



# WHY ETHICS MATTER?

# ETHICS AND MORALITY

Ethics refers to standards of conduct, standards that indicate how one should behave based on moral duties and virtues, which themselves are derived from principles of right and wrong.

# MORAL RELATIVISM

Values are determined by the society we grow up in, and there are no universal values. Moral values are simply customs or conventions that vary from culture to culture.

# MORAL CONSISTENCY

*To what extent do you think the following individuals are morally inconsistent?*

- A. an anti-abortionist who supports the death penalty*
- B. a vegetarian who buys leather shoes*
- C. a socialist who educates his children at a private school*
- D. a politician who advocates family values and has an affair*
- E. an environmental activist who drives a sport utility vehicle*
- F. someone who thinks stealing is wrong but makes illegal copies of computer software or music.*

# HOW DO I KNOW WHAT TO DO?

Can you choose three values which are universal for all humans? Why do you think so?

We have clearly made scientific progress over the last three hundred years. Does it also make sense that we have made moral progress?

# HOW DO I KNOW WHAT TO DO?

Are serial killers “bad” or “mad”

Are people basically good, and corrupted by society, or are people basically bad and must be kept in line by society?

Imagine that you arrive in a country in which adult women have the vote, but men have no political power. When you interview them, the men tell you that they are quite happy with the situation, that public life is for women, and a man's place is in the home. To what extent would you accept the situation, and to what extent would you try to “re-educate” the men and make them see the extent to which they have been indoctrinated?





# THEORIES OF ETHICS

While it may be that some values are relative and that people are often selfish, we do not have to conclude that all values are relative or that people are always selfish. An ethical theory attempts to provide a set of fundamental moral principles in harmony with our moral intuitions.

**Religious Ethics** – an authoritative rule book to tell us what rules to follow.

**Duty Ethics** - Fulfill your obligations. Duties and rights are two sides of the same coin.

**Utilitarianism** – There is one and only one supreme moral principal – that we should seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Maximize happiness. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (1800).

**Kant's Approach To Ethics** – Can your actions be consistently generalized? Ask yourself “What if everyone did that?”. According to Kant, if something is wrong, it is always wrong!



## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS A SPECIAL CASE THAT JUSTIFIES BREAKING A GENERALLY ACCEPTED RULE?

1a. You should respect the highway code, but it is ok to drive through a red light if you are late for work.

1b. You should respect the highway code, but it is ok to drive through a red light if you are taking a critically ill person to the hospital.

2a. You should keep your word, but it is ok to break a social engagement if something more interesting comes up.

2b. You should keep your word, but it is ok to break a social engagement if you have just contracted an infectious disease.

3a. You should pay your taxes, but it is ok not to pay them if you are short of money that year.

3b. You should pay your taxes, but it is ok not to pay them if they are being spent on a nuclear arms program.

4a. Murder is wrong, but it would have been ok to assassinate Hitler in 1942.

4b. Murder is wrong, but it would be OK to kill someone planning a terrorist attack.



# ETHICAL DILEMMAS

An elderly woman living alone in poor circumstances with few friends or relatives is dying, and you, her friend, are at her bedside. She draws your attention to a small case under her bed, which contains some mementos along with the money she has managed to save over the years, despite her apparent poverty.

She asks you to take the case and to promise to deliver its contents, after she dies, to her nephew living in another state. Moved by her plight and by your affection for her, you promise to do as she requests. After a tearful goodbye, you take the case and leave.

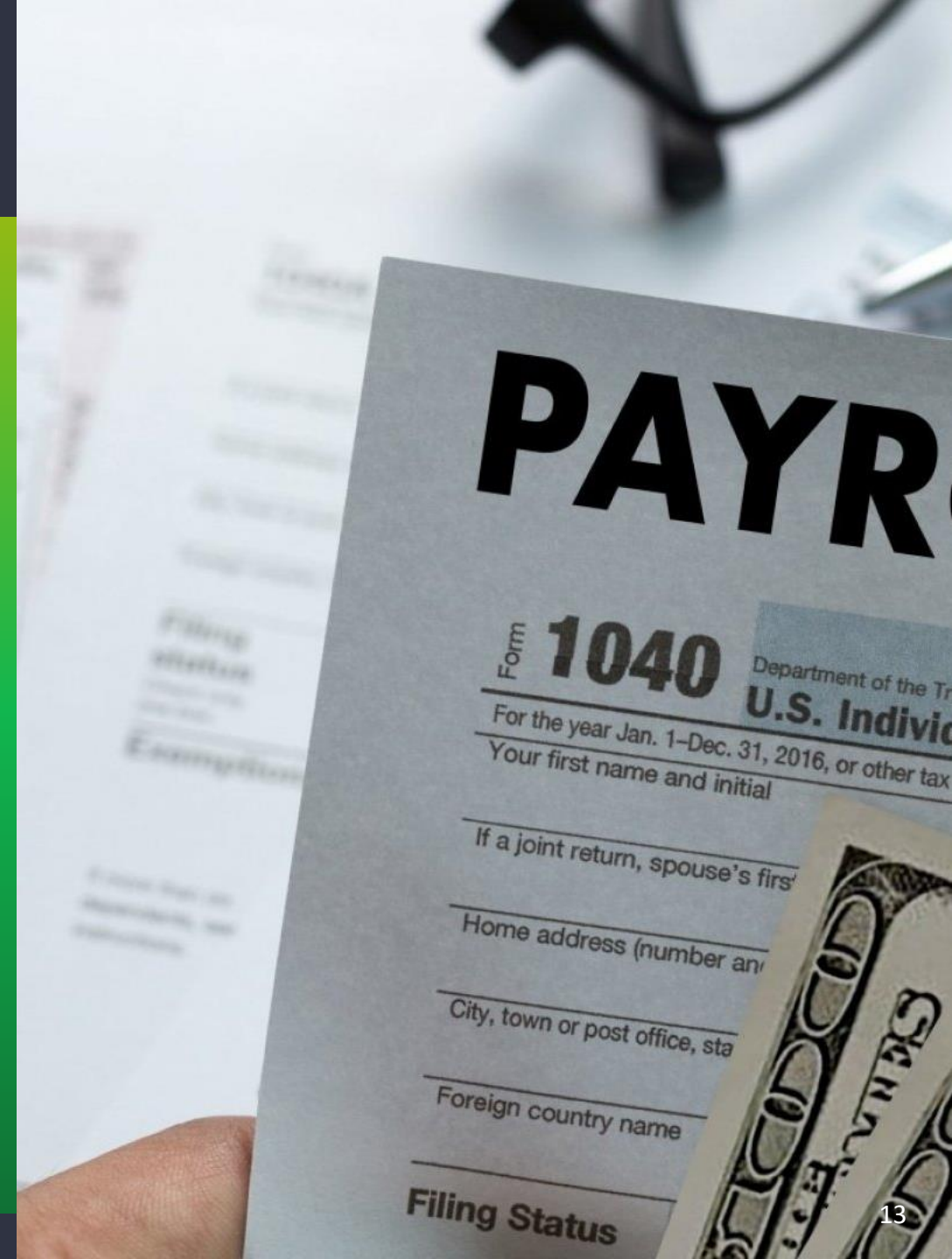
A few weeks later the old woman dies, and when you open the case, you discover that it contains \$500,000 dollars. No one else knows about the money, or the promise you made. You learn that the nephew is a compulsive gambler and has a drug addiction.

# WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

## Which Corporate Culture Do You Value?

- Upon graduation you are offered two job opportunities. The first is with a corporation known to cultivate a hard-nosed, no-nonsense business culture in which keeping long hours and working intensely are highly valued. At the end of each year, the company donates to numerous social and environmental causes.
- The second job opportunity is with a nonprofit recognized for a very different culture based on its compassionate approach to employee work-life balance. It also offers the chance to pursue your own professional interests or volunteerism during a portion of every work day.
- The first job offer pays 20 percent more per year.

How important an attribute is salary, and at what point would a higher salary override for you the nonmonetary benefits of the lower-paid position?



# WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

- **Taking Advantage of an Employee Discount**
  - Suppose you work in retail sales for an international clothing company.
  - A perk of the job is an employee discount of 25 percent on all merchandise you purchase for personal use. Your cousin, who is always looking for a bargain, approaches you in the store one day and implores you to give him your employee discount on a \$100 purchase of clothes for himself.
- **Critical Thinking**
  - How would you handle this situation and why?
  - Would it matter if the relative were someone closer to you, perhaps a brother or sister?
  - If so, why?



**BREAK TIME**



An aerial, high-angle photograph of a dense urban skyline, likely New York City, featuring numerous skyscrapers and buildings. The image is in black and white, with a green-to-yellow gradient overlay on the left side. A white rectangular frame is positioned over the center of the image, containing a dark gray rectangle with the title text.

# ANCIENT ETHICS

Aristotle

# ANCIENT ATHENS

- The Greeks developed the ancient concept of *virtue*.
  - The person most closely associated with virtue in the West, and the development of **virtue ethics** is Plato's famous pupil Aristotle (384–322 BCE)
    - Virtue Ethics: an ethical system based upon the exercise of certain virtues (loyalty, honor, courage) emphasizing the formation of character

# VIRTUE ETHICS

- For Aristotle, everything that exists has a purpose, or end, and has been designed to meet that end.
  - Example: The proper end of birds is to fly, that of fish to swim.
  - Birds and fish have been designed with the appropriate means (feathers, fins) to achieve those ends.
- Teleology or “finality” is a reason or explanation for something as a function of its end, purpose, or goal. Its name is derived from two Greek words: telos (end, goal, purpose) and logos (reason, explanation).
- Aristotle believed that everything, including people, had a purpose/telos/function.

# QUESTIONS

- What is the *telos* of human beings?
- Do we have a greater purpose or is the world just a meaningless void?

# ARISTOTLE

- Aristotle believed that the Telos of humans is to achieve *eudaimonia*, which has been roughly translated to happiness.
- He did not mean happiness in a superficial sense, such as having fun or being content.
- He equated eudaimonia with human flourishing, which he believed could be attained through the exercise of reason.
- For Aristotle, reason was supreme and best used to increase not wealth but character.

- The great task of life, according to Aristotle, is to recognize and pursue eudemonia, no matter the constraints placed on the individual (the most dramatic of which are suffering and death).
  - Birds and fish have little difficulty achieving their ends, and we can assume that much of this is due to their genetic coding.
  - Because happiness might not be genetically encoded in human beings, they must learn how to achieve eudaimonia.
- How do they do that?

- According to Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is achieved by leading a virtuous life, which is attained over time.
- “Happiness is a kind of activity; and an activity clearly is developed and is not a piece of property already in one’s possession.”



# TWO TYPES OF VIRTUES: INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL

- **Intellectual virtues**—including knowledge, wisdom, and, most importantly for Aristotle, prudence —served as guides to behavior
- According to Aristotle, the intellectual virtues are acquired purely through learning, whereas the moral virtues are acquired through practice and the development of habits.

- Prudence has been translated as “common sense” and “practical wisdom”. It helps individuals make the right decision in the right way at the right time for the right reason.
- Among the intellectual virtues, prudence played the major role because it helped individuals avoid excess and deficiency and arrive at the **golden mean** between the two.
- In Aristotle’s view, only the truly prudent person could possess all the moral virtues.

# PRUDENCE

- This exercise of prudence was part of the cosmic order that ensured the right management of the home, the marketplace, and civilization itself.
  - Committing fraud or deception to achieve an end, even if that end were good or just, was not considered an honorable act.
- Only when ends and means were aligned and worked in harmony were those engaged in the transaction considered virtuous.
  - This virtue, in turn, would lead to the happiness Aristotle envisioned and toward which his entire system of virtue ethics aimed.

# INTELLECTUAL VS. MORAL VIRTUES

- Whereas **intellectual virtues** focused on external acts, **the moral virtues** had to do with character.
  - They included courage, self-control, liberality, honor, patience, and amiability.

# INTELLECTUAL VS. MORAL VIRTUES

- The paragon of an individual with good moral virtues was the magnanimous individual, someone for whom fame and wealth held little attraction.
  - This person had self-knowledge; was not quick to anger, or submissive to others; and acted with self-respect, control, and prudence.
  - They achieved happiness by leading a life characterized by reason and will.
  - They remained in control of self and did not hand over their authority—or moral agency—to others, whether in judgment or in decision-making.



**What about real life?**

# PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF ARISTOTLE

- A hiring manager acts prudently when assessing a pool of candidates based on knowledge of their backgrounds and on insight gained after years of working in that role.
- The manager may even use intuitive reason regarding a candidate, which Aristotle believed was another way of arriving at truth. The manager's intuition is an impression regarding character and someone's potential fit in an organization.



# HOW TO CHANGE CHARACTER

- Aristotle believed that action preceded character.
- The primary way to change character was through consistent, intentional behavior in the direction of virtue.

Do you agree? Do you need to develop habits first in order to develop a moral character or do good acts occur as a result of good character?

# HOW TO CHANGE CHARACTER ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE

- Aristotle gave the example of courage.
  - A person was not courageous first and then went about performing acts of courage.
  - Instead, courage resulted from incremental change, small steps taken over time that molded the person's character.
    - It relied on a recognition of justice, so that courage was directed toward the right end.
  - Anyone could become courageous; however, it was a discipline that had to be learned and practiced with dedication.

# MODERN SOCIAL SCIENCE

“People who are good at self-control ... seem to be structuring their lives in a way to avoid having to make a self-control decision in the first place,’ . . . And structuring your life is a skill. People who do the same activity, like running or meditating, at the same time each day have an easier time accomplishing their goals, he says — not because of their willpower, but because the routine makes it easier.”

- In other words, modern social science suggests that good habits do in fact lead to good acts.



**THANK YOU**