



# Data Ethics: Philosophical Bases

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## Sources of inspiration

- ▶ Coursera MOOC from the University of Geneva (2018): *Le Bien, le Juste, l'Utile. Introduction aux éthiques philosophiques*
- ▶ *Ethical IT Innovation* (2016). S. Spiekermann. CRC Press.
- ▶ *L'éthique aux interfaces entre biologie/santé et sciences de l'information* (2016). H. Chneiweiss. (with his approval)
- ▶ Wikipedia

## The Question Behind

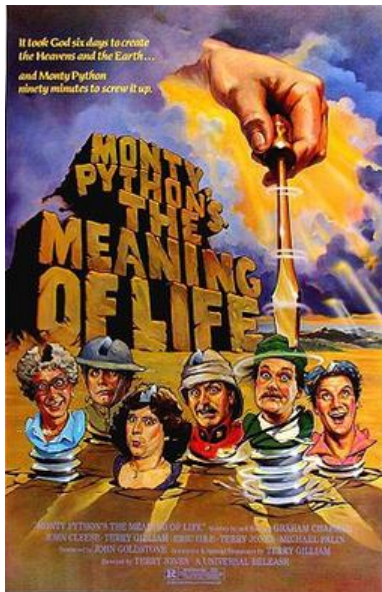
Virtue Ethics

Deontological (duty) Ethics

Utilitarianism

Applying ethics

To finish



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# What is a good life?



How humans should best live (to achieve this **good** life)

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**Virtue Ethics**

Origins

Principles

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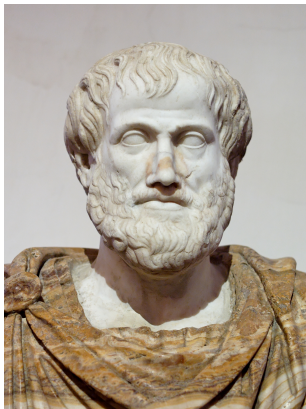
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# Aristotle (384–322 BC)



After Lysippos - Jastrow (2006)

Work on ethics

Nicomachean Ethics



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# Ethics is about happiness, feeling good

Which "good"?

- ▶ each (intermediary) good (pleasure, money, etc) is linked to another
- ▶ except the **sovereign good**: supreme good, not linked to another

Inspired by nature (proper function of a being):

- ▶ plants: a good life is to grow, to produce fruits
- ▶ dogs: satisfaction of senses
- ▶ specific for human: choose our life and the goal of our life (**practical reason**)

⇒ thinking in terms of being a "good" person

## Ethics is about action (not theory)

Do the best thing, make the best choices: a virtuous man is a virtuoso (perfectionism)

To achieve this:

- ▶ exercise being virtuous
- ▶ be surrounded by virtuous persons

Main virtue = PRUDENCE (not too much, not too little: middle ground)

# A bit further

All our activities are about ethics

Importance of:

- ▶ education (role models)
- ▶ (real) friendship (we are social beings)
- ▶ justice
- ▶ politics

## A bit further

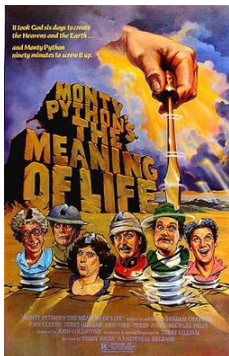
All our activities are about ethics

Importance of:

- ▶ education (role models)
- ▶ (real) friendship (we are social beings)
- ▶ justice
- ▶ politics

Limits/risks:

- ▶ list of virtues contingent to his time
- ▶ prudence is not science



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Is happiness our goal in life?

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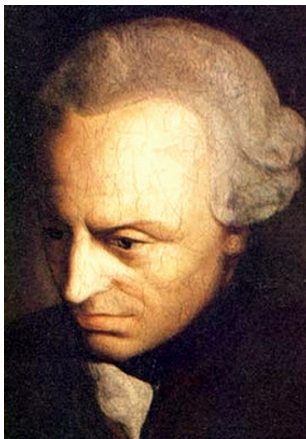
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# Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)



Work on ethics

Critique of Pure Reason

Critique of Practical Reason

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# The Imperative of the Practical Reason

Inflexible order of nature → to be really **free** I have to reason (practically) and act accordingly, without being the slave of my passions

- ▶ submission to duty (internal law: wanting to do good) elevates us (perfectionism)
- ▶ test: universalization (care for others)

⇒ thinking in terms of the "right" action

# Parenthesis on Government

For Kant, 4 kinds of government (Wikipedia)

1. Law and freedom without force
2. Law and force without freedom
3. Force without freedom and law
4. Force with freedom and law

# Parenthesis on Government

For Kant, 4 kinds of government (Wikipedia)

1. Law and freedom without force: [anarchy](#)
2. Law and force without freedom
3. Force without freedom and law
4. Force with freedom and law

# Parenthesis on Government

For Kant, 4 kinds of government (Wikipedia)

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2. Law and force without freedom: [despotism](#)
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1. Law and freedom without force: [anarchy](#)
2. Law and force without freedom: [despotism](#)
3. Force without freedom and law: [barbarism](#)
4. Force with freedom and law: [republic](#)



# Kant's ethics

- ▶ Perfectionist: the human being should aim at being better
- ▶ Moral principle is a priori and **absolute** ("you shall not kill/steal")

# Contemporary Deontological Ethics

Opening towards two dimensions:

- ▶ Jürgen Habermas (1929-): open to other people (intra-generational ethics)
  - ▶ discourse ethics: a respectful, symmetric, authentic discussion with all concerned will generate the best solution
- ▶ Hans Jonas (1903-1993): open to other generations (inter-generational ethics)
  - ▶ ethics of responsibility: preserve what is fragile and vulnerable
  - precautionary principle

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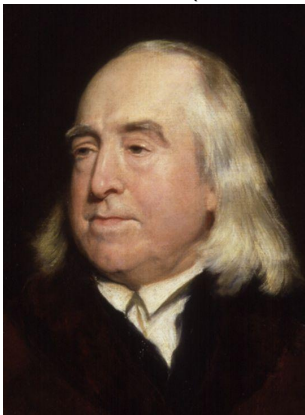
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## Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

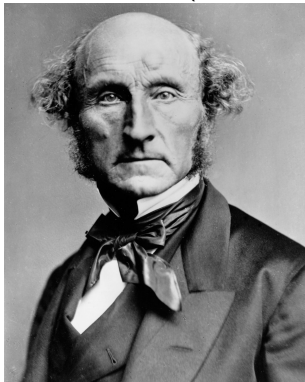


By Henry William Pickersgill

Work on ethics

The Principles of Morals and  
Legislation

## John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)



London Stereoscopic Company - Hulton Archive

Work on ethics

Essay on Bentham

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# Bentham's Utilitarianism

Scientific, truly altruistic, method:

- ▶ observation of human behaviours: they want **pleasure**
- ▶ counting positive and negative points (money) for each decision to be made
- ▶ **each person counts for 1** (nobody matters more than the others, even the agent)

⇒ maximize pleasure for a maximum of persons (beings)

⇒ **no** perfectionism

⇒ thinking in terms of the consequences of an action

# Mill's Utilitarianism

Maximize **happiness** (not pleasure)

Adds **virtue** as part of happiness (hierarchy in pleasures)



# Contemporary Utilitarianism: consequentialism

Only consequences matter

Criteria: satisfaction of preferences, well-being, still not moral

But no more calculus

Which consequences matter?

- ▶ everybody counts for 1: problem (1 person can be killed to save more)
- ▶ average vs addition, negative?
- ▶ of each act, for the agent (if the agent kill 1 person it has really negative effects on the agent)
- ▶ virtues with good consequences (virtue consequentialism)

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**Applying ethics**

A classic dilemma

Results

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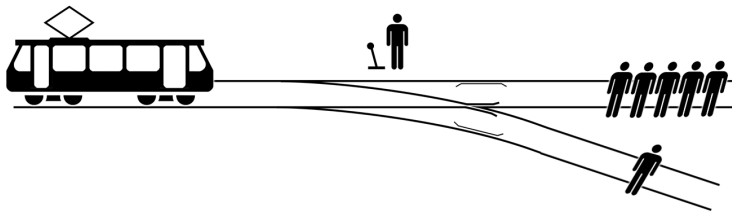
**Applying ethics**

A classic dilemma

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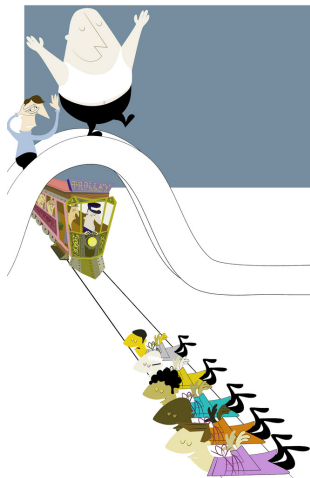
# The (classic) trolley problem [P. Foot, 1967]



By McGeddon - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0

# The (classic) trolley problem

## The fat man variant



By John Holbo, CC BY-NC 2.0

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# An Experiment [J. Greene]

Trolley dilemma votes:

- ▶ 90% of the persons would activate the shift (distant action)

# An Experiment [J. Greene]

Trolley dilemma votes:

- ▶ 90% of the persons would activate the shift (distant action)
- ▶ 10% would push the fat man (direct and immediate)



# A Neuroscientific Experiment [J. Greene]

Brain imaging:

- ▶ normal case: some zones of the brain activated
- ▶ fat man case: other zones of the brain activated

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WYHTR: What You Have To Remember

A bit of work



- ▶ ethics of virtue
- ▶ deontological ethics
- ▶ consequentialist ethics

## A bit of reading

Read, annotate and comment

the Menlo report [Dittrich and Kenneally, 2012]



Dittrich, D. and Kenneally, E. (2012).

The Menlo Report: Ethical Principles Guiding Information and Communication Technology Research.

Technical report, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.