent children to save more lives ("morality by numbers"). This "slippery slope" risks "hurtling down into the abyss of amorality and ultimately tyranny".
- **Luban's Critique: Ticking Bomb as "Intellectual Fraud"**:
    - **David Luban** argues that the ticking bomb scenario is an "intellectual fraud" because it rests on **unrealistic assumptions**.
    - It **stipulates certainty** that rarely exists in the real world:
        - Knowing there is a bomb and having the person who planted it.
        - Knowing the person will talk when tortured.
        - Certainty that lives will be saved.
    - Luban highlights the reality of **uncertainty and imperfect knowledge**:

        - Authorities may only *think* a plot exists or that a captive *might* know something.
        - This leads to questions about duration and intensity of torture, and the likelihood of success.
        - It can lead to torturing innocent people (e.g., 49 captives for information from one) or loved ones.
    - He warns against "morality by numbers," which can justify anything if only consequences count.
    - Luban cites **David Rousset** and **Bernard Williams** on the "insanity" of trying to rationally decide in such monstrous situations, stating that "normal human beings do not know that everything is possible".
- **Torture as a "Practice" vs. "Ad Hoc Emergency" (Luban)**:
    - The ticking bomb scenario assumes a single, ad hoc decision by officials who would not ordinarily torture. Luban argues that in reality, it creates **institutionalized practices and procedures** – a "torture culture".
    - This leads to:
        - **Professional cadres of trained torturers**: Learning techniques, overcoming revulsion, developing "surgeon's arrogance," and potentially involving medical professionals to keep captives alive for torture.
        - **Escalation of violence**: History shows that "casehardened torturers" rarely know where to draw the line, leading to abuses (e.g., Algeria, Israel, Argentina's "Dirty War"). The Stanford Prison Experiment is cited as an example of how violence becomes normalized and escalates.
        - **Bureaucratic division of labor**: The decision-maker (conscience) is not the interrogator (executor), pushing "guilty knowledge" down the chain of command, as seen in vague orders at Abu Ghraib.
        - **Totalitarian mind-control**: Even "non-abusive" interrogation techniques involve trickery, disorientation, and manipulation, creating a "false reality" for the subject. Without clear, strictly enforced rules, this can easily turn into abuse.

III. Dershowitz's Proposal: Torture Warrants

Alan Dershowitz proposes a system of **judicial torture warrants** as a "principled break" to the slippery slope.

- **Rationale**:
    - He believes torture **would be used anyway** in ticking bomb cases, so it's better to do it openly and legally rather than secretly "off-the-books".
    - This approach aims to balance security and civil liberties while ensuring **open accountability** in a democracy.
    - "Off-the-book actions" are antithetical to democracy and historically lead to negative consequences (e.g., Watergate, Iran-Contra).
    - He rejects the "hypocritical approach" of allowing torture but keeping it secret, citing the French experience in Algeria where an officer was prosecuted for *revealing* torture, not for performing it.
- **Mechanism**:
    - Judges would issue warrants (akin to search warrants) as a prerequisite for nonlethal torture.
    - This would make the practice visible, accountable, and centralized, potentially decreasing abuse compared to secret, ad hoc methods.

    - The suspect would first be offered **immunity** to compel testimony, threatened with imprisonment, and only if they still refused, subjected to judicially monitored nonlethal pain.
- **Benefits (according to Dershowitz)**:
    - **Decrease violence**: A double-check (field officer + judge) is more protective; judges would require compelling evidence.
    - **Protect rights**: Suspects would be granted immunity, and torture would only be considered if they refused legally compelled, non-incriminating information.
    - **Democratic accountability**: Responsibility for difficult choices would be placed in a visible, neutral institution like the judiciary.
    - **Historical precedent**: He notes that Anglo-Saxon law once used judicially supervised, limited nonlethal torture for discovery, not punishment, in cases of treason to protect the state.

IV. Critiques of Dershowitz's Torture Warrants

Dershowitz's proposal faces strong opposition.

- **Luban's Objection**:
    - Judges "do not fight their culture—they reflect it". If politicians accept torture, judges will too (e.g., Jay S. Bybee, who signed a permissive torture memo, later became a federal judge).
    - The warrant system would legitimize and institutionalize torture, contributing to a "torture culture".
- **Steinhoff's Objection**:
    - Torture warrants are unnecessary because cases justifying torture are rare.
    - Institutionalizing torture undermines the general prohibition and brutalizes the enforcer.

V. Ways a State Can Respond to Terrorism

The Israeli government, through a commission in the late 1980s, identified three ways a state can respond to the dilemma of fighting terrorism while maintaining rule of law; Dershowitz adds a fourth:

1. **"Twilight zone"**: Allow security services to operate outside the law.
2. **"Way of the hypocrites"**: Declare adherence to law but turn a blind eye to secret, "off-the-books" practices.
3. **"Truthful road of the rule of law"**: Integrate necessary actions (like torture) into a legal framework. This is Dershowitz's preferred option.
4. **Forgo any use of torture**: Allow preventable terrorist acts to occur. Dershowitz rejects this, citing the Israeli Supreme Court's decision to outlaw physical pressure led to at least one preventable terrorist act.

VI. Historical and Psychological Context

- **Historical Abuses**: The association of torture with gruesome deaths, the Inquisition, Gestapo, Stalinist purges, and the Argentine "dirty war" makes it difficult for many to consider "benign" nonlethal torture.
- **Bentham's Distinction**: Bentham did not distinguish between torture inflicted by private persons and by governments.
- **Early English Law**: In the 16th and 17th centuries, limited nonlethal torture was judicially supervised to secure evidence (confessions) or "for discovery" to prevent attacks on the state (e.g., treason plots).

This was centrally controlled, making it easier to abolish.
- **Ancient Jewish Law**: Required two witnesses and advance warning for conviction, disfavored confessions, and did not use torture. Instead, obvious but unwitnessed murderers were acquitted but then forcibly fed until death. More flexible "self-help" was allowed against community threats (Din Rodef).
- **Modern "Off-the-Books" Practices**: US law enforcement has reportedly facilitated torture by allied repressive regimes and engaged in physical abuse post-9/11. Threats of prison rape by prosecutors have been condemned by the Canadian Supreme Court as an abuse of process.
- **Stanford Prison Experiment**: This psychological study demonstrated how individuals assigned roles of "guards" quickly escalated to abusive behavior, highlighting how a shift in norms can normalize and increase violence.

Defining Morality: Reason, Impartiality, and Hard Cases

This philosophical text explores the fundamental nature of morality by examining challenging ethical dilemmas. It begins by establishing that moral philosophy investigates how we ought to live and the reasons behind our actions. The discussion then presents three compelling case studies—Baby Theresa, Jodie and Mary, and Tracy Latimer—each highlighting complex situations with divided opinions from parents, doctors, and ethicists. Through these examples, the text analyzes various moral arguments and principles, such as the "Benefits Argument," the "Wrongness of Using People as Means," the "Sanctity of Human Life," and the "Slippery Slope Argument." Ultimately, the text proposes a "minimum conception of morality" which mandates that moral judgments must be supported by sound reasoning and require the impartial consideration of every individual's interests.

Here are comprehensive notes on the nature of morality, drawing from the provided sources:

What Is Morality?

Moral philosophy is fundamentally the study of **what morality is and what it requires of us**, addressing the Socratic question of "how we ought to live" and why. A simple, uncontroversial definition of morality is difficult to establish due to many rival theories, each presenting a different conception of what it means to live morally. To navigate this, the text introduces a **"minimum conception" of morality**, which serves as a core that every moral theory should accept as a starting point. This minimum conception's features are explored through various moral controversies.

Case Studies and Moral Arguments

The text examines three case studies involving difficult moral dilemmas to illustrate the complexities of moral reasoning and the application of moral principles:

1. **Baby Theresa (Anencephalic Infant)**
    - **Case Description**: Baby Theresa was born in Florida in 1992 with anencephaly, a severe genetic disorder where major parts of the brain (cerebrum and cerebellum) are missing. She could never be conscious and would die within days. Her parents requested her organs for transplant to other children, which her physicians agreed to, but Florida law prevented removal of organs until death. By the time she died nine days later, her organs were unsuitable.
    - **The Benefits Argument (For Transplant)**:

        - **Premise**: If we can benefit someone without harming anyone else, we ought to do so. Transplanting Theresa's organs would benefit other children without harming her, as her organs were doing her no good because she was not conscious and would die soon.
        - **Assessment**: The argument is considered a **powerful reason for transplanting the organs**. The assertion that Theresa would not be harmed is supported by the idea that biological existence has no value without consciousness, activities, thoughts, feelings, or relations with other people—in other words, without the capacity to have a life.
    - **The Argument That We Should Not Use People as Means (Against Transplant)**:
        - **Premise**: It is wrong to use people as means to other people's ends. Taking Theresa's organs would be using her to benefit other children.
        - **Assessment**: The notion of "using people" is appealing but vague. Typically, it involves **violating a person's autonomy**—their ability to decide for themselves. This can happen through manipulation, trickery, deceit, or force. However, Baby Theresa had no autonomy; she could not make decisions, had no desires, and could not value anything. While her organs would be used for someone else's benefit without her permission, she had no wishes to violate.
        - **Guidelines for those unable to decide**:
            - **Best Interests**: For individuals unable to make decisions, a guideline is to consider what would be in their own best interests. For Baby Theresa, taking her organs would not affect her interests, as she was not conscious and would die soon.
            - **Person's Preferences**: Another guideline asks what the person would say if they could express their wishes. This is useful for comatose patients with prior preferences (e.g., a living will). However, Baby Theresa had no preferences, so this guideline provides no guidance. The conclusion is that others are left to do what they think is best.
    - **The Argument from the Wrongness of Killing (Against Transplant)**:
        - **Premise**: It is wrong to kill one person to save another. Taking Theresa's organs would be killing her to save others.
        - **Assessment**: While the prohibition against killing is crucial, most people accept exceptions (e.g., self-defense). Reasons to consider taking Baby Theresa's organs an exception include her lack of consciousness, no future life, imminent death, and the benefit to other babies.
        - **Rethinking Death**: Another possibility is to consider Baby Theresa as already dead. The definition of death has evolved; for example, "brain death" became the standard to allow organ transplantation from patients with healthy hearts. Although anencephalics don't meet current brain death criteria, the definition could be revised to include them, as they lack any hope for conscious life. If anencephalics were considered born dead, taking their organs would not be killing them, rendering this argument moot.
    - **Conclusion for Baby Theresa**: On the whole, the **arguments in favor of transplanting Baby Theresa's organs seem stronger** than those against it.

2. **Jodie and Mary (Conjoined Twins)**

    - **Case Description**: Conjoined twins Jodie and Mary were born in England, sharing a heart and lungs, with Jodie providing blood for Mary. Doctors predicted both would die within six months without intervention, but separation could save Jodie while immediately killing Mary. The parents, devout Catholics, refused permission for the operation, believing "nature should take

its course". The hospital sought court permission, which was granted, and Jodie lived while Mary died.

- **Focus**: The key question is not who should make the decision, but **what the wisest decision would be**.
- **The Argument That We Should Save as Many as We Can (For Separation)**:
  - **Premise**: Given a choice between saving one infant or letting both die, it is plainly better to save one. A poll showed 78% of Americans approved of the operation based on this idea.
- **The Argument from the Sanctity of Human Life (Against Separation)**:
  - **Premise**: All human life is precious, and it is wrong to kill an innocent human, regardless of the purpose it might serve. Mary was an innocent human and should not be killed. This idea is central to Western moral tradition and religious writings.
  - **Assessment**: The judges who heard the case initially denied the operation would kill Mary, stating she would die due to her body's weakness, not intentional killing. However, the text refutes this, arguing that knowingly hastening death is the essence of the prohibition against killing the innocent.
  - **Possible exception to the prohibition**: Killing innocent human beings might be justified if three conditions are met:
    - The innocent human has **no future** and will die soon anyway.
    - The innocent human has **no wish to go on living** (perhaps no wishes at all).
    - The killing will **save others** who can lead full lives.
    - These circumstances are rare, but they suggest that the killing of the innocent is not *always* wrong.

3. **Tracy Latimer (12-year-old with Cerebral Palsy)**

- **Case Description**: Tracy, a 12-year-old with severe cerebral palsy, weighing less than 40 pounds and functioning at the mental level of a three-month-old, was killed by her father, Robert Latimer, using exhaust fumes. Tracy had undergone multiple surgeries and was in constant suffering. Her father argued it was an act of mercy.
- **Moral Questions**: Beyond legal aspects, the question is whether Mr. Latimer acted wrongly. One argument against him is the inherent preciousness of Tracy's life. In his defense, her catastrophic condition and suffering could justify the act as mercy.
- **The Argument from the Wrongness of Discriminating against the Handicapped (Against Latimer's Action)**:
  - **Premise**: Handicapped people should receive the same respect and rights as everyone else. Killing Tracy because she was handicapped is unconscionable, as "nobody has the right to decide my life is worth less than yours". Discrimination involves treating some people worse for no good reason.
  - **Assessment**: Mr. Latimer denied killing Tracy due to her disability, but rather because of her **"torture issue"—her relentless suffering and lack of hope**, compounded by numerous surgeries and bedsores. He argued her cerebral palsy was not the issue, but her pain was.
- **The Slippery Slope Argument (Against Latimer's Action)**:
  - **Premise**: If we accept any form of mercy killing, we will "slide down a slippery slope" where life will eventually be held cheap. Critics warned that allowing such actions could

lead to decisions about who should live or die for other disabled people, the elderly, or the infirm, drawing parallels to Hitler's program of "racial purification".
- **Assessment**: Slippery slope arguments are **hard to assess without hindsight**. While some past worries (like those regarding IVF) proved unfounded, reasonable people can disagree about the predictions. The text notes that these arguments are **easy to abuse** by making up implausible predictions that cannot be disproven, thus urging caution.

The Nature of Morality: Reason and Impartiality

From these cases, two main points emerge regarding the nature of morality:

1. **Moral Judgments Must Be Backed by Good Reasons (Moral Reasoning)**
    - **Limitations of Feelings**: While strong feelings can indicate moral seriousness, they can also **obstruct the discovery of truth**. Feelings can be irrational, products of prejudice, selfishness, or cultural conditioning (e.g., past beliefs about racial inferiority or slavery). Different people can have conflicting strong feelings, and both cannot be correct.
    - **Role of Reason**: To discover the truth, **feelings must be guided by reason**. The morally right action is always the one **best supported by arguments**.
    - **Distinction from Personal Taste**: Unlike personal preferences (e.g., liking coffee), which don't require reasons, **moral claims demand reasons**. If no good reason can be given for a moral judgment, it can be rejected as arbitrary. If reasons are legitimate, others must acknowledge their force.
    - **Assessing Arguments**:
        - **Get Facts Straight**: This is crucial but often difficult due to unknown facts, complex issues, or human prejudice (e.g., wanting to believe predictions that support preconceptions). Responsible moral thinking requires seeing things as they are, independent of wishes.
        - **Apply Moral Principles**: Moral arguments involve principles like "not using people," "not killing one to save another," "benefiting those affected," "life is sacred," or "not discriminating against the handicapped". It's essential to assess whether these principles are justified and applied correctly.
    - **No Simple Recipe**: There is no simple recipe for good arguments; critical thinking, rather than rote application, is necessary.

2. **Morality Requires the Impartial Consideration of Each Individual's Interests (Impartiality)**
    - **Definition**: Impartiality means that **each individual's interests are equally important; no one should receive special treatment**. It condemns discrimination (like sexism and racism) by forbidding the treatment of particular groups as inferior.
    - **Connection to Reason**: Impartiality is closely linked to the need for good reasons. For example, a racist who believes white people deserve all good jobs would fail to provide good reasons for such differential treatment (e.g., superior intelligence, industriousness, or benefit). Without good reasons, discrimination is arbitrarily unacceptable.
    - **Rule Against Arbitrary Treatment**: Impartiality is fundamentally a rule against treating people arbitrarily. It forbids treating one person worse than another *without good reason*. This also explains why *some* differential treatment is not racist or objectionable (e.g., casting an African-American actor to play Fred Shuttlesworth, as there's a good reason for it).

The Minimum Conception of Morality

Based on these insights, the **minimum conception of morality** is defined as:

- "**the effort to guide one's conduct by reason—that is, to do what there are the best reasons for doing—while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual affected by one's decision**".

The Conscientious Moral Agent

A **conscientious moral agent** embodies this minimum conception. Such an agent is characterized by:

- **Impartial concern** for the interests of everyone affected by their actions.
- **Careful sifting of facts** and examination of their implications.
- **Acceptance of conduct principles only after scrutiny** to ensure they are justified.
- **Willingness to "listen to reason,"** even if it means revising prior convictions.
- **Willingness to act on the results** of this deliberation.

While not every ethical theory fully accepts this minimum conception, most moral theories incorporate it in some form because theories that reject it encounter serious difficulties.

Foundations of Ethical Thought

This chapter, "Theories of Ethics" by Stephen L. Darwall, introduces the division of ethics into meta-ethics and normative ethics, with a focus on applied or "case ethics." It explains that normative theories, such as contractarianism, contractualism, consequentialism, and deontology, offer frameworks for evaluating ethical judgments by providing principles and concepts. The text contrasts contractarianism's self-interested agreement on moral rules with contractualism's grounding in mutual respect and the notion of principles that cannot be reasonably rejected. Furthermore, it distinguishes consequentialism, which assesses actions based on their non-moral outcomes, from deontological theories, which prioritize agent-relative duties and principles, regardless of consequences. Finally, the chapter presents virtue ethics as an approach centered on character and the idea of what a virtuous person would do, often serving as a complementary or alternative perspective to conduct-focused moral theories.

I. Division of Ethics and Terminology

Ethics is conventionally divided into two main areas: **meta-ethics** and **normative ethics**. Normative ethics is further divided into normative theory and "applied ethics".

- **"Applied Ethics"**: This term may not be entirely fitting because it suggests that ethical theories are developed independently and then merely "applied" to cases, similar to pure mathematics. In reality, normative theories are often formulated and evaluated by reflecting on the ethically relevant features of specific cases, such as Judith Thomson's "trolley problem".
- **"Practical Ethics"**: This alternative term avoids the "application" suggestion but is misleading because it implies that only questions of "what to do" are of interest. However, ethical inquiry often concerns evaluations of character, motives, or broader questions like the intrinsic worth of living species or the value of aesthetic appreciation, which are not primarily practical, even if they have practical implications.
- **"Case Ethics"**: The source suggests "case ethics" as a better term.

    - It draws an analogy to "case law," where judges' findings include both conclusions and the reasoning (*ratio*) behind them.
    - In case ethics, this refers to our considered judgments about specific ethical issues or cases, along with the reasons or principled reflections that underpin these judgments.
    - Unlike legal judgments where only vested judges have authority, moral and ethical discussions are open to everyone, and no single individual holds final authority, though we may grant authority to those considered thoughtful and judicious.
    - Judges must support legal judgments with applicable laws and principles, aiming for conclusions that others could reasonably reach, though this rarely involves deductive proof. Similarly, even art critics provide reasons for their judgments.
    - Many cases in "applied" or "case ethics" involve **public morality**, where discussion takes place in a democratic society, and everyone has standing to participate.
    - When these issues involve **moral obligations**, which entail accountability and potential sanctions (as J.S. Mill noted), there's a strong need for publicly formulated, principled justifications, akin to those required for legal judgments, to restrict liberty in ways acceptable to fellow citizens.

II. Normative Ethical Theory

Philosophers use "normative ethical theory" broadly to refer to **principles, concepts, and ideals cited in support of ethical judgments about cases**.

- **Commitment to Theory**: Anytime we give reasons for an ethical judgment, we implicitly commit to some theory. Moreover, making an ethical judgment inherently commits us to the existence of a justifying background theory due to the "reason- or warrant-dependence" of ethical concepts.
- **Reason- or Warrant-Dependence**: When judging something as "good" or "morally required," we're not just stating a personal feeling, but that there is *reason* to value it or that it is *warranted*. This implies the existence of other properties that serve as reasons or grounds for that ethical property. For example, judging an action morally required implies there are characteristics of the action and situation that make it obligatory, committing us to valid moral principles relating those features to its obligatoriness.
- **Unavoidable Investigation**: Understanding normative ethical theories is unavoidable for careful ethical thought, as the quality of our judgments depends on the background theories we implicitly accept.
- **Robust Theories for Morality**: For judgments of moral right and wrong, even more robust normative theories are required. Morality, unlike some other ethical areas, is modeled on law; wrongdoing warrants blame and accountability, which are directive and often coercive practices. Thus, like judges, we face pressure to articulate principles that justify our judgments and can be publicly accepted by the moral community. The expectation is that those held accountable for wrongdoing should be able to accept the judgment as reasonable, which is distinct from other ethical assessments like disdain for cowardice. This burden of public justification makes normative moral theory integral to public moral discourse.

III. Meta-ethics

Meta-ethics addresses **abstract philosophical issues underlying normative questions**. It is traditionally divided into four kinds of questions:

- **(a) Philosophy of language**: Meaning and content of ethical judgments.
- **(b) Philosophy of mind**: Mental states expressed by ethical judgments or what it means to hold an ethical view.
- **(c) Metaphysics**: Possibility and nature of ethical truth.
- **(d) Epistemology**: Possibility and nature of ethical knowledge and its justification.

Why care about meta-ethics? The view that case ethics can be entirely divorced from meta-ethics is mistaken. A sharp separation distorts both how great ethical thinkers proceeded and how contemporary moral debate should proceed.

- **Environmental Ethics Example**: Thinking carefully about moral claims of other living species (e.g., weighing harm to them) necessitates engaging with meta-ethical issues.
    - **Nature of Harm**: To be harmed, something must have a good or welfare. A common meta-ethical view that a person's good consists in desire satisfaction (or informed desires) would rule out the possibility of species lacking desire from being harmed or benefited. However, the concept of welfare can be understood as what we require when we care for something for its sake, thus extending harm and benefit beyond beings with desires. We can sensibly regard a species as capable of being benefited or harmed if we can care for them for their sake.
    - **Nature of Moral Obligation**: Whether harm to other species carries the same moral relevance as harm to persons depends on one's meta-ethical stance on what morality and moral obligation *are*.
        - If morality is understood broadly, then all harm might seem equally morally relevant.
        - However, if morality is conceived as a **system of reciprocity or mutual accountability**, where norms mediate a community of free and equal moral persons, then harm to persons has intrinsic moral relevance because norms of right and wrong must be justifiable to members of this community. Harm to other species, in this view, does not hold the same status.
- **Conclusion on Meta-ethics**: These examples demonstrate how meta-ethical questions are implicitly involved in normative ethical theory and case ethics, making it necessary to pursue philosophical ethics that integrates both.

IV. Major Normative Ethical Theories

The chapter reviews major normative ethical theories: contractualism, consequentialism, deontology, and virtue theory.

A. Contractarianism/Contractualism

This approach grounds whether an action is right or wrong in **principles that would be the object of an agreement, contract, or choice made under certain conditions by members of the moral community**.

- **Distinction**:
    - **Contractarianism**: Choice of moral principles is **self-interested**.
    - **Contractualism**: Grounds principles in a moral ideal of **reciprocity, reasonableness, or fairness**.
- **Hypothetical Agreement**: Rarely do these theories claim that right and wrong are determined by actual choices; rather, they posit principles that *would be* rationally or reasonably chosen or agreed to under specified (often counterfactual) conditions.

1. Contractarianism

- **Origin**: Formulated by Thomas Hobbes.
- **Foundation**: Hobbes considers agents deliberating from their own desires and interests. The problem arises in **collective action problems**, where individual pursuit of self-interest leads to worse outcomes for all than if they had pursued some other aim or acted on different principles.
- **Prisoner's Dilemma**: This game-theoretic example illustrates how two individuals, acting purely in their self-interest (minimizing jail time), both confess and end up with a worse outcome (5 years each) than if they had cooperated by not confessing (1 year each). Individual rational action leads to a collectively suboptimal outcome.
- **Cooperation**: People cooperate by forgoing independent interests and following rules that collectively promote everyone's interests better than independent pursuit. Morality is seen as a broad form of cooperation among all competent human agents.
- **Moral Principles**: Contractarianism holds that right and wrong are determined by the rules of this broadest cooperation. For example, a rule of mutual aid (helping others in need if sacrifice is not too great) might be adopted if everyone following it promotes everyone's interests more than independent action.
- **Rational Bargaining**: When multiple rules could promote everyone's interests, contractarianism defines moral principles as the **solution to a rational bargaining problem**. Starting from a "no agreement" point (where all are bound only by self-interest), parties agree to mutually advantageous principles. The resulting principles depend on who has the most to lose if no agreement is reached.
- **Application**: To assess moral obligations (e.g., rich and poor countries reducing global warming), one considers what agreement on principles would arise from a negotiation where each party attempts to advance its own interests. Parties cooperate by making necessary sacrifices, prepared to do their part as required by rationally agreeable principles.

2. Contractualism

- **Structure**: Similar to contractarianism in understanding right conduct as the object of rational agreement.
- **Key Difference**: Contractualism's agreement on principles is governed by a **moral ideal of equal respect**, rather than rational bargaining.
- **Critique of Contractarianism**:
    - Contractarianism implicitly assumes individuals have a moral claim to resources they'd have without cooperation, which seems arbitrary without a background theory of natural rights, which contractarianism cannot justify.
    - It struggles to explain how self-interested reasoning leads to actual motivation to follow rules, as following rules requires constraining self-interest and thus accepting prior moral reasons for cooperation.
- **Animating Idea (Kant and Rousseau)**:
    - Implicit in Kant's "kingdom of ends," where moral agents are also "making the law," legislating common laws they subject themselves to as free and equal members.
    - Similar to Rousseau's "general will," where laws express the will of each as a free and equal member, allowing individuals to obey only themselves while uniting with all.
- **Common Perspective**: Moral principles are not prescribed from individual self-interest, but from a **common perspective as one free and equal person among others**.
- **Rawls's "Original Position"**:

    - This perspective is concretized by John Rawls's idea of choosing principles of justice behind a **"veil of ignorance"**. Parties are ignorant of individual resources, abilities, talents, gender, race, socioeconomic position, and their own interests or individual values.
    - They are assumed to value "primary goods" necessary for pursuing interests (freedom, opportunities, wealth, social bases of self-respect).
    - Choosing from behind the veil, even if self-interested *within those constraints*, is functionally equivalent to choosing out of concern for any single other individual, thus representing the perspective of an arbitrary, free, and equal individual.
    - Rawls argues this leads to two principles: basic civil/political rights and freedoms, and the "difference principle" (fair equality of opportunity and distribution of wealth to the greatest advantage of the least advantaged). This protects against the worst possibilities by considering oneself as potentially anyone.
    - Originally a theory of justice ("justice as fairness"), Rawls later emphasized its political nature, but also suggested it could be a moral theory ("rightness as fairness") by asking what principles of individual conduct would be chosen from the original position.
- **Scanlon's Contractualism**:
    - Motivated by the idea of making claims on someone as an equal, based on reasonable needs.
    - Assumes a community whose members want to justify their conduct by principles that others could **not reasonably reject**, provided others share this aim.
    - Principles of moral right and wrong structure a mutually accountable community of equals.
    - **Application**: Requires judgments about what is "reasonable" by impartially entering into others' perspectives to see if a claim or objection is reasonable to make to an equal. Example: principles for reducing fossil fuels where developed and developing countries cannot reasonably reject the standards.

B. Consequentialism

Consequentialism begins with **non-moral values that are held to be prior to morality itself**.

- **Non-moral Value Theory**: Some things are good or bad irrespective of moral agency or character (e.g., suffering caused by an earthquake is bad, not morally wrong). These are judgments about states of affairs, not moral evaluations.
- **Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value**: Consequentialist theories start with a normative theory of which states of the world have intrinsic value or disvalue, and how these compare. These values are non-moral because they evaluate outcomes, not moral agency or character, though outcomes might *include* agency/character. For example, thinking Hitler's assassination would have been a "good thing to happen" (due to lives saved) is consistent with thinking it might have been morally wrong.
- **Determinant of Rightness/Wrongness**: All consequentialist theories agree that the **moral rightness and wrongness of acts are determined by the non-moral goodness of relevant consequences**.
- **Divisions within Consequentialism**:
    - **Different theories of non-moral value**: e.g., hedonism (pleasure as only intrinsic good) vs. preserving species/cultural treasures.
    - **Different relevant consequences**:
        - **Act-consequentialism**: Rightness of an act depends on the value of *that act's* consequences compared to other available acts.
        - **Rule-consequentialism**: Rightness of acts depends on the consequences of the *social acceptance of a rule* requiring, forbidding, or permitting the act, compared to other

possible rules.

- **Instrumental/Extrinsic Value**: All forms understand moral evaluation as an assessment of instrumental or extrinsic value at the most fundamental level. Acts, social rules, or character traits are judged by how well they promote the most valuable states.
- **Benefit Consequentialism**: Historically, consequentialism has often linked valuable outcomes to the lives of conscious beings.
    - This view, **benefit consequentialism**, posits that valuable states concern the good or welfare of some being.
    - While some perfectionists believe a being's good lies in approximating an ideal (e.g., Aristotle's human flourishing), benefit consequentialists usually hold that benefit/harm relates to mental lives (hedonistic or desire-based forms).
- **Utilitarianism**: The most popular historical form, distinguished by three features:
    1. **Benefit consequentialist**: Based on hedonistic or desire-based conceptions of benefit.
    2. **Summing values**: Non-moral value of outcomes determined by summing benefits and costs to all affected parties.
    3. **Greatest overall value**: Moral rightness of action or character depends on what produces the greatest overall value (summed).
    - **Classical Hedonistic Utilitarianism (Bentham)**: Happiness is an experienced state; people are benefited by pleasure over pain in their conscious lives.
    - **Desire-Satisfaction Utilitarianism**: Welfare determined by individual desires and preferences, even for things not directly experienced (e.g., survival of a wilderness area).
- **Broader Considerations**: Consequentialism is not limited to utilitarian or benefit-focused versions. It can include intrinsic values like knowledge, understanding, friendship, love, beauty, artistic/cultural activity, or the existence of a species. The test for moral relevance is simply whether a state of affairs positively contributes to the value instantiated in the world.
- **Scope**: This structure allows consequentialism to consider a wider range of issues than contractarianism/contractualism, including non-human interests (e.g., animals' capacity to suffer, as Bentham noted).
- **Agent-Neutrality**: A crucial feature is the **agent-neutrality of its fundamental values**. Values derive from the existence of states and justify actions to promote them, regardless of the agent's relation to those states. Example: If betrayal is intrinsically bad, then you have reason to betray your own friend if it would prevent more overall betrayals by others, even though this contradicts common moral sense about agent-relative duties.
- **Rule-Consequentialism and Agent-Relativity**: Rule-consequentialism *can* agree with common moral sense regarding agent-relative duties (e.g., not betraying friends) if establishing social practices and psychological patterns guided by such rules produces the greatest overall agent-neutral value. However, for rule-consequentialists, the ultimate reason for accepting agent-relative rules is still instrumental: they promote agent-neutral value.

C. Deontology

Deontological theories fundamentally diverge from consequentialism by holding that **what is morally right and wrong is not determined at any level by what promotes the best outcomes or states, assessed agent-neutrally**.

- **Skepticism of Agent-Neutral Values**: Deontologists may be skeptical of the very possibility of pre- or non-moral evaluations of states that are both agent-neutral and morally relevant.

- **Beyond Outcomes**: They disagree with act-consequentialism that producing good/bad outcomes is the *only* thing that makes an act right/wrong. They also disagree with rule-consequentialism that the reason for this is merely that believing it produces best outcomes.
- **Agent-Relative Principles**: Deontologists assert that at least some fundamental moral principles or ideas are **agent-relative "all the way down"**. Actions are based on reasons and principles that involve the agent's relation to various persons or beings in the outcomes they affect (e.g., harming *one's own* friends, breaking *one's own* promises).
- **Contractualism as Deontological**: Contractualism is an example of a deontological theory because it grounds moral principles in the agent-relative idea of living with others on terms of mutual respect.
- **Intuitionism**: Many deontological theories are defended directly, without grounding them in a more basic theory. These versions are historically called intuitionist, characterized by the view that there is an **irreducible plurality of different right- or wrong-making features**. Their moral relevance cannot be derived from a more fundamental principle but is confirmed by moral reflection or "intuition".
    - Examples: It can seem obvious that betrayal or a broken promise counts against an action morally. The "trolley problem" can reveal an evident moral difference between causing harm and allowing it to happen.
- **Doctrine of Double Effect**: A specific principle defended by some deontologists, stating a moral difference between causing harm as an unintended side-effect of an intended action and intending the harm directly (as an end or means). Example: bombing military targets causing civilian casualties (unintended side-effect) vs. directly killing the same number of civilians (intended harm), even for the same goal. This has been applied to abortion debates, arguing that directly intending the death of a fetus to save the mother is morally worse than a procedure that risks the fetus's death as an unintended side-effect.
- **Variety of Independent Duties/Principles** (Intuitionist list):
    1. **Duties of beneficence and non-maleficence**: Affecting the good of others is relevant, but the agent's antecedent relations matter. Harming is worse than failing to benefit; doing harm is worse than failing to prevent it; directly intending harm is worse than causing it as a side-effect.
    2. **Duties of special care**: Arise from specific caretaking relations (e.g., parents to children, doctors to patients).
    3. **Duties of honesty and fidelity**: Not lying, keeping promises, upholding contracts, and not violating trust (including in personal relationships).
    4. **Duties deriving from agents' and patients' histories of conduct**: Acknowledging fault for wrongs, offering restitution, gratitude for benefits received, and appropriate responses to merit/desert.
    5. **Duties of reciprocity and fair play**: Doing one's part in mutually advantageous cooperation, especially when accepting benefits. Contractarians/contractualists see this as fundamental, while intuitionists see it as one among many.
    6. **Further duties of justice**: From political relations (e.g., equal citizenship, supporting a just political order, establishing justice internationally).
    7. **Duties to other species**: Beyond beneficence/non-maleficence, special obligations can arise from history of interaction (e.g., pets, species cultivated for human purposes).
- **"Right is Prior to the Good"**: Both intuitionist and contractualist deontologists believe that attempts to derive rightness from agent-neutral outcome value will fail. Moral duties arise from the agent's specific place within the world, defined by complex relations to others and their histories, not from an agent-neutral observer's standpoint.
- **Interaction of Principles**: Actual cases involve complex combinations of principles.

    - **W.D. Ross's Distinction**: Between *prima facie* (or *pro tanto*) duties (holding "other things being equal") and *all things considered* duties ("sans phrase"). A *pro tanto* duty is a right- or wrong-making consideration that *would* make an action right or wrong if it were the only morally relevant feature.
    - **Weighing and Overriding**: In real cases, different duties interact. One duty might be weightier and override another (e.g., saving a life overriding a mundane promise), but the overridden duty may give rise to a **residual obligation** (e.g., compensating the promisee).
    - **Defeating**: Sometimes, one consideration can wholly defeat another, rather than just outweighing it (e.g., injustice tainting a benefit can cancel the positive reason to provide it).
- **Intuitionist Moral Reflection**: Intuitionists believe there is no substitute for carefully considering cases in their full complexity. While factoring a case into *prima facie* duties is useful, the interaction of these duties defies general formulation, requiring a reflective sense of the moral verdict they ultimately support.

D. Virtue Theory

Virtue ethics is **orthogonal** to contractarianism/contractualism, consequentialism, and deontology in two main ways:

- **Primary Concern**: It focuses primarily on **character** ("how we should be") rather than **conduct** ("what we should do").
- **Relation to Morality**: It is often advanced not as a moral theory but as an account of other, ethically deep aspects of human life, sometimes as a **rival or replacement for morality** and its distinct forms.
    - The modern concept of morality (universal, authoritative norms/laws) is seen as a secular successor to Judeo-Christian-Islamic ideas of divinely ordained law.
    - Some philosophers argue this conception is defective and that ethical reflection would be more profitable in other forms, looking to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- **Aristotle's Approach**: Instead of asking about the fundamental principle of moral right or duty, Aristotle asks, "What is the goal of human life?" or "What kind of life is best for human beings?".
- **Non-Moral Virtue Ethics (Aristotle)**:
    - "Non-moral" because it doesn't relate virtues to a concept of moral law or universal accountability as equals.
    - **Virtues (areté)**: Dispositions to choose what is **fine or noble (kalon)** for its own sake and avoid what is base. They are excellences that make something an excellent instance of its kind (e.g., sharpness in a knife).
    - **Function (ergon)**: Excellences are reckoned in relation to a thing's characteristic activity. For humans, this is action (*praxis*) expressing distinctively human choice, guided by an ideal of human excellence.
    - **Operative Ethical Emotions**: Shame, esteem, pride, disdain/contempt, rather than guilt, respect, self-respect, and moral indignation (which are more aligned with a moral law model).
- **General Non-Moral Virtue Ethics**: Any non-moral human ideal, which may or may not be tied to a teleological/perfectionist view of human nature. It can simply be a normative view of which human traits are worthy of esteem (or disdain).
- **Moral Virtue Ethics**: Focuses on traits worthy of *distinctively moral* esteem. Francis Hutcheson, for example, argued that the basic moral phenomenon is esteem for benevolence (desire to benefit others), valuing the motive/trait rather than just the outcome.
- **Bearing on Case Ethics**:

1. **Broader Ethical Questions**: Reminds us that right/wrong are not the only, or necessarily most important, ethical questions. For example, failing to aid the hungry might not be "seriously morally wrong" but could manifest vices like complacency. Clear-cutting a forest might show an inappropriate attitude, even if the environment can't be "wronged".
2. **Guidance through Exemplars**: Asks what a **virtuous person** (or someone with a specific virtue like generosity) would do in a given case. This can be a heuristic or reflect the Aristotelian view that ethical insight requires the wisdom or "sense" of the virtuous person, making it inaccessible to those who "have to ask".
3. **Defining Right Action**: Some virtue ethicists hold that an action is right or appropriate *just in case it is what the virtuous person would characteristically do* in that circumstance. While potentially departing from Aristotle's letter (where virtues are dispositions to choose noble actions), it maintains the spirit that access to appropriate action is through the wisdom of a virtuous person.

- **Limitations in Case Ethics**: Writers on case ethics look to virtue ethics less frequently for questions of *moral right and wrong*. This is because judgments of moral obligation are implicitly directive and hold others accountable, requiring **publicly articulable, action-guiding principles** that can be grasped and applied by normally competent moral agents without special virtue. This need for public justification drives the development of contractarian/contractualist, consequentialist, and deontological theories.

V. Integration of Theories

Ultimately, there is no alternative but to pursue philosophical ethics, integrating normative ethics and meta-ethics to form a comprehensive outlook.

An Introduction to Moral Philosophy and Argument

This document introduces fundamental concepts in moral philosophy, beginning with the ancient Greek idea of Gyges's ring to question why individuals should act morally when they can escape consequences. It then explores various historical ethical frameworks, including Relativism, which ties morality to social customs, and Divine Command Theory, which bases ethics on religious decrees. The text progresses to Aristotle's virtue ethics and the subsequent Natural Law theory, explaining how they connect morality to inherent purposes. Finally, it presents modern ethical theories: Social Contract Theory, which posits morality as an agreement for mutual benefit, and Utilitarianism, advocating for actions that produce the greatest happiness. The document concludes by outlining how to evaluate philosophical arguments through logical validity and factual premises, especially in the context of Moral Skepticism.

Chapter 1: A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy

The text introduces moral philosophy by posing fundamental questions about morality, its importance, justifications for acting in one way over another, and the nature of right and wrong.

- **The Challenge of Gyges's Ring**
    - **The Legend**: Gyges, a poor shepherd, finds a magic ring that grants invisibility. He uses this power to seduce the queen, murder the king, and seize the throne, swiftly transitioning from poverty to kingship.
    - **Glaucon's Point**: In Plato's *Republic*, Glaucon uses this story in a dialogue with Socrates to question the nature of morality. He asks us to imagine two such rings, one given to a virtuous

man and one to a rogue.
    - **Expected Behavior**:
        - The **rogue** would, protected by invisibility, recognize no moral constraints and pursue personal wealth and power without fear of discovery.
        - Glaucon suggests the **virtuous man** would behave no differently. Freed from fear of reprisal, he would also indulge his desires (taking goods, sleeping with whomever he chose, killing at will) and act like a god.
    - **The Question**: Glaucon then asks, why shouldn't he? Why should a person care about "morality" if freed from the fear of consequences and able to do what he pleases or what he thinks is best for himself? This challenge forms a central inquiry for moral philosophy.

- **Philosophical Theories on Morality**

    - **Relativism**

        - **Core Idea**: Perhaps the oldest philosophical theory, it posits that **right and wrong are relative to the customs of one's society**, suggesting morality is merely social convention.
        - **Herodotus's Illustration**: The Greek historian Herodotus (contemporary of Socrates) observed diverse customs, like the Massagetae tribe in Central Asia. They practiced polyandry (one wife, held in common), sacrificed the very old and ate their flesh, and buried those who died of disease as unfortunate. Herodotus believed these customs were neither better nor worse than others, just different, and that people naturally believe their own society's customs are the best.
        - **Critiques of Relativism**:
            - **Conservatism**: Critics argue that Relativism is **exceedingly conservative**, endorsing current societal moral views. This would mean reformers who disagree with dominant views (e.g., on capital punishment, homosexuality, animal treatment) would be considered wrong simply for opposing the majority.
            - **Socrates's Deeper Problem**: Socrates emphasized that while some customs are arbitrary (like funerary practices, e.g., Greeks burned, Callatians ate their dead), others are not. There can be **objective reasons why some practices are superior**. For example, honesty and respect for human life are socially desirable, while slavery and racism are undesirable. These judgments can be supported by rational arguments, moving them beyond "merely" being expressions of a society's moral code.

    - **Divine Commands**

        - **Core Idea**: Moral living consists of **obedience to divine commands**.
        - **Addressing Gyges's Ring**: This view offers a potential answer to Gyges's challenge, as even with invisibility, one would still be subject to divine retribution, thus unable to "get away with" wrongdoing.
        - **Socrates's Critique (from Plato's *Euthyphro*)**: Socrates, while accepting the existence of gods, argued this could not be the ultimate basis of ethics.
            - **Practical Difficulties**:
                - **Knowing Commands**: How does one know what gods command? Claims of divine communication can be signs of mental illness, and scripture/church

tradition are notoriously ambiguous, often supporting pre-existing moral views.
        - **Contemporary Problems**: Ancient sources offer little direct guidance for modern issues like environmental preservation or resource allocation for AIDS research.
    - **The Euthyphro Dilemma**: Socrates pointed out a deeper logical problem:
        - **Arbitrary Commands**: If gods have no reason for their commands, their instructions are arbitrary, like petty tyrants, which is an impious view for religious people to accept.
        - **Independent Standard**: If gods *do* have good reasons, then there is a **standard of rightness independent of their commands**, to which the gods themselves refer. This means the rightness or wrongness of actions is not *merely* conformity to divine prescriptions; we can always ask *why* gods command what they do.

- **Aristotle and Natural Law**

    - **Aristotle's Ethics**: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (ca. 330 BCE) was the first systematic treatise on moral philosophy. He focused on **virtues**—qualities of character (courage, prudence, generosity, honesty) necessary for human happiness. His answer to Gyges's ring was that virtue is essential for happiness, making the virtuous man ultimately better off.
    - **Aristotle's Worldview (Teleology)**: Aristotle believed **everything in nature exists for a purpose**. Examples include teeth for chewing, eyes for seeing, and rain falling for plants to grow. He saw the world as an orderly, rational system where everything serves a special purpose, forming a hierarchy where plants exist for animals, and animals exist **for the sake of people** ("stunningly anthropocentric").
    - **Natural Law (Christian Adaptation)**: Later Christian thinkers adopted Aristotle's teleological view, adding God as the Creator who intended these purposes. Rain falls to help plants because God intended it, and animals are for human use because God made them for that purpose.
        - **Ethical Consequences**: This worldview enshrined the supreme value of human life and justified human domination over nature, viewing it as the "Natural Order of Things".
        - **"Laws of Nature"**: Natural laws were seen to specify not just how things *are* but how things *ought to be*. Things serving their natural purposes are good; those that don't (e.g., decayed teeth, drought) are defective or evil.
        - **Moral Rules**: Some human behaviors are "natural" (e.g., beneficence because we are social creatures), while "unnatural" acts are wrong. For instance, the purpose of sex organs is procreation, leading the Christian church to traditionally regard any non-procreative sexual activity (masturbation, gay sex, contraception) as "contrary to nature" and impermissible.
        - **Aquinas**: Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) fully developed Natural Law Theory, but its reliance on the Aristotelian worldview means it has few adherents outside the Catholic Church today.
    - **Decline of Natural Law**: The rise of modern science (Galileo, Newton, Darwin) replaced the Aristotelian worldview. Scientists explained natural phenomena without "evaluative

notions" or inherent purposes. Rain has no purpose; species evolve in environments where water is available. This outlook, which the Catholic Church condemned, removed intrinsic value and purpose from the natural world.

- **Hume's Conclusion**: David Hume (18th century) articulated the moral implications, stating that right and wrong could no longer be deduced from the nature of things. He concluded there are "no moral facts," and that "the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster," seeing vice as merely a "sentiment of [disapproval]" within us, not an objective fact in the world.

- **The Social Contract**

  - **Context**: With divine commands and natural purposes discarded, ethics needed a purely human basis, stemming from human needs, interests, and desires. This became the main project of moral philosophy from the 17th century onwards.
  - **Thomas Hobbes's View**: Hobbes (17th century English philosopher) proposed a secular, naturalistic basis for ethics. He believed "good" and "bad" are simply names for what we like and dislike, but fundamentally, we are all **self-interested creatures wanting to live and live well**.
  - **Origin of Ethics**: Ethics arises from the realization that living in a **mutually cooperative society** makes individuals enormously better off than if they were alone. Social cooperation provides benefits like schools, hospitals, infrastructure, technology, culture, science, and agriculture.
  - **Rules of Behavior**: To achieve these benefits, a cooperative society requires adopting specific rules: telling the truth, keeping promises, respecting lives and property. Without these, communication, the economy, and security would collapse.
  - **The Social Contract Defined**: Morality is thus a bargain: individuals agree to obey these rules for their mutual benefit, *provided others do likewise*. Mechanisms (legal sanctions, informal enforcement) are needed to ensure compliance. Morality is **"the set of rules that rational people will agree to obey, for their mutual benefit, provided that other people will obey them as well"**.
  - **Appealing Features**:
    - **Practical**: It demystifies ethics, making it a practical, down-to-earth matter of making social living possible.
    - **Answers Gyges (Partially)**: It explains why we should care about ethics—it's to our advantage to live in a moral society. Accepting moral restrictions is a rational bargain; we benefit from others' ethical conduct, and our compliance is the price for theirs.
    - **Sensible Duties**: The purpose of morality is social cooperation, not restricting personal lives (e.g., bedroom activities), which the theory would have little interest in.
    - **Minimal Assumptions**: It treats humans as self-interested and does not assume natural altruism. It shows how moral obligations, including often acting altruistically, arise from banding together for this fundamentally self-interested goal.
  - **Critique (Altruism and Self-Interest)**: While the Social Contract Theory has supporters, many philosophers question Hobbes's purely egoistic view of human nature. Humans appear to have some **altruistic feelings** (for family, friends), having evolved as social

creatures. Hume argued that our moral opinions are expressions of "social sentiments" that connect us to others' welfare, leading us to measure right and wrong by "the true interests of mankind". This idea led to Utilitarianism.

- **Utilitarianism**
  - **Core Principle**: Utilitarians believe all moral duties can be summed up in one precept: **"we should always do whatever will produce the greatest possible balance of happiness over unhappiness for everyone who will be affected by our action"**. This is the "principle of utility".
  - **Three Key Ideas**:
    - **Consequentialism**: Guided by the **expected consequences** of actions; do whatever has the best consequences.
    - **Happiness Focus**: The best consequences are those that cause the **most happiness or least unhappiness**.
    - **Impartiality**: **Each individual's happiness is equally as important as anyone else's**.
  - **Key Figures**:
    - **Jeremy Bentham** (late 18th/early 19th century): Led philosophical radicals to reform British laws along utilitarian lines, successful in prison reform and restricting child labor.
    - **John Stuart Mill** (1861): Gave the theory its most popular and influential defense in *Utilitarianism*.
  - **Controversial and Subversive Aspects**:
    - **"Godless Doctrine"**: Ignored conventional religious notions, focusing on making life in *this* world happy. Mill countered that if God desires the happiness of his creatures, Utilitarianism is profoundly religious.
    - **Criminal Justice**: Bentham argued punishment should identify causes of crime, reform lawbreakers, and deter others, not "pay back" wrongdoers.
    - **Equality**: By insisting on equal importance for everyone's happiness, Utilitarians challenged elitist notions (race, sex, social class), exemplified by Mill's *The Subjection of Women*.
    - **No Absolute Rules**: Traditional rules (against killing, lying, promise-breaking) are seen as "rules of thumb" useful *generally*, but not absolute. They should be broken if doing so yields better overall results (e.g., voluntary euthanasia for painful illness). Some traditional rules (like condemnation of masturbation or homosexuality) are viewed as dubious or harmful by Utilitarians if they cause misery without harming others.
  - **Justification (Mill)**: Why promote general happiness? Aside from "external sanctions" (law, public opinion), Mill argued the "internal sanction" is **"a feeling in our minds,"** specifically the "social feelings of mankind"—the desire to be in unity with fellow creatures—which strengthens with advancing civilization.

- **Impartiality: Social Contract vs. Utilitarianism**
  - **Similarities**: Both theories have similar implications for many practical matters (punishment, racial discrimination, women's rights, euthanasia, homosexuality).
  - **Key Difference: Duty to Help Strangers**:

- **Utilitarianism**: Requires an **extensive moral duty to help other people**. For example, spending $1000 on UNICEF for medicine for dozens of children instead of a new carpet, because the medicine provides far greater utility (happiness/unhappiness balance).
- **Social Contract**: Denies an extensive duty to help strangers. Based on self-interest, rational people would agree not to harm strangers and perhaps offer easy aid, but not a general, virtually unlimited duty that comes at great personal cost.
- **Jan Narveson (Contract Theorist)**: Argues that morals are agreements among people pursuing their own interests, which don't necessarily include much concern for others. We agree not to harm and to respect property, but not to go "very far out of our way to be very helpful to those we don't know and may not particularly care for". He uses the example of choosing a daughter's birthday party over saving a dozen strangers, stating that "people do not 'count equally'" for most, and normal people prioritize those they care for.
- **Mill's Rebuttal**: While acknowledging personal feelings, Mill argues that "conscientious feelings"—those that prevail after thoughtful reflection—should determine obligations. He assumes we cannot, reflectively, choose a trivial personal benefit (like a party) over saving many lives.
- **Peter Singer (Contemporary Utilitarian)**: Argues that reason leads to impartiality. We can see ourselves as "just one being among others, with interests and desires like others." From "the point of view of the universe," our personal perspective (prioritizing self, family, friends) is no more privileged than anyone else's. Reason allows us to detach from our personal perspective and acknowledge that our needs and interests are comparable to others, justifying no special status for our own.

- **Kant**

  - **Core Idea**: Immanuel Kant's system of ethics (18th century German philosopher) sees morality as a product of **"pure reason,"** not divine commands or "moral facts". Moral law is binding on us because of our reason, just as some actions are binding due to desires.
  - **Categorical Imperative**: Kant believed morality could be summed up in one ultimate principle, but unlike Utilitarianism, he **did not emphasize the outcomes of actions**. What mattered was "doing one's duty," which is not determined by calculating consequences. He offered two formulations:
    - **First Formulation (Universal Law)**: **"Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"**.
      - **Procedure**: When considering an action, ask what rule (maxim) you would be following. Then, ask if you would be willing for *everyone* to follow that rule *all the time*. If yes, the act is permissible; if no, it is morally impermissible.
      - **Rationality and Consistency**: The moral law binds us due to rationality, which requires consistency. Acting on a maxim you wouldn't want universally adopted is inconsistent. This leads Kant to endorse **absolute prohibitions** with no exceptions, such as against lying or suicide.
    - **Second Formulation (Humanity as an End)**: **"So act that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as means only"**.

        - **Treating as Means vs. Ends**: To treat someone "as a means" is to manipulate them for your own goals. For example, making a false promise to get money uses a friend as a means. To treat someone "as an end" means to respect their rationality and autonomy. If you told your friend the truth about your inability to repay, they could freely choose whether to help, making your purpose their own if they decide to give the money.

Chapter 2: Some Basic Points about Arguments

Evaluating philosophical ideas requires examining the arguments that support them. A theory is acceptable only if there are **sound arguments** in its favor.

- **Definition of an Argument (Logician's Sense)**
    - An argument is a **chain of reasoning designed to prove something**. It consists of one or more **premises** and a **conclusion**, with the claim that the conclusion follows from the premises.
    - **Example**: (1) All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal. (Premises: first two statements; Conclusion: third statement).
- **Validity**
    - A conclusion "follows from" premises (an argument is **valid**) if, and only if, **it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false at the same time**.
    - Example (1) is valid: If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, Socrates *must* be mortal.
    - An argument can be valid even if its premises are not actually true. Example: (2) All people from Georgia are famous. Jimmy Carter is from Georgia. Therefore, Jimmy Carter is famous. (This is valid, but the first premise is false).
- **Soundness**
    - An argument is **sound** if and only if **it is valid AND its premises are true**.
    - Example (1) (Socrates) is sound.
    - Example (2) (Jimmy Carter) is not sound because, while valid, its first premise is false.
    - An argument can be unsound even if its premises and conclusion are all true, if the conclusion does not logically follow from the premises (i.e., it's invalid). Example: (3) The earth has one moon. John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Therefore, snow is white. (All true statements, but the conclusion doesn't follow).
- **Evaluating Arguments**: When evaluating an argument, one must ask two separate questions: **Are the premises true?** and **Does the conclusion follow from them?**.
- **Moral Skepticism and its Arguments**
    - **Definition**: Moral Skepticism is the idea that **there is no such thing as objective moral truth**. Morality is subjective, a matter of opinion, and values exist only in our minds.
    - **The Cultural Differences Argument (CDA)**:
        - **Premises**: In some societies (e.g., Eskimos), infanticide is acceptable; in others (e.g., our own), it is odious.

        - **Conclusion**: Therefore, infanticide is neither objectively right nor wrong; it's merely a matter of opinion that varies by culture.
        - **Critique**: This argument is **not valid**. The conclusion concerns what *is* true, but the premises only state what people *believe*. From the mere fact of different beliefs, it does not follow that there is no truth in the matter. People (or whole societies) can be mistaken (e.g., believing the earth is flat doesn't mean it's objectively shapeless).
        - **Common Mistakes to Avoid**:
            - **Rejecting an argument doesn't mean its conclusion is false**: An unsound argument merely fails to provide *support* for its conclusion; the conclusion might still be true for other reasons.
            - **Confusing arguments**: The CDA is distinct from arguments about "provability" in ethics. Different premises make different arguments.

    - **The Provability Argument**:

        - **Premises**: (1) If objective truth in ethics existed, we could prove moral opinions true/false. (2) We cannot prove moral opinions true/false.
        - **Conclusion**: Therefore, there is no such thing as objective truth in ethics.
        - **Critique**: The conclusion seems to follow from the premises, but the **second premise (that moral judgments cannot be proven) is questionable**.
            - **Counter-examples**: We often *can* give good reasons to back up ethical judgments, proving them correct. For instance, a student can prove a test was unfair by pointing out its length, focus on trivial matters, or inclusion of un-covered material. Similarly, one can prove someone is a "bad man" or "irresponsible" with supporting evidence of their actions.
            - **Reasons for Misconception**:
                - **Focus on Difficult Issues**: People tend to focus only on highly complex moral dilemmas like abortion, making "proof" seem impossible. Simpler moral matters often have widely agreed-upon proofs.
                - **Confusing Proof with Persuasion**: It's easy to confuse *proving* an opinion to be correct with *persuading* someone to accept that proof. A proof can be impeccable, but the other person might be stubborn or unreasonable, which doesn't invalidate the argument itself.

- **Overall Conclusion on Arguments**: The main arguments for Moral Skepticism discussed are not sound. To evaluate philosophical ideas, always consider the reasons for and against them, distinguishing sound arguments (valid with true premises) from unsound ones.