



Lecture 9

Networked Communications

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Participation Quiz

Which of these things is the least like the others?

- A. A wrench
- B. Running
- C. Stickiness
- D. Karl Marx
- E. Email

Movie Download Scenario

- InterMovies is a site that streams movies for a flat monthly fee
- Collects information about movie choices from customers
- Constructs profiles of customers
- Sells profiles to direct marketing firms
- Some customers happy to receive more mail order catalogs; others unhappy at increase in “junk mail”

Evaluation (Social Contract Theory)

- Consider rights of InterMovies, customers, and mail order companies.
- Does customer have right to expect name, address to be kept confidential?
- If customer watches movie using InterMovies, who owns information about transaction?
- If InterMovies and customer have equal rights to information, InterMovies did nothing wrong to sell information.
- If customers have right to expect name and address or transaction to be confidential without giving permission, then InterMovies was wrong to sell information without asking for permission.

What do you think about InterMovies?

- Now, let's explore both scenarios. Work in groups of six to consider whether each of the following scenarios can be justified using social contract theory.
 - Customer doesn't have the right to privacy
 - Can you construct a system of rules that rational people would accept as beneficial, given that others would accept these ideas as well?
 - Does this system of rules meet Rawls' conditions?
 - Customer does have the right to privacy
 - Can you construct a system of rules that rational people would accept as beneficial, given that others would accept these ideas as well?
 - Does this system of rules meet Rawls' conditions?
- Let's vote:
 - We can justify the no-privacy scenario (A=true)
 - We can justify the privacy scenario (A=true)
 - Which social contract would you prefer (A=no privacy; B=privacy)

Case for Social Contract Theory

- Framed in language of rights
 - Intuitive and natural
- Explains why people act in self-interest without common agreement
 - Logically, it's the best thing to do (prisoner's dilemma)
- Provides clear analysis of certain citizen/government problems
 - Why is it right to punish someone for a crime?
 - Why is civil disobedience justifiable?

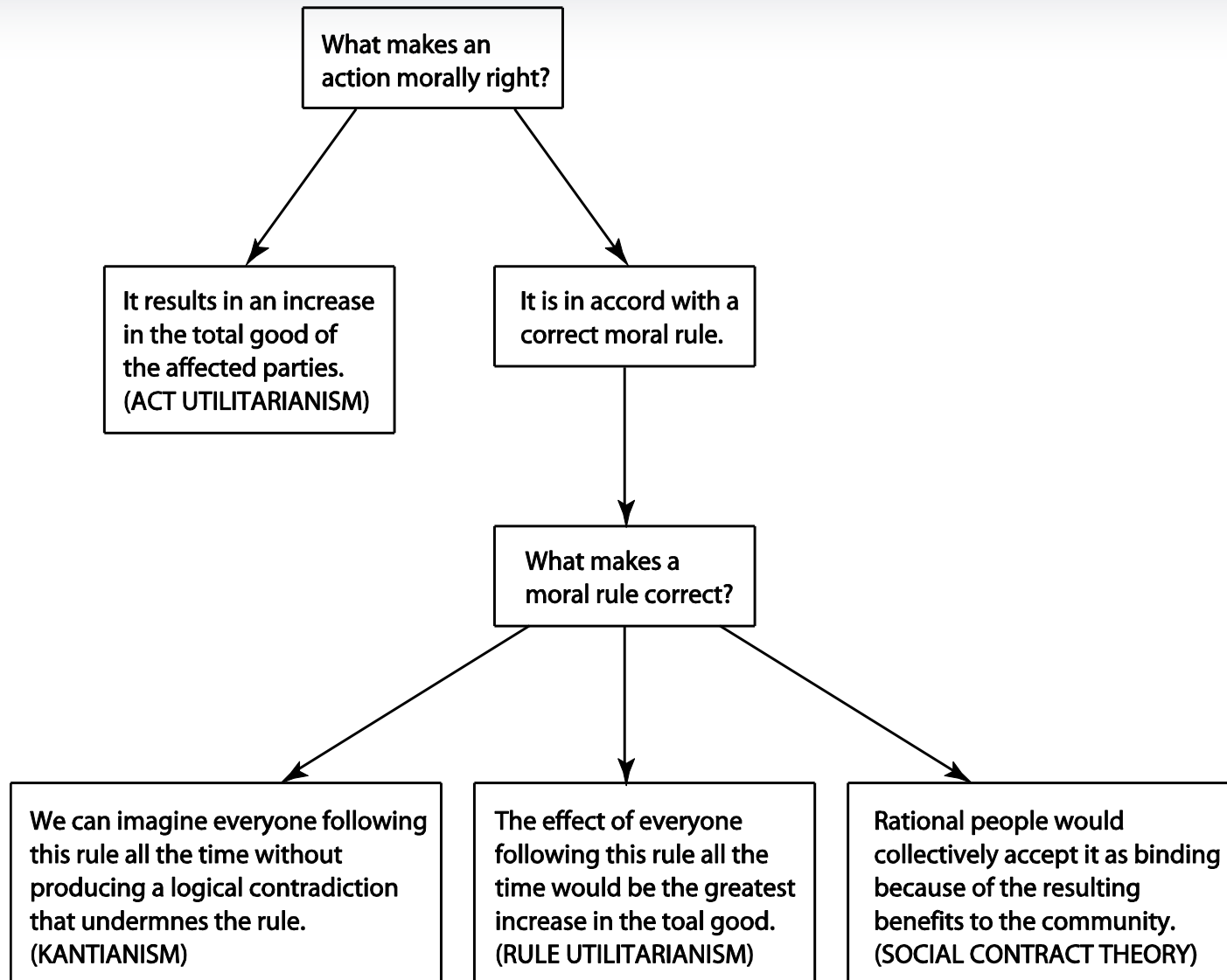
Case Against Social Contract Theory

- No one signed a contract
- Some actions have multiple characterizations. In such cases, we don't learn how to make trade-offs between these conflicting rights.
 - Same problem we saw with Kantianism, though phrased in terms of duties instead of rights.
- May unjustly treat people who cannot uphold contract
 - In principle, we should distinguish between people who *can't* follow the contract, and those who *choose not to*.
 - In practice, this can be hard to do.

Summary: Objectivism vs. Relativism

- Objectivism: Morality has some kind of existence outside a given human mind
- Relativism: Morality is subjective
 - This is clearly not going to get us anywhere persuading anyone else with a moral argument.
- Kantianism, utilitarianism, and social contract theory are examples of objectivism
 - So are divine command theory and ethical egoism, but we rejected these as poor bases for ethical argumentation.

Comparing Workable Ethical Theories

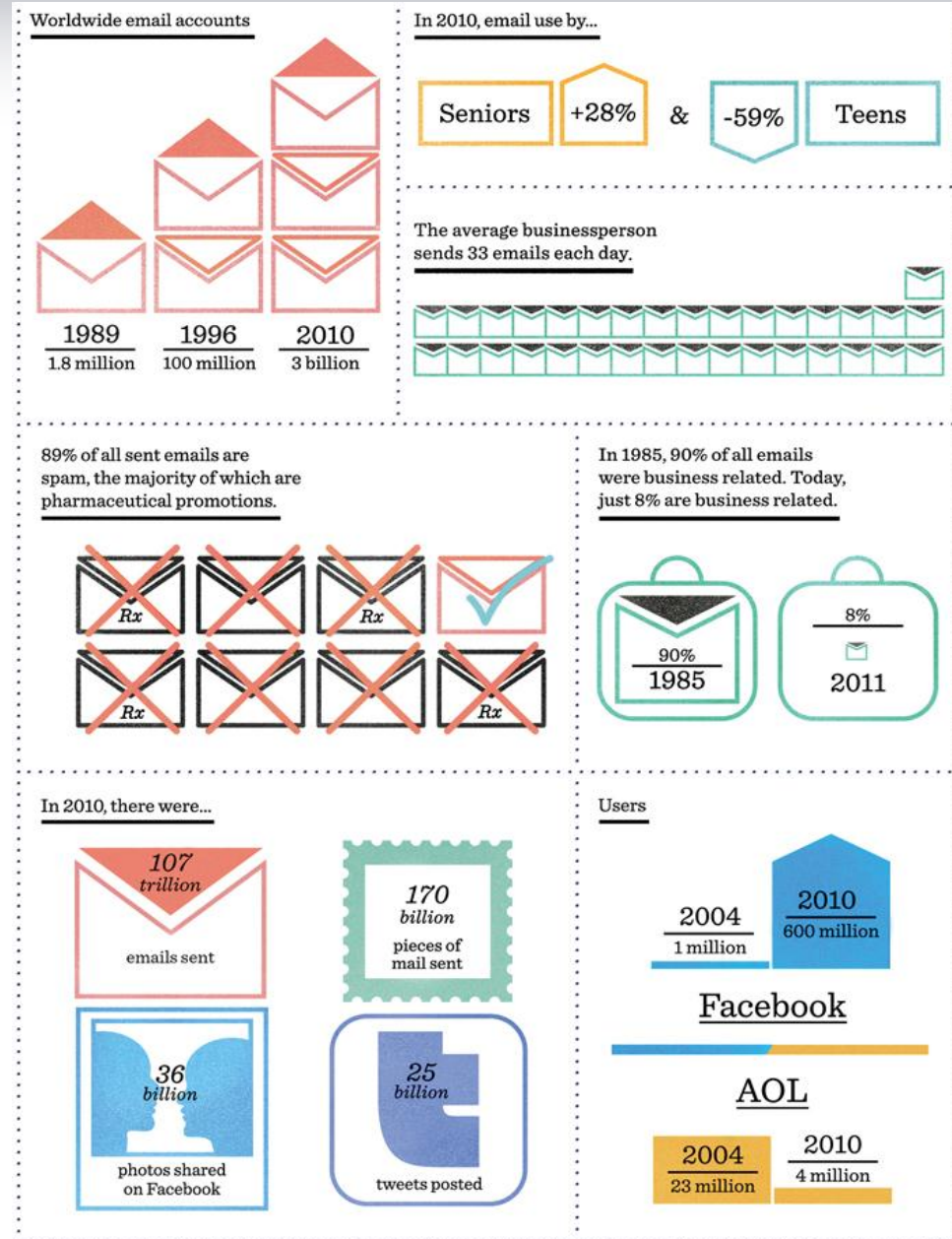


So much for ethical theories. Let's transition to:

NETWORKED COMMUNICATIONS

The Spam Epidemic

- Spam: Unsolicited, bulk email
- Spam is profitable
 - More than 100 times cheaper than “junk mail”
 - Profitable even if only 1 in 100,000 buys product
- Amount of email that is spam has ballooned
 - 8% in 2001
 - 90% in 2009



Ethical Evaluations of Spamming

The book argues from each perspective that spamming is wrong. Let's see if we can make the arguments ourselves:

- Kantian evaluation
- Act utilitarian evaluation
- Rule utilitarian evaluation
- Social contract theory evaluation

Which of these do you find most/least convincing?

Need for Socio-Technical Solutions

- New technologies sometimes cause new social situations to emerge
 - Calculators → feminization of bookkeeping
 - Telephones → blurred work/home boundaries
- Spam is an example of this phenomenon
 - Email messages practically free
 - Profits increase with number of messages sent
 - Strong motivation to send more messages
- For communications to be perceived as fair, they need to be two-way (allowing consequences for misuse)
 - Internet design allows unfair, one-way communications

Government Control of the Internet

- Myanmar, Cuba, North Korea: Internet virtually inaccessible
- Saudi Arabia: centralized control center
- People's Republic of China: “one of most sophisticated filtering systems in the world” as well as censorship
- Germany: Forbids access to neo-Nazi sites
- United States: limit access of minors to pornography

Forms of Direct Censorship

- Government monopolization of a communication medium
 - E.g., the government owns all television stations, or all printing presses, and so controls the message
 - Doesn't work so well with the Internet
- Prepublication review
 - Certain kinds of information must be reviewed before they can be published
 - E.g., nuclear/military secrets
- Licensing and registration
 - You can't operate a TV station without a license
 - Necessary because of limited bandwidth
 - Opens the door to regulation of content

Self-censorship

- Most common form of censorship
- Group decides for itself not to publish
- Reasons
 - Avoid subsequent prosecution
 - Maintain good relations with government officials (sources of information)
- A “soft” form of self-censorship: ratings systems
 - Movies, TVs, CDs, video games
 - Nothing similar has happened on the Web
 - At least, not consistently.

Challenges Posed by the Internet

- Many-to-many communications
 - Hard for the government to shut down (but, Arab Spring)
- Dynamic connections
 - Computers coming and going all the time; hard to know who's who
- Huge numbers of Web sites
 - Hard to control access to online information
- Extends beyond national borders, laws
 - Governments may have limited authority to shut down sites
 - E.g., SOPA
- Hard to distinguish between minors and adults
 - Important for initiatives that seek to restrict children's access

Ethical Perspectives on Censorship

- Kant opposed censorship
 - Product of the Enlightenment: reaction to institutional control
 - “Have courage to use your own reason”
- Mill opposed censorship
 1. No one is infallible: we may silence the truth.
 2. Even if not, an opinion may contain a kernel of truth.
 3. Even if not, the truth must be rationally tested and validated.
 4. Ideas are most persuasive if they’re tested rigorously.

Principle of harm:

“The only ground on which intervention is justified is to prevent harm to others; the individual’s own good is not a sufficient condition.”