

# **Basic Philosophical & Applied Ethics**

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# Philosophical Ethics

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- Consequentialism
  - Deontology
  - (Virtue Ethics)
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# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Consequentialism**
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# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Consequentialism**
  - the *value* of an action (the action's moral worth, its rightness or wrongness) derives entirely from its consequences
  - to evaluate an action, look at its consequences; if they are "good" (or the best possible), then the action is right; if the consequences are "bad", then the action is wrong



# Philosophical Ethics

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- Consequentialism
  - “maximizing” strategy: trying to get the GREATEST benefit for the GREATEST number
  - Even if 2 options will both produce good outcomes, the morally right choice is the one that will generate the *best possible* outcome

# Philosophical Ethics

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## ■ Consequentialism

- no action is wrong in and of itself or “in principle”; e.g., lying is wrong because the world will be worse off if it generally takes place (though in specific cases, it might be morally correct)
- can't argue that slavery or torture or the killing of animals for fun is wrong if the consequences aren't negative/bad in a certain situation

# Philosophical Ethics

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## ■ Consequentialism

- if it will bring about more good to kill an innocent person (maybe 5 other innocent people will be saved), then killing that innocent person is right/good
- Rarely comes to this: usually following everyday moral rules generates better consequences, but if following the rules doesn't generate better results, break them....

# Philosophical Ethics

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- Consequentialism

- Different accounts of *what* is to be maximized:
    - ❖ Welfare
    - ❖ Well-being
    - ❖ Happiness
    - ❖ Pleasure
    - ❖ **Utility**
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# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Consequentialism**

- **Utilitarianism**

- ❖ Articulated: Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)
    - ❖ Goal: the greatest utility for the greatest number
    - ❖ Units to measure utility: “utils”
    - ❖ Metaphor to compare the good of one option over another

# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Consequentialism**
    - **Modern-Day Bioethicists**
      - ❖ Peter Singer, Arthur Caplan
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# Philosophical Ethics

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## ■ Consequentialism

- The interests/preferences/suffering/pleasures of individuals (both human beings *and* animals) count in the moral calculus, but can be compared and contrasted
- We can assign different value to different entities, even of the same species
- Child whose future work will cure cancer > Child who will become a serial killer

# Philosophical Ethics

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## ■ Consequentialism

### ❖ Famous Thought Experiment:

LIFE BOAT: has 4 spots, who do you pick?

- Rescue dog
- 90-year old man with severe dementia
- Healthy 1 year old child
- Chimpanzee
- 40-year-old scientist
- 35-year-old woman with Down's Syndrome

### ❖ Can coherently debate this



# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Consequentialism: Strengths**
    - “Simplicity”: stream-lined, straightforward strategy for assessing action
      - Elegance, clarity
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# Philosophical Ethics

- **Consequentialism: Strengths**
  - Intuitive in Hard Cases:
    - If you had to kill 100 person to save 6 billion...
    - If you had to make 1000 mice suffer to cure cancer...
    - If you had to torture 5 people to stop a war that would harm thousands...

# Philosophical Ethics

- **Consequentialism: Issues**
  - “Nuanced Consequentialism”: looking at wide-ranging effects of outcome, beyond immediate set of actors and short-term consequences to the long-term, wider impact
  - But how far out in time and scope are we obligated to look?
    - Example: war (to decide whether it was justified, do you consider merely the years it was fought? 10 years later? Any good that could plausibly be argued to have come from it in, say, 100yrs?)

# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Consequentialism: Issues**
  - “Demandingness”: If the right action is the one that has the greatest benefit for the greatest number, then can't most of our actions be ruthlessly scrutinized or judged for their impact?
  - Especially problematic in the realm of charity: the cup of coffee I just bought, the amount of money I choose to give, the volunteer work I do...Is it ever enough?

# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Consequentialism: Issues**
  - “Nothing is Off-Limits”: Nothing that a consequentialist will take off the Options-List
  - Torture, Assassination, Killing of Innocents, Betrayal, War, Stealing, Lying – all “in-bounds” if the outcomes would be beneficial enough...

# Philosophical Ethics

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- Consequentialism
  - **Deontology**
  - (Virtue Ethics)
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# Philosophical Ethics

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## ■ Deontology

- From Greek “*deontos*”: what must be done, duty
- actions are right or wrong based on the obligations or duties we have to each other
- assess action by whether it conforms to a:
  - ❖ Duty
  - ❖ Principle
  - ❖ Obligation
  - ❖ Moral Consideration

# Philosophical Ethics

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- Deontology
  - Articulated by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
  - All human beings have infinite worth that stems from our ability to act morally
  - Morality is what separates human beings from animals (at least we *think* we are the only ones with morality!)
  - “Infinite value” = no human beings can be traded off for others (re: consequentialism, where individuals have a high, but finite value)



# Philosophical Ethics

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- Deontology

- One central principle that generates ALL of the others:

- ❖ Categorical Imperative:

Act in a way that your action could become a universal law of nature.

(“Do unto others...”)

# Philosophical Ethics

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- Deontology

- “Thou shalt not’s”:
  - ❖ Prohibitions against:
    - ❖ Killing
    - ❖ Stealing
    - ❖ Lying
    - ❖ Cheating
    - ❖ Torture
    - ❖ Betrayal

# Philosophical Ethics

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- Deontology

- “Thou shalt’s”:

- ❖ Duties *to*:

- ❖ Help Others

- ❖ Respect Oneself

- ❖ Respect Others

- ❖ Develop Talents

- ❖ (Virtue Theory adds) *Be*: Just, Kind, Generous, Tenacious, Courageous, Empathic, Reliable, Compassionate...

# Philosophical Ethics

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## ■ Deontology

- Core duties as “universals”: in all times and all places
- Actions judged by whether or not they “conform” to this set of duties or principles
- Example:
  - If I do x, will that be consistent with the prohibition against...
  - If I do y, will that be consistent with the obligation to...

# Philosophical Ethics

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## ■ Deontology

- Many actions are simply “off the table” in principle (e.g., slavery, killing of innocents, betraying a friend) *even if* the on-balance consequences would be good
- In fact, sometimes the consequences would be much better if a principle *were* violated, but that doesn't make it morally right
  - If an experiment on 100 people without their consent would produce a cure for HIV/AIDS...

# Philosophical Ethics

- Deontology: Strengths
  - Explains Moral Consistency Across Cultures:
    - Basic moral tenets have been remarkably consistent across time (e.g., prohibition against random killing of innocents, prohibition against taking others' possessions, obligations to offspring)
    - Variations in how principles are applied and who counts
    - Variations in “new” principles and some shifting in priority across different cultures
    - **NEVERTHELESS:** consistency in the basics

# Philosophical Ethics

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- Deontology: Strengths
    - Un-Yielding in Tough Cases:
      - Stands its ground when a better consequence would tempt the violation of a principle (e.g., doesn't sacrifice some people's interests for others)
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# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Deontology: Issues**
    - Un-Yielding in Tough Cases:
      - Seems cowardly or rigid when some sacrifices would save many lives
      - “Dirty Hands” Problem
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# Philosophical Ethics

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- Deontology : Issues
  - “Avoids Demandingness”: Because it is not a maximizing strategy, it is typically an “easier” moral system
  - E.G., “Help Others” can be discharged in many different ways; no obligation to do the “most” one can do for other people

# Philosophical Ethics

- Deontology : Issues
  - “Animal Problem”: Because only human beings have infinite worth (because they are moral), it hard to know what our obligations are to animals. Why care about them?
  - Kant tried to argue that cruelty to animals debases people (and surely it does), but is that ALL that’s wrong with hurting other living beings?

# Philosophical Ethics

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- Deontology : Issues
  - “Conflicting Duties”: What should be done when 2 duties conflict?
  - E.G., “Nazi at the Door”: should you tell the truth (you are hiding a Jew in your home) or should you protect innocent life?
  - E.G., “Defend Country or Take Care of Ailing Mother”

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# Philosophical Ethics

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- Consequentialism
  - Deontology
  - **(Virtue Ethics)**
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# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Virtue Ethics**

- Used to be thought of as a “third” way; now really thought of as a part of deontology
  - Flagged a rich set of obligations that deontologists had missed
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# Philosophical Ethics

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## ■ Virtue Ethics

- First articulated by Aristotle (384-322 BCE)
- Central Question: *how ought I to live?*
- Goal: to live according to the virtues because through virtues, human beings flourish
- a virtuous act: the right act at the right time for the right reason
- Cultivate virtues, try to rid oneself of vices

# Philosophical Ethics

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- Deontology

- “Thou shalt’s”:

- ❖ Duties *to*:

- ❖ Help Others
      - ❖ Respect Oneself
      - ❖ Respect Others
      - ❖ Develop Talents

- ❖ (**Virtue Theory adds**) ***Be*: Just, Kind, Generous, Tenacious, Courageous, Empathic, Reliable, Compassionate...**



# Philosophical Ethics

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- Virtue Ethics

- VICES

- ❖ Cowardice
    - ❖ Intemperance
    - ❖ Light-Mindedness
    - ❖ Cruelty
    - ❖ Self-Centeredness
    - ❖ Selfishness
    - ❖ Insensitivity

# Philosophical Ethics

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- **Virtue Ethics**

- Deontologists have incorporated these obligations as:

- ❖ Be just
- ❖ Avoid Intemperance
- ❖ Be honest
- ❖ Avoid Cruelty
- ❖ Avoid Selfishness
- ❖ Be generous.....

# Neuroethics “cases”

- Joe is a first-year student at a competitive Ivy League university and is struggling to keep up with his school work. Many of his dorm-mates are using Adderall a few times a month to intensify and prolong their focus while studying and completing assignments. Adderall is easy to get from sellers who have prescriptions. Should Joe procure some of the drug?

# □ **Neuroethics “cases”**

- Susan’s husband suspects her of having an affair and asks her to undergo fMRI lie detection testing at No-Lie MRI. In laboratory testing, the accuracy of these tests has reached 90%. This success rate has not been proven in real-life usage. What are the ethical implications for Susan and her husband if she agrees or disagrees to have this test?

