

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
 Department of Philosophy

Overview of Ethics

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Remember...

- Core philosophical skills
 - Argument
 - Thesis
 - Exegesis
 - Style



Don't forget the core skills

What is ethics?



Ethical theory

- Components
 - Values (descriptive)
 - What is the good?
 - Ranking by goodness
 - Obligations (prescriptive)
 - What should we do?
 - How should we act?
- Ethical theories
 - Non-consequentialist: nature of acts/agents
 - Virtue ethics
 - Rule following
 - Rights / duties
 - Consequentialist: nature of outcomes
 - Utilitarianism

Ethical disagreements


- Values
 - Between theories
 - How much does happiness matter?
 - Within theories
 - What is happiness anyway?
- Obligations
 - Between theories
 - Do rules matter more than good character?
 - Within theories
 - What are the rules / virtues?
- Facts
 - What are the likely results of an act?
 - How risky is genetic modification?
 - Will allowing euthanasia lead to devaluing human life?

**Consequentialist:
John Stewart Mill**

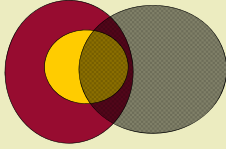
- "It is better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied"
- What is the good?
 - Pleasure; the higher the better
- What should we do?
 - Maximize the good



Deontologist:
Immanuel Kant

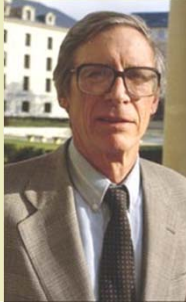


- "Treat **humanity**, in every case, as an **end in itself**, never as a **means only**."

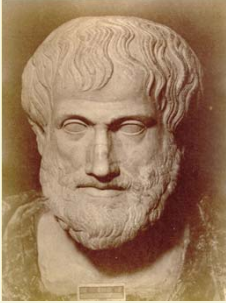


Contractarian:
John Rawls

- "The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance."
- Two principles of justice
 - First:
 - "Most extensive... liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others."
 - Second: Inequalities must...
 - Be "to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged"
 - Be "attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity."



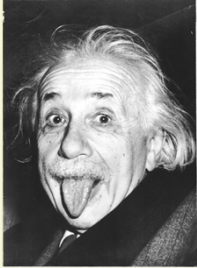
Virtue ethicist:
Aristotle




- "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim."
- What is the good?
 - Fulfilling proper purpose
- What should we do?
 - Develop character
 - Right action follows

What's wrong with relativism?

Don't panic!
Relativity is just fine.



Mixing & matching theories



Horses designed by a committee

- Helpful
 - Different views
 - Different insights
- Problematic
 - Inconsistent
 - Unprincipled
 - Ad hockery

Beware!

- Facts & values
 - Facts: 2+2=4
Malaria kills people
 - Values: Cats are cute
Pain is bad
- Is & ought
 - Is: what is
 - Ought: what should be

