

4. Ethics

The Euthryphro Argument

- Socrates asked: do the gods love an act because it is good, or is an act good because the god's love it.

The Euthryphro Argument

- **Divine Command Theory:** The view that an act is good if and only if God loves or requires it.
- Most (but not all) philosophers consider divine command theory absurd, because it means any act (no matter how bad you and I find it) would be good if God so decided.
- (Also, of course, some philosophers believe that divine command theory is false because they believe there is no god.)

The Euthryphro Argument

- If we reject divine command theory, then the value of the good is independent of God's will.
- If we reject divine command theory, we can study ethics independently of theology.
- This does not mean that one might not believe that the good is derived from the way that god built the universe.



FREE PARKING

HENTOCO AVENUE
M200

CHANCE

KENDRA AVENUE
M200

LUNDA AVENUE
M200

B & O BARBOUR

ATHLETIC
M200

KENDRA AVENUE
M200

SICK RIVER

MADRID AVENUE
M200

GO TO JAIL

NEW YORK AVENUE
M400

TENNESSEE AVENUE
M400

COMMUNITY CHEST

ST. JAMES PLACE
M160

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

VIRGINIA AVENUE
M160

STATES AVENUE
M160

ELECTRIC COMPANY

ST. CHARLES PLACE
M160



Fast-Dealing Property Trading Game
MONOPOLY



PACIFIC AVENUE
M300

NORTH CAROLINA AVENUE
M300

COMMUNITY CHEST

PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE
M160

SHORT LINE

CHANCE

RAIL PLACE
M160

LUXURY TAX

BOARDWALK
M400

JUST VISITING

CONNECTICUT AVENUE
M160

CHANCE

OREGON AVENUE
M160

READING RAILROAD

INCOME TAX

BALTIMORE AVENUE
M160

COMMUNITY CHEST

MEDITERRANEAN AVENUE
M160

GO

© 2010 Hasbro Gaming. All rights reserved. The design of the game board, the name of the game, and the characters are trademarks of Hasbro Gaming. The name of the game and the characters are registered trademarks of Hasbro Gaming. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Hasbro Gaming is a registered trademark of Hasbro Gaming. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

Ethics

We can think of an ethical theory as combining two elements:

- **A value theory.** This tells us what is good, what has value. The old term for this was “axiology.”
- **A decision theory.** This tells us how to make decisions, based on our value theory.

You are now philosophers, and will avoid these common mistakes

Before we start ethics, be aware of two problems that plague discussions of ethics.

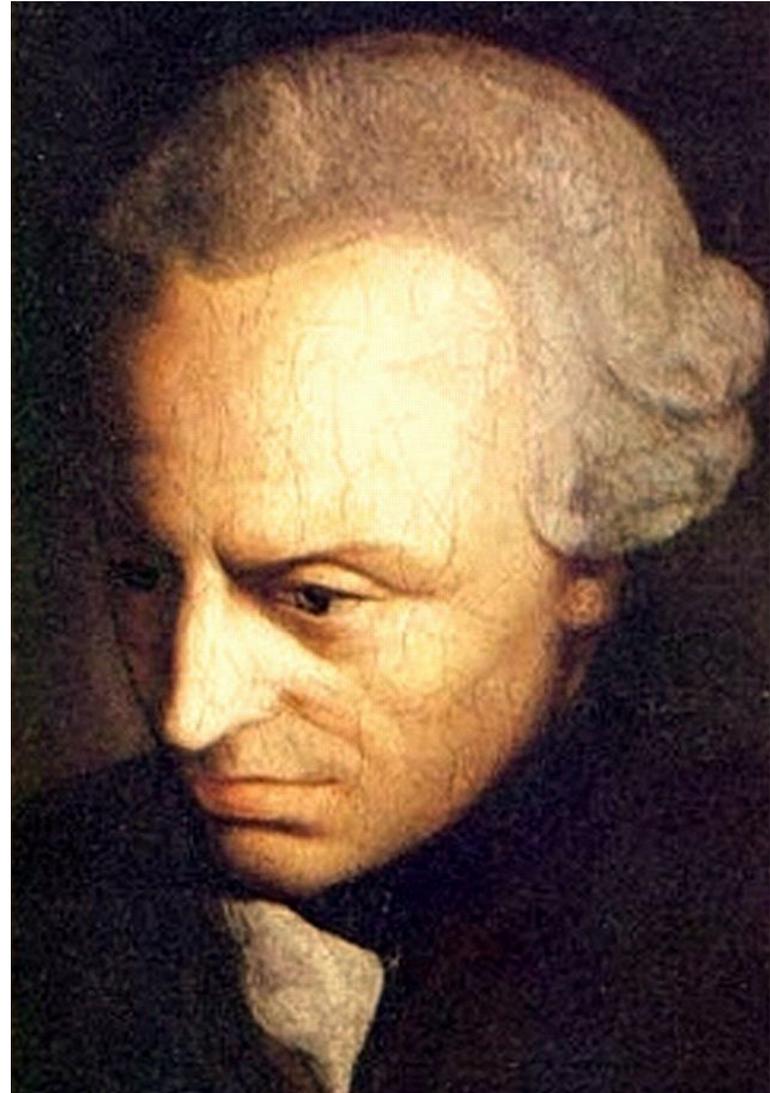
1. People often find it difficult to understand the difference between ethical statements and statements about how people live. Ethics is about what *should* be the case. It is not about what *is* the case.
2. *The Naturalistic Fallacy.* The philosopher Hume identified that there is a common fallacy in ethical reasoning: people derive an “ought” from an “is.” Hume argued this is impossible.

Some traditional challenges for ethics

- Cultural relativism
- Other forms of relativism (such as the belief that ethics is really a tool to protect other people)
- Psychological egoism
- Egoism
- Lack of a common method and consensus

Immanuel Kant!

- 1724-1804
- Great works include:
 - *Critique of Pure Reason*
 - “What is Enlightenment?”
 - *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
 - *Critique of Practical Reason*



Kant's Ethics

- **Value theory:** the only good thing is a will [a person] acting according to the law [the categorical imperative].
- **Decision theory:** follow the categorical imperative, which for Kant claims comes in two forms (which he claims are equivalent):
 - Act always according to a rule that you can consistently will to be a universal law.
 - Always treat another person as an end-in-itself and never solely as a means.

A case to consider

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho8geEtCYjw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiNFXcl9Rb8&t=290s>



Mill's Utilitarianism

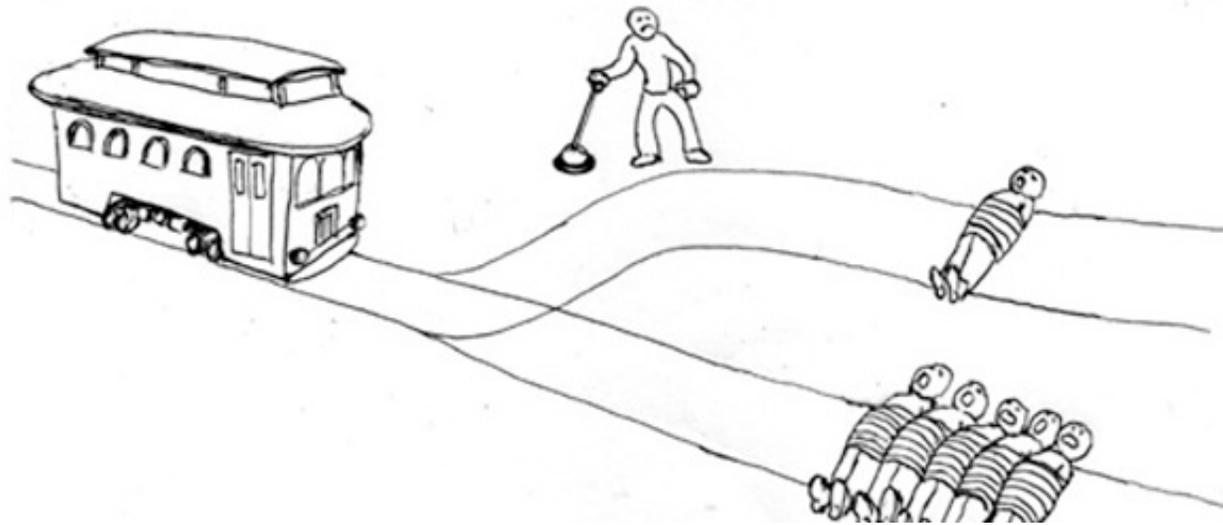
- **Value theory:** the good = pleasure. [This value theory is called “Hedonism”.]
- **Decision theory:** the best action is the one that has as a consequence the greatest increase in pleasure for the greatest number. [This decision theory is called “consequentialism”: judge an action by its consequences.]

Let's test our intuitions

A thought experiment
from the philosopher
Phillipa Foot (1920-
2010)



Foot's famous thought experiment!





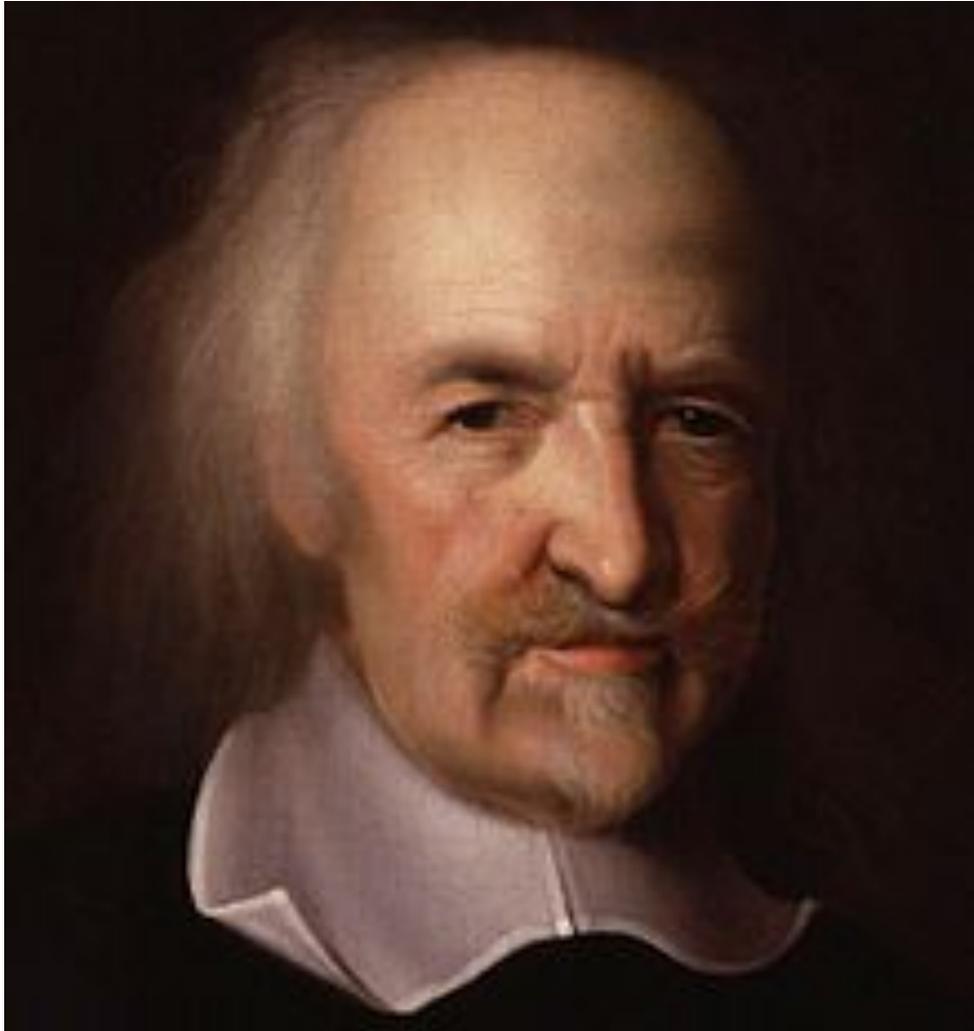
Contract Theory

- **Value theory:** the community decides together what they will value.*
- **Decision theory:** the community decides together what rules should be used for making decisions.

The contract is (almost always) an implicit agreement between everyone affected by the agreement.

* Many contract theorists also hold the value theory that individual people and their autonomy are inherently deserving of respect. The contract then respects this inherent dignity and autonomy by allowing people to choose for themselves how to organize.

Hobbes!



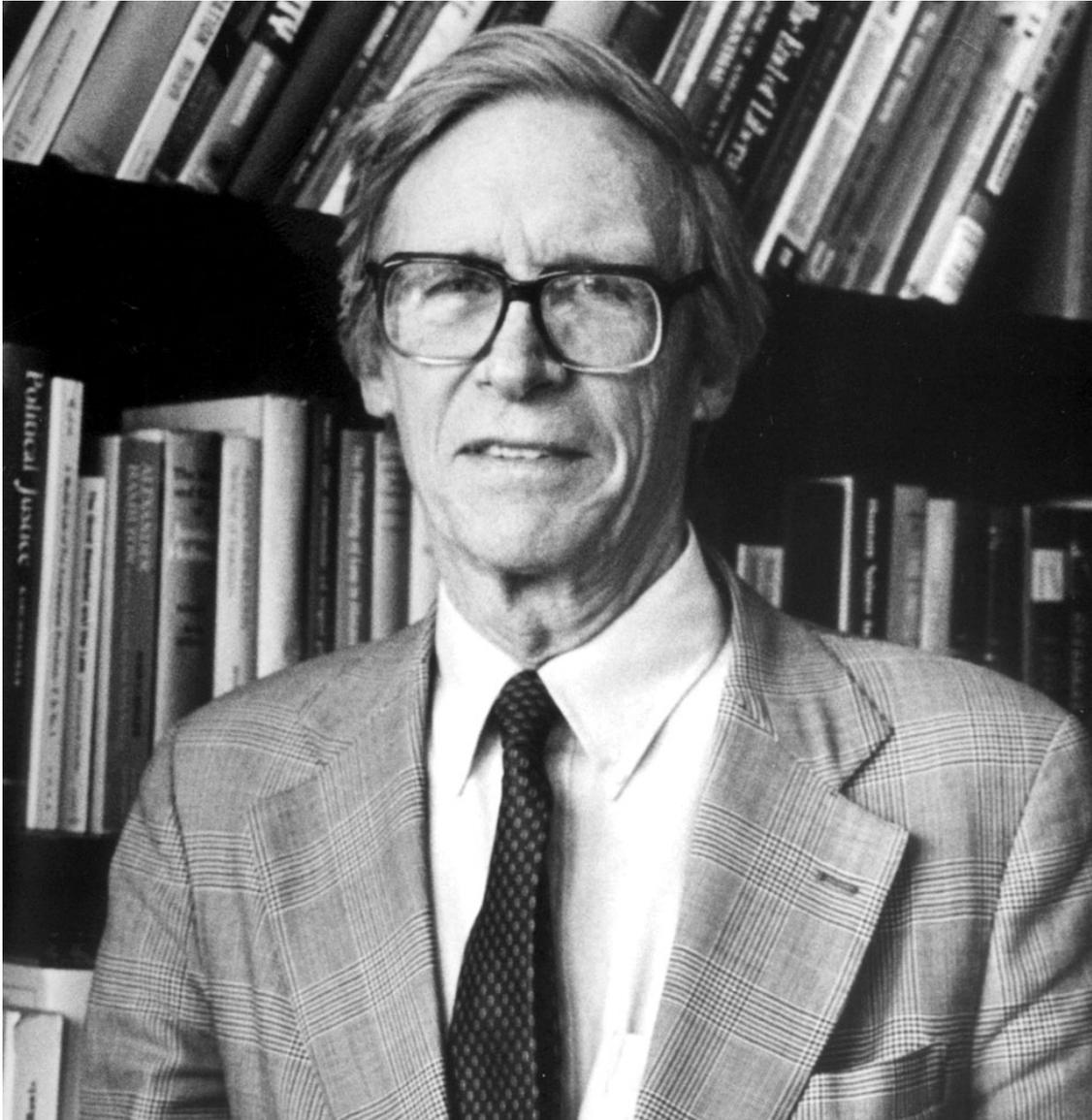
- 1588-1679
- *Leviathan* (1651)

Non est potestas Super Terram que Comparetur ei. Iob. 41. 24.



Hobbes!

In [the state of nature], there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.



- John Rawls
(1921-2002)

Rawls's Contract Theory

Rawls asks us to imagine ourselves in **the original position**: you imagine yourself outside of society, and you are soon to be put into society, but you do not know what role in society you will have. You could be male or female, gay or straight, President or unemployed, and so on. We then ask, what rules would you want for our society from the perspective of the original position?

The rules we would want from the perspective of the original position are fair because they are not biased, Rawls reasons.

Rawls argues from the original position would want two things:

1. Equality of basic rights and duties;
2. Social and economic inequalities will only be allowed if they benefit everyone (especially the least well off people in the society).