PHIL 226
Ethics and the Life Sciences
Paul Thagard

- Please do not sit in the back row unless you are NOT officially enrolled in the class.

- Please turn off and put away all electronics.

"Went in for a simple blood test and got cloned by mistake."

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Issues in the News

1. Should doctors assist suicide by terminally ill patients?

2. Should circumcision be banned?

3. Should the US have a national health plan?

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What is Philosophy?

- **Philosophy**: The search for answers to fundamental questions about the nature of reality, knowledge, morality, and the meaning of life.

- **Epistemology**: The philosophical study of the nature of knowledge.

- **Metaphysics**: The philosophical study of the fundamental nature of what exists.

- **Ethics**: The philosophical study of the basis of right and wrong.

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Facts   vs.   Values

- How the world *is*.
- Descriptive
- Scientific methods:
  - Observation
  - Experiment
  - Theories
  - Models

- How the world *ought* to be.
- Prescriptive, normative.
- Ethics, philosophy.

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What Matters?

1. Nihilism: nothing.

2. Egoism: yourself.

3. Tribalism: Your immediate family or group.

4. Anthropocentrism: all humans.

5. Theism: God.

6. Biocentrism: All living things.

7. Deep ecology: All things, e.g. the planet.

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Discussion Questions

- What do you see as the most pressing questions in biomedical ethics?

- Are there objective answers to these questions, or does right and wrong depend on your point of view?

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Positions about ethics (meta-ethics)

1. Objectivism: there really is right and wrong.

2. Relativism: right and wrong depend on your point of view, so what's right for one person might be wrong for another person.

3. Non-cognitivism: Ethical statements are merely expressions of emotional attitudes of approval or disapproval.

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Ethical Decision Procedure

1. Identify the issue.
2. Identify the options.
3. Use Ethical Reasoning Patterns to evaluate the options.
4. Reach a conclusion on the issue.

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Ethical reasoning patterns

An ethical reasoning pattern (ERP) is a standard way of justifying a conclusion about right and wrong.

Religious ERP:

• Issue: Is a particular **action** right or wrong?

• Analysis: According to my religious beliefs, the **action** is right (wrong).

• Conclusion: The action is **right** (wrong).

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Consequences ERP

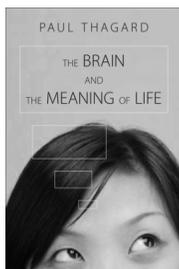Issue: Is a particular action right or wrong?

1. Analysis: Overall, the action has good consequences, so it is right.

2. Or, overall, the action has bad consequences, so it is wrong.

3. Conclusion: the action is right (wrong).

Hedonistic utilitarianism: Consider consequences with respect to pleasure/pain.

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What are good consequences?

1. Pleasure vs. pain.
2. Happiness
3. Flourishing
4. Human needs
   • Biological
   • Psychological

PAUL THAGARD

THE BRAIN
AND
THE MEANING OF LIFE

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Rights/duties ERP

Issue: Is a particular action right or wrong?
Analysis: An action is right if you have a duty to do it and it does not violate anyone's rights.
An action is wrong if you have a duty not to do it or if it violates someone's rights.
Conclusion: The action is right (wrong).

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Principles ERP

Issues: Is a particular action right or wrong?
Analysis: An action is right if it follows from a valid general principle,
and does not violate any principles.
An action is wrong if it violates an ethical principle.
Conclusion: The action is right (wrong).

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Discussion

- Which approach to ethics do you find most plausible?
  - Religion
  - Consequences
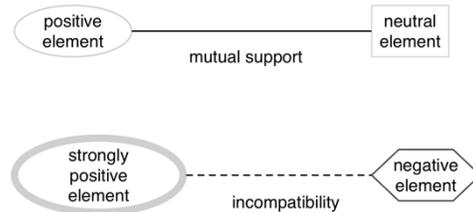 - Rights and duties
  - Principles

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Ethical Principles
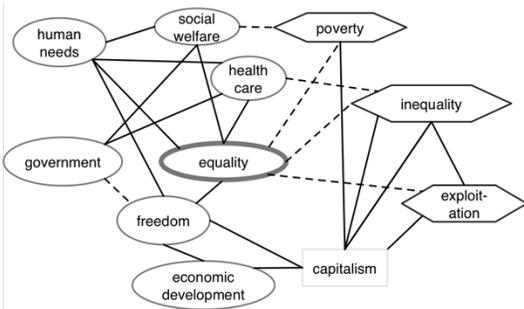
- Autonomy
- Equality
- Beneficence
- Non-malfeasance

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Value Maps

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Cognitive-Affective Map - Left

Cognitive-Affective Map - Right