The Elements of Moral Philosophy
A brief summary

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Some questions

- Can morality be defined?
- Is any ethics theory better than the rest?
- Can culture or religion explain ethics?
- What supports moral conduct?
    - egoism vs. altruism
    - duty vs. care
- Are there absolute moral rules?
- What would a *good* moral theory be like?
- What do we think?

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What is morality?

- No simple, uncontroversial definition
- Socrates: "*how we ought to live*"
- Minimum conception: a core that every moral theory should accept
- One's actions should be guided by reason
- Feelings make actions irrational
- Choose to do what is best (*but best for whom?*)
- Morality should be based on facts

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Moral theories

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Ethical Egoism: do whatever will best promote personal happiness

Utilitarianism: do whatever will promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number

Kant: universal laws – followed by all people in all circumstances

Social Contract Theory: the right thing to do is to follow the rules that rational, self-interested people can agree to establish for their mutual benefit

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Culture and religion

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Social norms

• no universal truth in ethics
• various cultural codes
• all people at all times cannot possibly agree

Problems:
• belief does not imply truth
• if people disagree it doesn't mean some of them are wrong
• customs of other societies are not morally inferior to our own

→ we cannot use culture to explain morality

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Culture and religion

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• What does *god's will* really mean?

• Socrates dilemma:
  1. Conduct is right because god commands it
  2. God commands right conduct because it is right

• Problems for a religious person:
  Agreeing with 1: regard god's command as arbitrary
  Agreeing with 2: abandon the theological conception of right and wrong

→ we cannot use religion to explain morality

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What supports moral conduct?
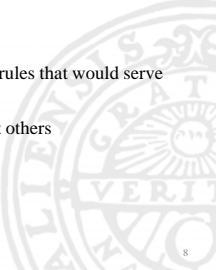
- egoism
- altruism
- duty
- care
- dignity
- virtues
- other?

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A good moral theory

A good moral theory has a good outcome.

A compromise between:

1. What reason requires – impartiality

2. Social living - adherence to a set of rules that would serve everyone's interests

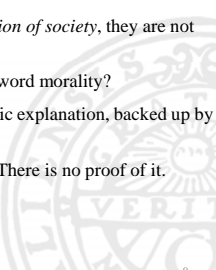3. Our natural inclination to care about others

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Our version

- Rachels assume that everything can be explained in terms of morality, when in fact it could be "*the nature of things.*"

- Rules in general are created for the *preservation of society*, they are not necessarily moral or immoral.

- Does *morality* need to be explained with the word morality?

- Any term, including morality needs a scientific explanation, backed up by logic.

- Ethical reasoning is not scientific reasoning. There is no proof of it.

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Thank you for listening!

Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Socrates*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York