Lecture 6
Kantianism

Participation Quiz

- Which internet meme is awesomest?

a) Lolcats

b) Rickrolling

c) Star Wars Kid

d) Double rainbow

Participation Quiz

- Which internet meme is lamest?

a) Lolcats

b) Rickrolling

c) Star Wars Kid

d) Double rainbow

Today's Class

- Debates from last class

- Kantianism

- ...we're behind by one class. But it's OK, because act and rule utilitarianism are similar. We'll do both next Tues.

The debaters: two-minute presentations

- There are 4 issues
  - two groups on the two sides of each issue
    - Except one topic where, amazingly, you're both arguing against ☺
  - each side will have 2 minutes to present their case
- The class will vote by clicker to decide whose argument was the most compelling
- At the end, we'll choose the best overall argument (among the four semi-finalists)
- Good luck!

Groups 1 and 2

(Very loosely) Adapted from Plato's Republic

"Ming, a computer programmer, discovers a password in her office. She guesses and then discovers that it is the password for her boss's private email account. She decides to go in to her boss's email to see what she has written about her and what is going on in her boss's life so she can be in a better position to ask for a raise"

Argument: Whenever people have the opportunity to act unethically without fear of getting caught or fear of anyone thinking worse of them, they do so

Group 1: In support of argument

Group 2: Against argument

Groups 3 and 4

Argument: If everyone agreed to take the ethical point of view by respecting others and their core values, there would be no need for a rigorous study of ethics

- **Groups 3 & 4: Argue <u>against</u> this position**

- **Anyone else: let's hear arguments for**

Groups 5 and 6

- **Group 5:** You have been hired as legal counsel for the Kopimistic Church in Canada in their quest to become recognized as a religion.

- **Group 6:** You are acting as legal counsel for the state AGAINST the Kopimistic Church's position to become recognized as a religion in Canada

Groups 7 and 8

All our menial tasks will one day be outsourced to robots or droids. We should be focusing technological advancements to this goal.

Group 7: Argue in favour of this position

Group 8: Argue against this position

Overall vote

A. Question about stealing boss' password
B. No need for a rigorous study of ethics
C. Kopimistic Church
D. Outsourcing to droids

2.6 Kantianism

- Good will: the desire to do the right thing

- Immanuel Kant: Only thing in the world that is good without qualification is a good will

- Reason should cultivate desire to do right thing

Categorical Imperative (1st Formulation)

Act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to be universal moral laws.
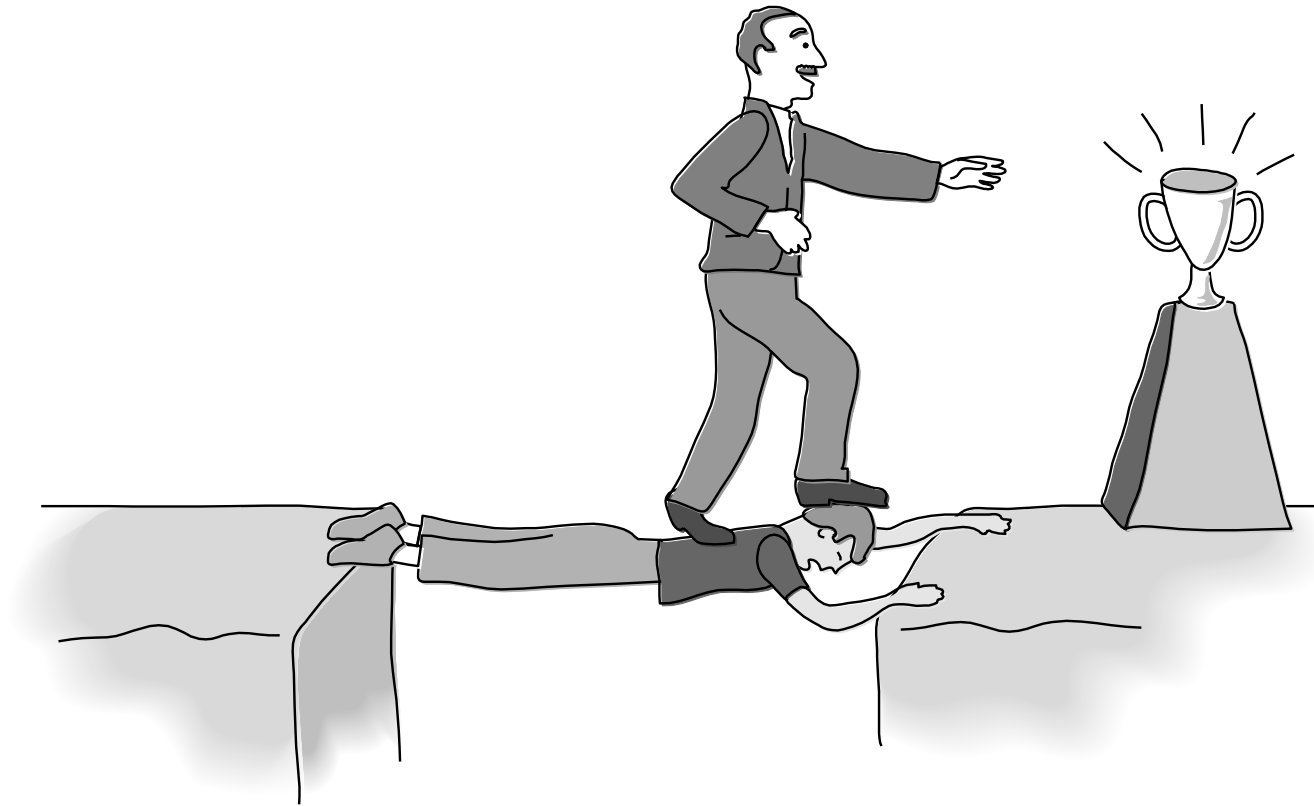
Illustration of 1st Formulation

- Question: Can a person in dire straits make a promise with the intention of breaking it later?

- Proposed rule: "I may make promises with the intention of later breaking them."

- The person in trouble wants his promise to be believed so he can get what he needs.

- Universalize rule: Everyone may make & break promises

- Everyone breaking promises would make promises unbelievable, contradicting desire to have promise believed

- The rule is flawed. The answer is "No."

Categorical Imperative (2ⁿᵈ Formulation)

Act so that you treat both yourself and other people as ends in themselves and never only as a means to an end.

This is usually an easier formulation to work with than the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative.

2ⁿᵈ Formulation of Categorical Imperative

Plagiarism Scenario

- Carla
  - Single mother
  - Works full time
  - Takes two evening courses/semester

- History class
  - Requires more work than normal
  - Carla earning an "A" on all work so far
  - Carla doesn't have time to write final report

- Carla purchases report and submits it as her own work

Kantian Evaluation (1ˢᵗ Formulation)

- Carla wants credit for plagiarized report

- Rule: "You may claim credit for work performed by someone else"

- If rule universalized, reports would no longer be credible indicator's of student's knowledge, and professors would not give credit for reports

- Proposal moral rule is self-defeating

- It is wrong for Carla to turn in a purchased report

Kantian Evaluation (2nd Formulation)

- Carla submitted another person's work as her own
- She attempted to deceive professor
- She treated professor as a means to an end
  - End: passing the course
  - Means: professor issues grade
- What Carla did was wrong

Case for Kantianism

- Rational

- Produces universal moral guidelines

- Treats all persons as moral equals

- Workable ethical theory

Perfect and Imperfect Duties

- Perfect duty: duty obliged to fulfill without exception
  - Example: Telling the truth
- Imperfect duties are still duties that can be inferred by the application of "pure reason": i.e., the first or second formulations of the categorical imperative. But they're:
  - Activities you couldn't keep doing forever; never "done"
  - Cause for praise if you do it; not cause for blame if you don't.
- So what *are* imperfect duties?
  - Examples: helping others; developing your talents.
- More generally:
  - Furthering the ends of ourselves and others.
  - Not following maxims that lead to undesirable states of affairs (as distinct from logical contradictions) when universalized

Case Against Kantianism

- Sometimes no rule adequately characterizes an action

- Sometimes there is no way to resolve a conflict between rules

  - In a conflict between a perfect duty and an imperfect duty, perfect duty prevails

  - In a conflict between two perfect duties, no solution

- Kantianism allows no exceptions to perfect duties