Classes of Ethical Theory

- Deontological Ethics.. based on notions of rules
- Pragmatic Ethics.. rights, duties
- Consequentialist Ethics.. based on evaluation of outcomes
- Virtue Ethics.. based on intentions of actors
Utilitarianism

• Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (1800’s)
  • An action is good if it benefits someone
  • An action is bad if it harms someone

• Outcomes most important ... 
  not good will, duty or intention

Consequentialist theory
Utilitarianism

• Utility: tendency of an object to produce happiness or to prevent unhappiness for an individual or community

• Happiness = advantage = benefit = good = pleasure

• Unhappiness = disadvantage = cost = harm = pain
Act Utilitarianism

An action is right (or wrong) to the extent that it increases (or decreases) the total happiness of the affected parties.

affected parties -- stakeholders
Act Utilitarianism

• Methodology
  • identify stakeholders
  • identify impacts of act on stakeholders
  • evaluate overall impact by combining impacts

consequentialist ethical theory
Highway Routing Scenario

• State may replace a dangerous stretch of highway
• New highway segment less curves, 1 mile shorter
• 150 houses would have to be removed
• Some wildlife habitat would be destroyed
Highway Routing Scenario

- stakeholders
  - home owners along proposed route
  - drivers that use the route
  - state tax payers
  - wildlife, environment
Impacts

• Costs
  • $20 million to compensate homeowners
  • $10 million to construct new highway
  • Lost wildlife habitat worth $1 million

• Benefits
  • $40 million savings in automobile driving costs
  • saved lives and reduced hospital costs
Utilitarian Decision

- Decision
  - Benefits exceed costs
  - Building highway a good action
- Action Design/Refinement
  - maximize benefits, minimize costs
  - in the high way scenario?
Case for Act Utilitarianism

- Focuses on happiness
- Down-to-earth (practical)
- Comprehensive
- Action refinement

Workable ethical theory
Case Against Act Utilitarianism

- Unclear whom to include as stakeholders
- Unclear the valuation of certain impacts
- Too much work for some decisions
- Ignores our innate sense of duty
- Susceptible to the problem of moral luck
Bentham
Weighing Benefits/Costs

• Intensity, Duration, Certainty
• Propinquity, Fecundity, Purity, Extent

To enact climate change regulations
To protect old growth forest habitat
Rule Utilitarianism

• Adopt general, moral rules which, if followed by everyone, will lead to the greatest increase in total happiness

• Act utilitarianism applies utility analysis to individual actions

• Rule utilitarianism applies utility analysis to general situation-action combinations
Rule Utilitarianism

• Methodology
  • generalize act utilitarian context
  • who are general stakeholder types
  • impacts
  • values
Highway Construction

- General Result
  - increase safety and efficiency of system
  - mitigate environmental damage
  - compensate affected landowners
Anti-Worm Scenario

• August 2003: Blaster worm infected thousands of Windows computers, impeding their performance

• Soon after, the so-called Nachi worm appeared
  • Took control of vulnerable computers
  • Located and destroyed copies of Blaster
  • Downloaded patch to fix security problem
  • Used computer as launching pad to try to “infect” other vulnerable PCs with killer worm
Evaluation using Rule Utilitarianism

• Proposed rule: If one can write/launch a helpful worm that removes a harmful worm from infected computers and protects others from attack, one should do so.

• Who would benefit?

• Who would be harmed?

• What is balance?
Case for Rule Utilitarianism

• Compared to act utilitarianism, it is often easier to perform the utilitarian calculus.

• Moral rules must survive exceptional situations that may have worked well

• Avoids much of the problem of moral luck

Workable ethical theory
Problem with Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism ignores the problem of an unjust distribution of good consequences.

- Utilitarianism does not mean "the greatest good for the greatest (or neediest) number"

- That requires a Principle of Justice

- What happens when a conflict arises between the Principle of Utility and a Principle of Justice?
Each person may claim a “fully adequate” set of basic rights and liberties, so long as these claims are consistent with everyone else having a claim to the same rights and liberties....

“equal opportunity”
John Rawls’s Principles of Justice

- Any social and economic inequality must
- Be associated with positions that everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to achieve
- Be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle)
Western Ethical Theories

- Kantianism
- Social Contract Theory
- Utilitarianism

- Arose during the Age of Reason/Enlightenment, primarily the 1700’s
Eastern Ethical Theories

- Confucianism
- Taoism
- Buddhism

arose more than 2000 years ago

Forms of Virtue Ethics
Virtue Ethics

- Virtue: a positive intention
- Happiness comes from living a life of virtue
- Virtue is developed by repeating appropriate acts
- Virtue is recognized within a community
- Some virtues:
  - benevolence, courage, fairness, generosity, honesty, loyalty, patience, respect, tolerance
Strengths of Virtue Ethics

• Provides motivation for good behavior
  • virtue is about right intention
  • outcomes, somewhat unpredictable, are secondary
• a complement to utilitarianism
Confucianism

- Virtues
  - Honesty, truthfulness, faithfulness, reverence
  - Respect for knowledge of ancestors and elders
  - Importance of duty to one’s community, respect existing hierarchy
Confucianism

- respect for interpersonal relationships is key
  - friend, family, boss, community

- Golden Rule
  - What one does not wish for oneself, one ought not to do to anyone else; what one recognizes as desirable for oneself, one ought to be willing to grant to others.
Confucianism

• acting for social benevolence and harmony is an important ethical consideration

• personal rights not as important

• differs from Western “barbarism”, based on respect for personal power and individual rights
Taoism

- Respecting (being part of) flow of nature.. Tao
- Selfless, helping
- Simplicity, moderation
- No strict ethical guidelines, situational
- Balancing opposites, futility of purity, yin-yang
- Loyalty to others and country
Buddhism

• Interdependence
  • any action result of countless factors

• Agent responsible for
  intention, action, consequences.. karma

• Reducing suffering is a primary goal

• Wisdom, generosity, compassion, non-violence
Western Virtue Ethics

• Aristotle
  • prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance

• New Testament
  • faith, love, endurance.. righteousness

• vice lists
Virtue Analysis

• What virtue can/should the actor demonstrate in this situation?

• What will be the affect upon the actor’s reputation of the action choices?
Weakness of Virtue

Ethics

• Almost any action reflects some virtue or other

• How to choose among competing virtues is often not clear