Normative Ethical Theories

I. Normative Ethics

A **Normative Ethical Theory** is a philosophical theory about the fundamental principles of morality. A fundamental principle of morality is a moral obligation of the highest degree of generality, from which more specific moral obligations can be derived. It is also an ultimate criterion for right and wrong action.

For example, perhaps the best known principle of morality is the "The Golden Rule", which says:

> "Treat others as you want others to treat you." (the positive formulation)
> "Do not treat other as you do not want others to treat you." (the negative formulation)

This rule obligates you to treat others as you want to be treated by others, or not to treat others as you do not want to be treated. Obligations not to murder and steal can be derived from this principle: since you would not want to be murdered or have your property stolen, so you should not murder or steal from others. So, what we might call "The Theory of the Golden Rule" is a normative ethical theory stating that the fundamental principle of morality is the Golden Rule.

So is the Golden Rule the fundamental principle of morality?

In order to decide whether we should accept a certain normative ethical theory, we need to see if the theory conforms well to our pre-theoretical intuitions in all morally relevant situations. In other words, we need to see how the theory would answer various *moral questions*. If the answers the theory provides to those questions don't make sense, or seem absurd, then we have a reason *not* to accept the theory.

For instance, consider what the Golden Rule would say about *sado-masochists*: sado-masochists like to have others inflict pain on them. According to the Golden Rule, it seems it would be okay if the sado-masochist went around inflicting pain on others! Also, consider what the Golden Rule would say about *Criminal Punishment*. Even in the case that you committed a crime, *you would not want to be punished*. So, the Golden Rule entails that we should not punish criminals. But that's counterintuitive (or "crazy")! We strongly believe that criminals should be punished. So what we see here is that the Golden Rule cannot explain why we should punish criminals. Though the Golden Rule works in most cases, the *true* theory of morality needs to work in *all* cases relevant to moral right and wrong.

Besides "the Golden Rule Theory", another normative ethical theory is called Rational Egoism (also called Ethical Egoism). According to Rational Egoism, our fundamental moral obligation is simply to do whatever is one's *own* best interest. We can call this the *Principle of Rational Egoism*: **Always act to maximize your own long-term happiness or satisfaction**.

Notice that this principle is *not* saying you should do simply whatever you want. It is telling you to do whatever will ultimately be in your own best interest to do, and to avoid doing what is not in your own best interest. For instance, you might want to steal something from a department store, but doing so would likely not be in your own best interest because you'll likely get caught and be prosecuted for theft. In this case, since stealing is not in your best interest, the rational egoist says that you should not steal, and that you are morally obligated not to steal, at least in this case.

In fact, the rational egoist says that, generally, because it is not in our own best interest to kill, steal, harm, lie or cheat, we should not kill, steal, harm, lie or cheat. This makes rational egoism not seem as malicious as might have at first seemed.

However, notice that in situations where it would clearly be in your own best interest to harm others, the rational egoist doesn't say that you *may* go ahead and harm others—it says that you *should* harm others, or that you are morally obligated to harm others, so long as it really promotes your own self-interest.

Consider this case: You are travelling through a third-world country which is politically unstable and torn apart by war and terrorism. You enter a local restaurant to have a quick drink before leaving on a boat tomorrow that will return you to the U.S.. A man sits down next you and strikes up a conversation. He's very friendly, and seems to be a nice guy. But an hour into your conversation with him, he reveals to you that he's one of the warlords fighting for control over the country, and his specialty is acts of terrorism on civilians. He assures you that he has no reason to harm you. You will be a safe. However, he wants to offer you a job before you leave. The warlord tells you that he will give you $1 million to place a small bomb on a school bus full of children, which only moments after you put in on there will detonate and kill all the children on board. You know this warlord has a reputation for being honest and keeping his word.

Let's also suppose that you are a rational egoist. You tell the warlord that you shouldn't do it because you don't want to risk getting caught. The warlord explains how you have virtually no chance of getting caught, and you realize that he's right (no authorities will investigate the bombing). But then you point out that, while it's very unlikely that you'll get caught, it is not worth $1 million to suffer the rest of your life with the emotional trauma of having killed more than a dozen children. At that point, however, the warlord hands you a pill and explains that if you swallow this pill 10 minutes before putting the bomb on the bus, then 15 minutes later the pill will take effect and it will erase your memory of the event. So, you'll just return home and simply find an extra $1 million in your bank account (it will be reported as a gift from unknown distant relative), and you will have no recollection at all that you murdered over a dozen children.

According to the rational egoist, not only are you allowed to kill all those children for $1 million, you are *morally obligated* to kill all those children, just a $1 million! Again, this is because the rational egoist says you

are obligated to serve your own interest in best way possible, and, in this case, that involves killing children. Needless to say, we cannot accept rational egoism given this consequence of it.

II. Psychological Egoism and Altruism

Before we turn to examine some other normative ethical theories, we should consider the following question:

Why be moral?

The rational egoist has an easy answer to this question: you should be moral because being moral means serving your own interests in the best way possible. However, if we reject rational egoism, and instead accept an *altruistic* view of morality—a view on which morality obligates us to do certain things, or not to do certain things, *solely for the sake of others*—then that answer is not available to us. But if our own *self-interest* can be reason enough for us to behave or not behave in certain ways, then why could the *interests of others* also be reason enough for us to behave or not behave in certain ways?

Historically, many have thought that people need a <u>self-interested reason</u> (or reasons) **not** to do things like murder, rape, torture, steal, cheat, lie, and so on, and especially to help others or prevent others from coming to harm. A self-interested reason can be defined as follows: <u>S has a self-interested reason to do X or not to do X, if by doing X or not doing X, S will satisfy some personal need or desire, or avoid some personal loss</u>. For example, you have a self-interested reason to donate to a charity if you will in some way benefit from making that donation, which could involve receiving a tax-credit, impressing a certain person, or simply being able to feel proud and righteous. If your reason for making a donation to the charity is to receive a tax credit, then your reason for doing so is a self-interested reason. Self-interested reasons, when recognized, are said to be *motivating*: they motivate or compel us to act in accord with that reason. And so we say an action is self-interested if it is motivated by a self-interested reason. Also, if your reason for not stealing from a department store is that you will get caught and likely serve some jail time, then your reason for not committing that action is a self-interested reason, because you avoided stealing in order to avoid some personal harm.

But are all our actions towards others motivated only by self-interested reasons? In plainer terms, is everything we do for selfish reasons?

In an ancient fable called the "The Ring of Gyges," recounted by the character Glaucon in Plato's most famous work, the *Republic*, an honest and noble man one day comes upon a magical ring which grants him total invisibility. The ring immediately corrupts him, as he uses it to sneak into a king's palace, seduce his queen, and kill the king to take over the kingdom. Glaucon's point in telling this story is this: "Suppose now that there were two such magic rings, and the unjust person put on one of them and the just person the other; no man can be imagined to be of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice. No man would keep his hands off what

was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a god among men."

Suppose you had the powers of Superman, without the weakness of kryptonite. No one and no military could stop you from doing whatever you want. Would you continue to respect the rights, dignity, and welfare of others? Glaucon, from Plato's *Republic*, thinks that you would not, because he thinks that people are good only so far as they need to be in order to get ahead in life.

However, Glaucon ignores another kind of reason people have for acting or not acting—namely, *altruistic reasons*. An <u>altruistic action</u> is an action which is done *solely for the sake of others*. For example, if you were to make an anonymous donation to a charity, without benefiting or expecting to benefit from that donation in any way, then you made that donation solely for the sake of those who will benefit from it. It's important to notice that an altruistic action is not simply an action which benefits another; we do things that benefit each other all the time, but most of it is not altruistic. For example, if you have a job, your services benefit your employer. But the work you do for your employer is not altruistic, since you do the work only because you get paid.

Thus, an altruistic action is motivated by <u>altruistic reasons</u>, which can be defined as follows: <u>*S* has an altruistic reason to do X or not to do X, if and only if those who will benefit or who are expected to benefit from *S's* action or inaction is *not* S herself.</u>

Has there ever been a genuinely altruistic act? The answer might seem obvious: of course there has been, at least at some point, an action which was done solely for the sake of others. While perhaps 90% of people act out of self-interest 90% of the time, surely there must be some instances where people have done good things for others, or have not done bad things to others, solely for the sake of others.

However, <u>Psychological Egoism</u> is the view that our actions are always motivated by self-interested reasons; that is, psychological egoism denies that altruism is truly possible. This theory has been defending most famously by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1651), though many people continue to hold this view today. In opposition to psychological egoism, <u>psychological altruism</u> says at least some actions are motivated mainly by altruistic reasons. Of course, an action can be motivated *in part* by self-interested reasons and *in part* by altruistic reasons (ex: you donate to charity because you want to help others, but also because you want a tax write-off). If both altruistic and self-interested reasons are necessary to motivate an action, then the action is both altruistic and self-interested. However, we can call an action a "self-interested action" *if the self-interested reasons were sufficient to motivate the action*; likewise, we can call an action altruistic *if the altruistic reasons were sufficient to motivate the action*. Accordingly, there are two forms of psychological egoism. One form says that while

people have altruistic reasons for acting or not acting, these reasons are *never* sufficiently motivating—that is, they can never motivate an action by themselves: self-interested reasons are always necessary to get one to act. According to the other form of psychological egoism, either there is no such thing as altruistic reasons or altruistic reasons are not motivating at all.

Note that both psychological egoism and psychological altruism are *not* normative ethical theories; instead, they are psychological theories: they do not tell us how people should behave; they explain why people behave the way they actually do.

One argument for psychological egoism is that many actions which might appear to be altruistic on the surface are not, upon closer inspection, truly altruistic. For instance, consider "corporate philanthropy". This involves large corporations donating money and resources to philanthropic causes, such as famine and water relief, education, environmental protection, etc. The job of the executives who run a corporation is to make money for the shareholders; in fact, corporations are legally mandated to do everything they can to turn the largest profit for their shareholders. So, corporations obey laws which serve the public interest simply to avoid penalties; and they do not donate to philanthropic causes simply out of the goodness of their hearts (they have no hearts). They do it because it can be very good for business: philanthropy can help promote the company, creating good relations between the company and the public, and can help build trust in the company by potential consumers. Corporate philanthropy is a concealed form of self-interested activity.

But are we all just like corporations? Do we really not harm others, when doing so would be to our benefit, only because we fear being harmed in response? Do we really do things that benefit others because we expect to get something in return? One might suppose that the following example shows that genuine altruistic acts are possible, contrary to the psychological egoist. In Afghanistan in November 2010, a grenade was thrown at two marines, Kyle and Nicolas, by an enemy fighter. One of the marines, Kyle, suddenly threw himself in front of the grenade to shield his comrade Nicolas from the explosion. The grenade would have killed Nicolas without the intervention of Kyle. Miraculously, Kyle survived, but is now terribly disfigured. How was Kyle's action self-interested? For saving his comrade, all Kyle got in return was life time of deformity and suffering.

The psychological egoist will appeal to many different things in explaining away instances of self-sacrifice which seem like obvious cases of altruism. For instance, the psychological egoist might say that Kyle would have been even more distressed had he allowed the grenade to kill Nicolas. Honor is a powerfully motivating value in the military, and Kyle didn't want to experience the dishonor, shame, and guilt of having not attempted to save Nicolas's life. Thus, Kyle threw himself at the grenade to spare himself even worse torment from the shame and guilt of being a coward; thus, Kyle's actions was ultimately self-interested.

Generally, the psychological egoist will say that pride often motivates people to do things for others, where the feeling of pride can be an enormous personal reward. Thus, people often will do things for others (anything from

holding a door open for another to heroic self-sacrifice) simply to experience pleasure of pride and a sense of righteousness, or, rather, to avoid the pain of shame and guilt.

However, against this psychological egoism, one can argue that it has committed an error. When classifying an action as self-interested or as altruistic, one need consider only the reasons which *self-consciously* motivated the action—that is, the reasons which the person who commits the action is aware of as the reasons for why he or she did it. For everything we do voluntarily, we have some conscious (or at least somewhat conscious) thought about why we are doing it. So, if Kyle thought to himself immediately before throwing himself in front of the grenade, "if I don't try to help my friend, I will be shamed and feel guilt for the rest of my life", then, yes, Kyle's action was self-interested. But if Kyle only thought "My friend will I die if I don't help", then, no, Kyle's action was not self-interested, it was altruistic, regardless of whether Kyle would have felt shame and guilt had he done nothing, and regardless of any pride or personal satisfaction he received from doing it. The psychological egoist will argue that there are unconscious reasons which motivate our actions, and that these are self-interested. But unconscious reasons do not matter to whether or not an action is selfless or not. What matters are the conscious reasons, because conscious reasons are what determine *voluntary* actions, as opposed to involuntary actions (such as reflexes) which do not require a conscious decision; and voluntary actions are our only concern in Ethics.

III. Utilitarianism

A very altruistic normative ethical theory is Utilitarianism. Like Rational Egoism, Utilitarianism says that an action is morally right or wrong only according to the *consequences* of the action. But while rational egoism says that an action is morally right if it has the overall best consequences for *oneself*, and wrong if it does *not* have the best consequences for oneself, Utilitarianism says that an action is morally right only if it is, among all the possible courses of action available in a given situation, the course of action that will have the best overall consequences for *all* considered. If one takes a course of action that is not the course of action that would have the best overall consequences for all considered, then the action is wrong. And who we should consider, according to the Utilitarian, are not only other people, but all sentient (sensing, feeling) creatures that might be affected by our action.

Utilitarianism was first developed as such by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the early 1800s. He argued that all morality is based on a single principle, which he called the "Principle of Utility". This principle says the following:

ALWAYS ACT SO AS TO MAXIMIZE OVERALL GOOD, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME
MINIMIZING OVERALL HARM.

What does this mean, exactly? Maximizing overall "good" means maximizing pleasure, happiness, and the satisfaction of needs and interests, such as the strong desire not to die, *regardless of whose* pleasure, happiness, need and interest it is—yours, mine, a stranger's, or even an animal's. Likewise, minimizing overall "harm" means minimizing the pain, suffering, and the dissatisfaction of needs and interests, *regardless of whose* pain, suffering, and dissatisfaction it is.

Utilitarianism can be broken down into the following **four** theses:

1. Actions are right or wrong only according to their consequences. (Depending on the particular type of Utilitarian theory, these can be *expected* consequences or *actual* consequences.)

2. What matters in the way of consequences is pleasure and the satisfaction of needs and interests, which are good (or have "positive utility"), and pain and the dissatisfaction of needs and interests, which are bad (or have "negative utility").

3. Not all pleasures and pains, or needs and interests, count the same. For instance, the desire not to be killed far outweighs the desire for amusement, in which case one can never be morally justified in killing a person solely for amusement.

4. Everyone's happiness and suffering, and needs and interests, must be given equal consideration. That is, no person's needs or happiness necessarily count more than the needs and happiness of any other simply because of *who* that person is. However, a person's life or happiness can count more than the life or happiness of another *if* that person's life or happiness matters more to the happiness and satisfaction of others. For instance, the life of a scientist on the verge of a breakthrough in cancer research would matter more than the average Joe the plumber. But, ultimately, what matters is overall net happiness and satisfaction, or pain and suffering, caused by our actions.

For the Utilitarian, the morally right action is the one which has the highest proportion of good consequences to bad consequences. For example, suppose one is in a situation where the only available courses of action are the following three:

Action A: Save 5 people by killing 3 people.
Action B: Save 12 people by killing 6 people.
Action C: Save 30 people by killing 12 people.

Which is the morally right action, according to Utilitarianism? Answer: <u>action C</u>, because action A nets 5/3 good-to-bad consequences, while action B nets 2/1 good-to-bad consequences, and while action 3 nets 5/2 good-to-bad consequences.

Notice that the Utilitarian (like the rational egoist) *does* believe it can be morally right to kill, steal, lie or cheat. In Utilitarianism, killing, stealing, and so on is morally right so long as doing it prevents a greater harm or brings about a much greater good. In fact, all that matters for the Utilitarian is bringing about the greatest overall good (or prevent the greatest overall harm) for all sentient beings that might be adversely or positively affected. Thus, Utilitarianism entails all of the following:

1. <u>The Ends Justify the Means</u>: For the Utilitarian, if the course of action which has the overall best consequences requires causing a certain amount of harm, then one is morally obligated to cause that harm. Ex1: Kill one to save many. Ex2. Steal from the rich, give to the poor.

2. <u>No Difference between Killing and Letting Die, or between Causing Harm / Letting Harm be Caused:</u> For the Utilitarian, all that matters is the net result of good and bad consequences. It does not matter whether they are consequences of action (commission) or of inaction (omission). For example, for the Utilitarian, if you could very likely prevent someone from getting killed, but you do nothing and let that person get killed, that is just as morally wrong as killing that person him or herself.

3. <u>Animals Matter</u> : According to Utilitarianism, because most other animals have a capacity to experience pain and suffering, and happiness and pleasure, causing needless harm to animals is morally wrong. Also, unless the suffering and death of an animal is weighed less than the pleasure a human gets from eating its flesh, the act of killing an animal for food is morally wrong.

4. <u>Inalienable Rights, Personal Autonomy, Equality, and Retributive Justice Matter Little, If At All, For Utilitarianism</u>:

    A. *Inalienable Rights*: If your life can be justifiably taken, or if your property can be justifiably taken, whenever doing so would benefit a greater good, then you cannot be said to have an inalienable or absolute right to life or to your property.

    B. *Personal Autonomy of Freedom*: For the Utilitarian, as long as a person is happy, it does not matter whether he or she is free. For example, if a slave is very happy, and would be less happy if he or she were freed, then it is better to keep him or her as a slave.

    C. *Equality/Fairness:* For the Utilitarian, it does not necessarily matter if the good consequences or the bad consequences of an action are evenly or unevenly distributed across all people concerned. All the matters is that the highest net amount of good possible is produced. For example, if I can produce the same overall net happiness by assigning half the class A's and the other half C's as by assigning everyone B's, then it doesn't matter which one I do.

D. *Retributive Justice*: For the Utilitarian, the only reason we should ever punish those who commit crimes if the consequences of punishing would be better than the consequences of not punishing. But, for the Utilitarian, we should never punish a person solely because he or she *deserves* it.

5. <u>No Moral Supererogation</u>: A "morally supererogatory" action is an action which is morally right or praiseworthy, but not morally obligatory. For instance, if you donated your life-savings to UNICEF (which helps feed and provide medical care to children in need), many would think that's good and praiseworthy, but few believe that it's obligatory. But, according to Utilitarianism, we should always act to promote the greatest good possible. This means that if one can benefit a greater good by sacrificing one's own happiness or even life, then one is morally obligated to do so. For the Utilitarian, then, there is no such thing as a morally supererogatory act.

IV. Kantian Ethics

The last normative ethical theory that we will discuss here sharply contrasts with both rational egoism and utilitarianism. This theory is known as <u>Kantian Ethics</u>. Kantian ethics is named after its original author and greatest proponent, the late 18th century German philosopher *Immanuel Kant*. For Kant, the fundamental principle of morality is, what he called, the "Categorical Imperative". The phrase "categorical imperative" simply means "absolute command"; so the name alone does not tell us much about what categorical imperative says—except that we are obliged to follow whatever it does say absolutely or unconditionally.

Kant formulated the "categorical imperative" in a few different ways. But the following is a paraphrase of the formulation considered to be the most defensible:

The Categorical Imperative: "**NEVER TREAT OTHERS MERELY AS MEANS TO ENDS, BUT ALWAYS AS ENDS-IN-THEMSELVES.**

To understand what this is saying, let's begin by concentrating on the first part. What does it mean to treat another "merely as a means to an end"? Here, "end" stands for "goal," "purpose" or something towards which one works and strives. A "means" IS something *used* to achieve the certain end, goal, or purpose. So, basically, the first part of the categorical imperative is saying that one should never merely use another for some purpose; we should never treat another as a mere tool. Of course, we use each other all the time. For instance, if you are employed, your employer uses you (you perform services for your employer), and you in turn use your employer (your employer gives you money). But the point is that you don't *merely* use each other: you each consent to do something for the other in an exchange, and insofar as the exchange is consensual, and so long as it's fair and honest, neither side is *merely* using the other.

The second part of the categorical imperative says to always treat others as "ends-in-themselves". An "end-in-themselves" is a technical term used by Kant to refer to an *autonomous agent* or *person*, but also in order highlight three features of persons (or of what it is to be a person or an autonomous agent):

1. <u>Intrinsic value</u>: while a mere means-to-an-end, such as a car or a hammer, is something having value only for other things, an end-in-itself is something which is not only valuable for other things, but is also valuable for and in itself. Even the laziest, good-for-nothing couch potato is still a valuable thing, on Kant's view!

2. <u>Free Will</u>: an end-in-itself has (a) a capacity for *self-determination*—it can choose the ends, goals, and laws for and by which it acts—and (b) a capacity for *self-governance*: it can act according to those ends and laws it chooses. An end-in-itself can determine its own goals and rules of conduct, and can act according to those goals and laws.

3. <u>Self-Ownership</u>: An end-in-itself has *exclusive authority or jurisdiction* over itself—over its body, its mind, its life, and over what it can rightfully claim as its property. In other words, it and it alone has any rightful say over what happens to and with its body, mind, life, and property. If anyone else does anything to us or to our property which we do not permit, then a wrongful act has been committed.

So, to treat another as an end-in-itself is (a) to treat the other as something that is intrinsically or inherently valuable, but, most importantly, (b) to respect the other's rights over his or her body, life, mind, and property. Thus, in short, Kantian Ethics tells us that *we must always respect the rights and the dignity of others*. And, thus, more specific prohibitions can be derived from the categorical imperative—namely, prohibitions on killing, torturing, raping, kidnapping, stealing, enslaving and even lying and cheating, because all of these types of actions involve doing something to another's body, life, mind or property without one's permission or consent. Lying involves trying to get someone to believe a falsehood, against their wishes; thus, it involves doing something to another's mind that goes against their wishes. Also, when you cheat or break a contract, not only is it like lying, you are using those who you are cheating as a mere means to end by not following the rules to which you agreed.

By way of the categorical imperative, Kantian Ethics says that it is *always* wrong and prohibited to kill, steal, harm, kidnap, enslave, lie, or cheat—though harm may be justifiably caused in cases of self-defense and to serve justice (specifically, retributive justice). But the Kantian does not hold that one may kill, harm, or steal in order to bring about a greater good, or to prevent a greater harm. This is one of many points on which the Kantian sharply disagrees with the Utilitarian: while the Utilitarian believes that one *should* kill (harm, lie, steal, etc.) in order to prevent a greater harm, the Kantian believes that one *should not* kill (harm, lie, steal, etc.) in order to prevent a greater harm, because doing so involves treating another as a mere means to end, or as a mere tool to promote the greater good.

There are two other related differences between Utilitarianism and Kantian Ethics. First, while the Utilitarian has practically no place for inalienable individual rights, Kantian Ethics is a rights-based conception of morality: the fundamental moral imperative is to respect the rights of others. Also, while the for the Utilitarian, there's no or little more difference between killing and letting die, or between causing harm and allowing harm to be caused, for the Kantian there is a significant difference between killing and letting die, and between causing harm and allowing harm to be caused: the former is almost always wrong, while the latter is not almost always wrong.

The reason that the Kantian doesn't think that letting die or allowing harm to be caused is always wrong is that, so long as you are simply minding your own business, you cannot be treating another as a mere means to an end or, that is, violating the rights of others. So, if you hear someone getting brutally attacked outside your home, and decide to just close your window and not do anything to help, though you could easily call the police, you are not blameworthy, on the Kantian view. You are in weak violation of the categorical imperative, because if you were truly regarding that person getting attacked as something intrinsically valuable, then would help. But so long as you yourself are not doing anything to the person (or to his property) you cannot be violating his rights.

Here Kantians make a distinction between *perfect duties*, which it would be morally wrong not to follow, and *imperfect duties*, which would be morally right to follow but not morally wrong not to follow. Our perfect duties are the obligations not to kill, steal, harm, lie, etc., while our imperfect duties are *morally supererogatory* acts such as saving the life of another, or donating to a worthy charity. You are not morally wrong if you *do not* risk your life to save another, or if you do not save another; but your action would be right and praiseworthy if you did.

In some ways, Kantian Ethics better conforms to our common moral instincts than does Utilitarianism. However, notice that we do often think more like the Utilitarian than we think like the Kantian, especially when it comes to *lying*. On the Kantian view, we have perfect duty not to lie, but only an imperfect duty to save the lives of others. This means that in the circumstance in which all one has to do in order to save the life of a loved one is tell a harmless lie, Kantian Ethics says that we still shouldn't lie; perfect duties always outweigh imperfect duties. Let's say Nazis are going door to door looking for Jewish people who are hiding; and that you are hiding a Jewish family in your basement. Let's also suppose that all you have to do to save the family and make Nazis never return is lie and tell them there you are not hiding anyone. If you say nothing, they search your house. Isn't clear that you should lie? The Utilitarian says yes, but the Kantian says no.

To illustrate once more how Kantian Ethics and Utilitarianism are so different, consider what each would say is the right thing to do in the Trolley Dilemma. In this scenario, there's a runaway trolley carrying 15 people which is going to crash and kill all those people, unless you pull a lever which will divert the trolley down

another set of tracks on which it will coast to a safe stop. The catch is that there's an 11 year old boy on the other set tracks, and that if you divert the trolley down the other set of tracks, the trolley will hit and kill the boy (he's facing the opposition direction, and has his earphones in playing loud music, so there's no way you can yell to him to get off the tracks; and there's no time to run and get him off the tracks). What would the Utilitarian and the Kantian each say you should do? Pull the lever, saving 15 but killing 1, or not pull the lever, not killing anyone but allowing 15 people to die?

If you thought the Utilitarian would say that pulling the lever is the right thing to do, while the Kantian would say that one should *not* pull the lever, you would be correct.

Conclusion

There are many other proposed normative ethical theories than the ones discussed here. Though the ones discussed here—Rational Egoism, Utilitarianism, and Kantian Ethics—are among the most hotly debated; and there's still no consensus on what, exactly, the fundamental principles of morality are. But Utilitarianism and Kantian Ethics each gives us a reasonable answer to the question: what makes an action or practice *wrong*? When asking such a question, we should ask the following two: Does it cause pain, suffering, death, or dissatisfaction? Does it violate the rights and dignity of others? If the answer to both is *no*, then it is unlikely that there is anything wrong with the action or practice at all.

QUESTIONS (Worth 12 points).

Instructions: On another sheet, answer the following questions on the above reading. Answers should be around 2-5 full and clearly-written sentences. Each question is worth **1** point.

1. What is a "normative ethical theory"? What is "fundamental principle of morality"?

2. What is an altruistic action? Is *any* action that simply benefits another altruistic? Why or why not? Come up with an example (not mentioned in the reading) of an action which only appears to be altruistic, but is really self-interested.

3. What is Rational Egoism? Explain what the Rational Egoist would say about (a) stealing, and (b) donating to a charity. What does the rational egoist say about altruism?

4. What is Psychological Egoism? What are the two forms of psychological egoism? What does psychological egoism say about altruism?

5. How would the psychological egoist explain a starving mother who feeds her child before feeding herself? Give another example of how the psychological egoist would explain an apparently obvious instance of altruism.

6. Explain the main problem for (or objection to) psychological egoism.

7. Explain Utilitarianism. What does Utilitarianism say makes an action morally wrong? How does it differ from Rational Egoism? What does it have in common with Rational Egoism?

8. What does Utilitarianism say about (a) causing harm in order to prevent a greater harm, (b) killing vs. letting die, (c) individual rights, and (d) the treatment of animals?

9. Apply Utilitarianism to the case of criminal punishment. Why should we punish criminals, according to Utilitarianism? In what specific ways might the consequences of punishing criminals justify the punishment (upon Utilitarian grounds)?

10. What is a morally supererogatory action? What do Utilitarianism and Kantian Ethics each say about morally supererogatory acts?

11. Explain the "Categorical Imperative". What does it say? What are "perfect duties" and "imperfect duties"?

12. What does Kantian Ethics entail about (a) causing harm in order to prevent a greater harm, (b) killing vs. letting die, (c) individual rights, and (c) stealing from the rich to give to the poor?