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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*
- edX MOOC from the University of Michigan (2018): *Data Science Ethics*
- *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)
- *L'éthique appliquée* (2010). M. Marzano. PUF
- Wikipedia

The Question Behind

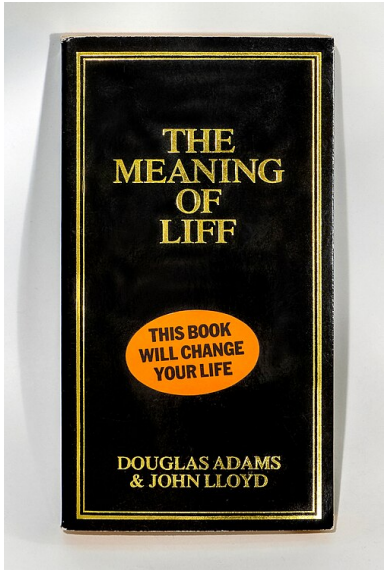
Virtue Ethics

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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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)

$\Rightarrow$ 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 to 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:

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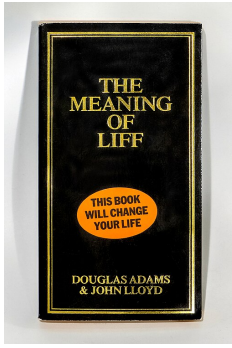
Limits/risks:

- 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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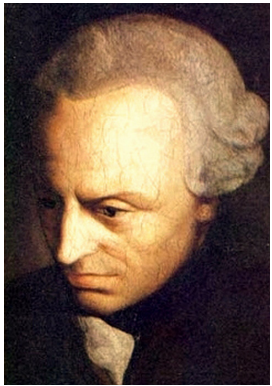
Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)



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 $\rightarrow$ 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)

$\Rightarrow$ thinking in terms of the "right" action

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, symetric, 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

  $\rightarrow$ precautionary principle

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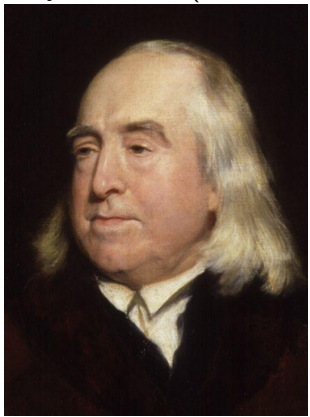
Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

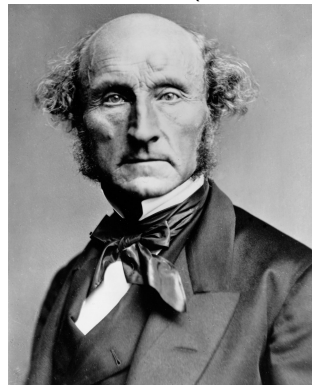


By Henry William Pickersgill

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)

$\Rightarrow$ maximize pleasure for a maximum of persons (beings)
$\Rightarrow$ no perfectionism

$\Rightarrow$ 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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- Results

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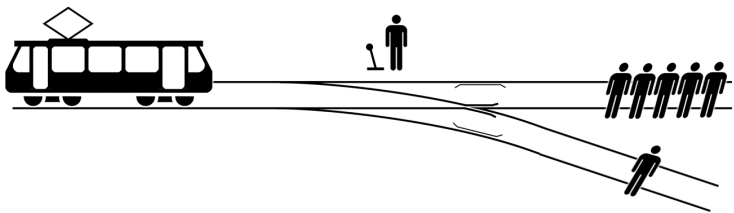
The (classic) trolley problem [P. Foot, 1967]



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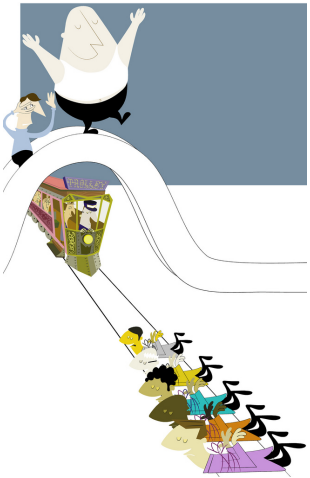
The (classic) trolley problem

The fat man variant



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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

- ethics of virtue
- deontological ethics
- consequentialist ethics

A bit of thinking

Should we use the medical research results obtained in the concentration camps during the Second World War?

- what questions should you ask yourself?
- what do you need to answer them?

https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199005173222006