Class 5:
A focus on unworkable ethical theories

First clicker question for participation points!

Who is your computer/technology hero?

a. Bill Gates

b. Steve Jobs

c. Sergey Brin (substitute here Larry Page)

d. R2-D2

e. The whole enterprise is sexist, Euro-centric, heterosexist and I reject the entire premise of choosing a 'hero'.

Ethical dilemma

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-16596577

On Wednesday, English Wikipedia blocked out for 24 hours in protest

SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) PIPA (Protect IP Act)

"The bills propose that anyone found guilty of streaming copyrighted content without permission 10 or more times within six months should face up to five years in jail."

On a piece of paper/Ipad/Laptop/hand write:

- 3-5 arguments in favour of this bills/statement
- 3-5 arguments against the bills/statement

Previous class

- Initial exploration of the concepts of morality, ethics, an ethical point of view, and ethical theories

- Questions we might ask when making an ethical argument

- What makes some arguments stronger than others?

- Explored two ethical theories related to relativism: subjective relativism (and cultural relativism)

Today's class

- Further explore 'cultural relativism' as an unworkable theory

- Introduce and discuss two remaining ethical theories identified as 'unworkable' by the textbook. Explore their pros and cons:

  - Divine Command Theory

  - Ethical Egoism

- Hone our argumentation skills, and further explore what good (and bad) arguments look like

Cultural relativism

- What do we mean?

Which of these could form a cultural relativism argument?

a. "I'm going to download this pirated CD because everyone else is doing it"

b. "I don't think people under 25 should drive because they're too immature"

c. At our StarTrek conventions, we insult each other. That's just what we do.

d. People should pay taxes because it's legally required

Case against cultural relativism: Gag order

- Because two societies **do** have different moral views doesn't mean they **ought to** have different views
- It doesn't explain how moral guidelines are determined
- What if there are no cultural norms?
- Cultural norms are often not accepted across the culture
- It doesn't account for evolution of moral guidelines
- It provides no way out for cultures in conflict
- Existence of **many** acceptable practices does not imply **all** practices are acceptable (many/any fallacy)
- Societies do, in fact, share certain core values
- Only indirectly based on reason. History not reason

The problem with moral relativism is...it doesn't exist

Internal logical inconsistency

The assertion that all morality is relative, and we cannot judge others' morality, is necessarily taking a normative position and is not a relative statement.

Some would argue relativism is moral absolutism (always moral/immoral regardless of context)

Others argue it is nihilism (rejection of all morality and values)

Examples of relativism from our lives/the media

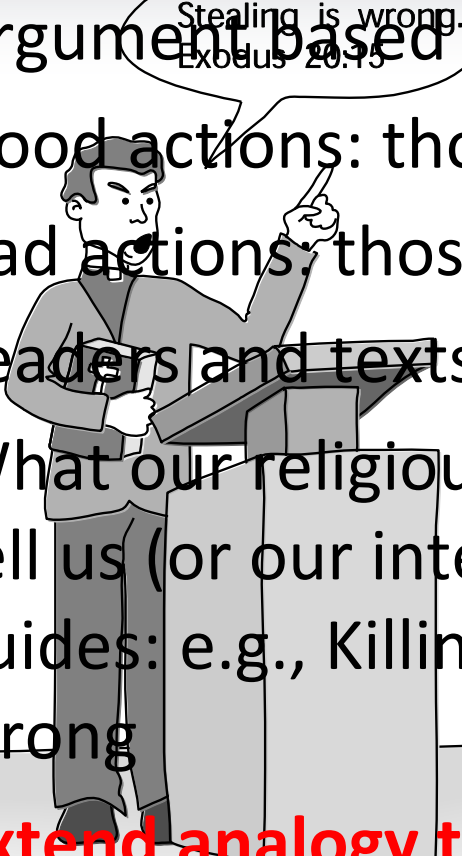Any examples?

Argumentation for a position

The Church of Kopimism

Listen to the clip—focus on his argumentation

http://www.cbc.ca/video/news/audioplayer.html?clipid=2187818658

Argument: I just feel it (I feel it in my gut). I just believe it

Common to relativism and to divine command theory (and to other arguably unworkable theories)

Divine Command Theory

- Argument based on what we believe our religion tells us

- Good actions: those aligned with God's will

- Bad actions: those contrary to God's will

- Leaders and texts reveal God's will

- What our religious leaders say and what our holy books tell us (or our interpretation of them) are our moral guides: e.g., Killing is wrong because the bible says it's wrong

- **Extend analogy to the idea of secular law. Our laws say it is wrong—legalistic interpretation of morality and ethics. Law=ethics (Killing is wrong because the law says it's wrong)**

Case for Divine Command Theory

- We owe obedience to the creator

- God knows what's best for us—so we must follow him

- God not humans are ultimate authority

More Nuanced Arguments…

- God as the ultimate reality—reasonable people can disagree

- Evidence that religious rules often benefit society—e.g., our legal code based on the 10 commandments, Jewish law. Likewise, our laws benefit society—there is often overlap with laws/religious doctrine and ethical practice

- Our spiritual and religious beliefs/texts can be our guiding compass in our values and assessment of situations

Case against divine command theory

- Different holy books disagree—and different legal codes don't always line up.

- Society is multicultural, secular—we cannot impose our religious views on others in a mixed society

- Some modern moral problems not addressed in scripture or laws

- Any/many fallacy: Just because some laws or religious codes benefit society and are ethical, not all of them may be

- Based on obedience rather than a form of argumentation grounded in reason (again, a form of argumentation with which we cannot engage—who am I to say God is wrong?)

Unworkable ethical theories

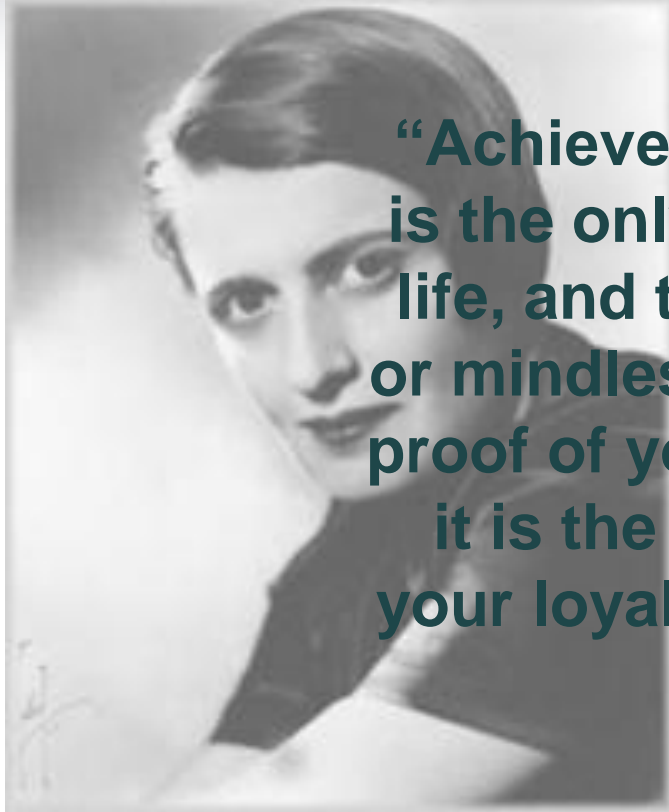You can't really make a good argument from them. Conversation stoppers

You can't evaluate whether what I did was unethical because all morality is personal **Subjective relativism**

You can't evaluate whether what our group did was wrong because it's OK for us to do it—you don't have to do it. This is what we've always done, and we, as a group, think it's OK **Cultural relativism**
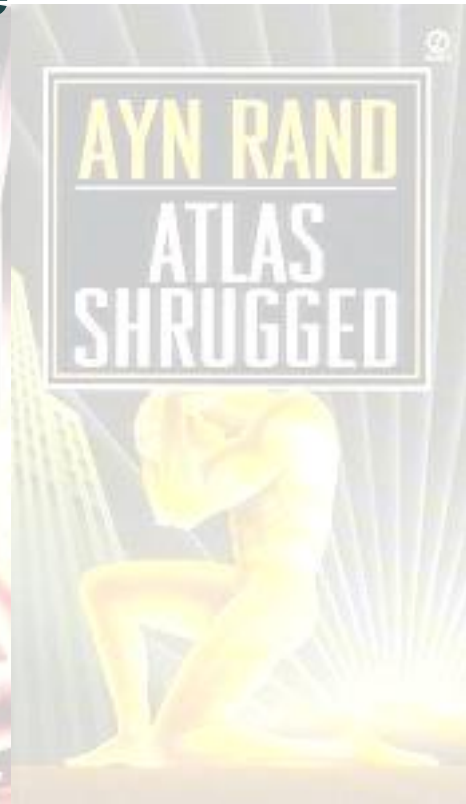
You can't judge what I did as unethical because I've got God on my side— "Anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him." (Lev 24:16) I choose to interpret this literally—therefore, I was entirely ethical when my community stoned a tourist to death for saying "Oh my God". **Divine Command Theory**

(Legalism: in our law it says we should imprison men with beards, so therefore it's wrong to have beards)

Ethical Egoism

"Achievement of your happiness is the only moral purpose of your life, and that happiness, not pain or mindless self-indulgence, is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values."

Self interest

Psychological egoism: We act in our own self-interest

Ethical egoism: We *ought* to act in our own self-interest. It is morally right

- Each person should focus exclusively on his or her self-interest

- Morally right action is the action that provides self with maximum long-term benefit not instant gratification (misunderstanding of ethical egoism)

The case for ethical egoism

- It is practical since we are already inclined to do what's best for ourselves

- The community can benefit when individuals put their well-being first

- Some other moral principles are rooted in the principle of self-interest

- If you are rational and really understood your self-interest, you would act in a way that would do no harm to others as you would see it would do harm to you

The case against ethical egoism

- An easy moral philosophy may not be the best moral philosophy

- Not true that people naturally act in their own long-term self-interest (criticism of rationality assumption)

- Social injustices have occurred when individuals have put their own interests first

- Altruism before self interest?

- Other moral principles are superior to principle of self-interest

- **Ethical egoism is a form of bigotry—what makes my interests more important than yours?? Does not acknowledge social obligations**

Making a good argument...putting forward a position

- Number 1 through 8

- Get in your groups: all the 1s together, 2s together, 3s together etc.

- In your group, you're going to create a 2-minute argument in accordance with what is written on your group's piece of paper.

Making a good argument

- Listen to the other point of view—anticipate and understand the other position, understand where they're coming from (or going to come from)

- Use anecdotes

- Use specific examples from your own personal experience

- Gather all the information you know about the case

- Evaluate who benefits and who loses

- Evaluate whether goals could be achieved in a better way

- ??

Good luck

- Select a scribe

- Select a presenter

- You have 10 minutes to create a 2-minute position—written/ad-libbed—up to you

- Each group will have 2 minutes to present—4 sets of issues—vote on most persuasive group

Wrap up

Exit polls:

Think about what we've covered over the last week

On your cue card, write either:

1. 1 thing/idea that still isn't clear to you

1. 1 question you have as a result of anything you've learned this week—something you'd like to explore further, either as part of this course or by yourself; something that's piqued your interest