Class recap

Obama admits CIA 'tortured some folks'

Vivisection: Scientists use 6% more animals for research

Class recap

- Why do we make moral judgements?

- What kinds of bases do we use?

- Are they just objective, or are some culturally relative and subjective?

- Can the 'good life' be lived according to unchanging, eternal rules, or by measuring up the greatest advantage in each situation?

- What about akrasia, or ambivalence?

- 'Morality': particular principles concerning right and wrong...

Those are my principles, and if you don't like them ... well, I have others.

~ Groucho Marx

Class aims

- Discuss reasons why people *should* be moral

- Begin to identify the features for a general moral theory, as well as criteria for evaluating different moral theories

- Evaluate how best we can help others with finite resources, and what moral dilemmas this entails

- Encounter Utilitarianism, our first philosophical theory of social morality
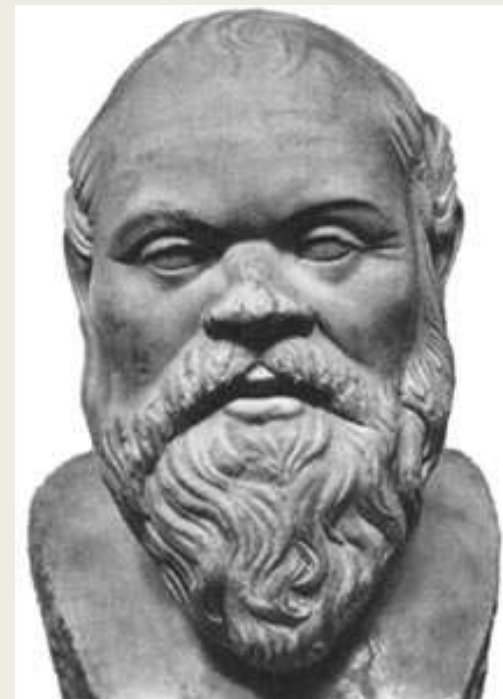
Why should we be good?

- In small groups, discuss why we should be moral in the first place

- What compels us to do the right thing?

- How do we remain moral when so often others act without moral scruples, often successfully?

- Reflect on your own personal reasons for trying to do the right thing....

# Why should we be good?

- Do you have a single, underlying reason that compels you to do the right thing, or do you weigh up a number of factors?

- Philosophers have struggled with trying to identify a single underlying basis for acting morally

- Some have claimed to have found an objective basis, and so offer philosophies that instruct us on how to do the right thing and become better people

Why should we be good?

- This relies on identifying the factors on identifying whether a given moral action is good or bad...

- We can weigh up character and virtue, or duty, or the greater social good or consequences that result...

Virtue ethics
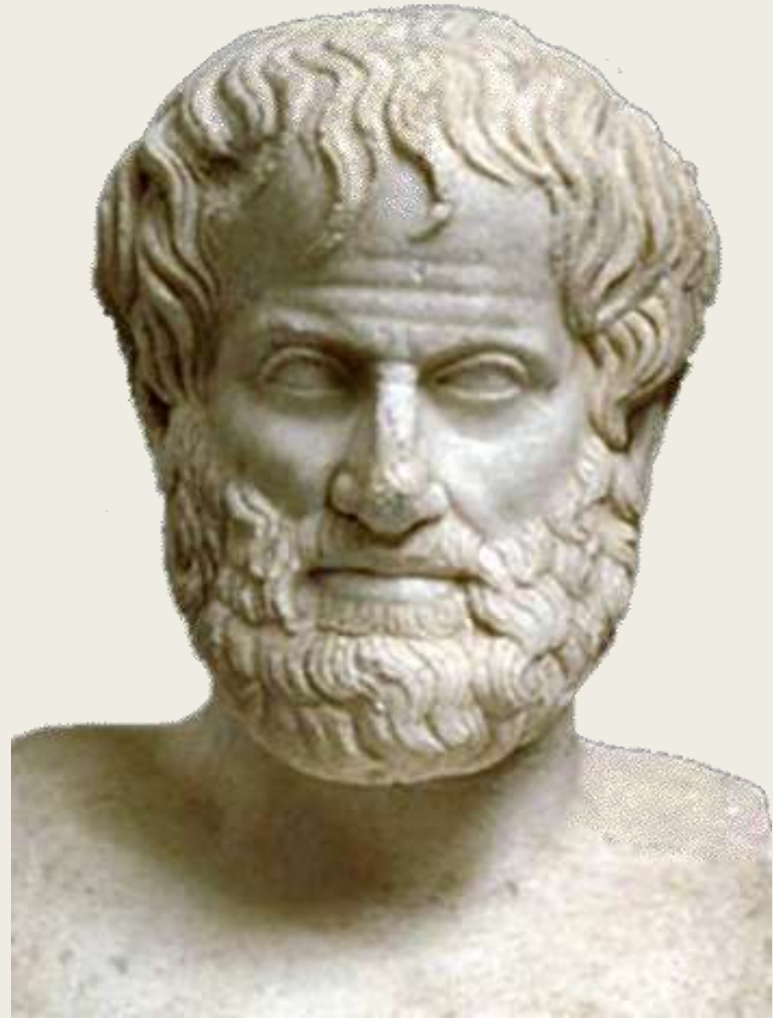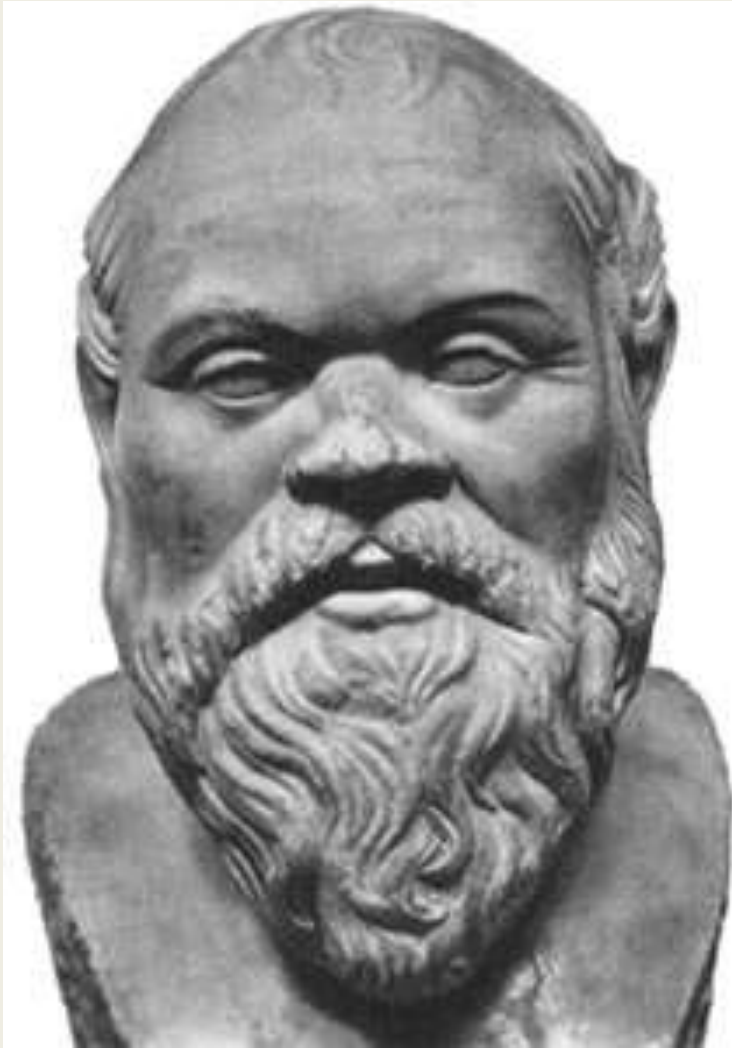
Virtue ethics

- Ancient Greek philosophers focused on the internal character or virtue of the person doing the action, not the consequence

- These are internal qualities that we should strive to embody and carry out in our relations with others

- Plato's *Republic* emphasised wisdom, justice, courage and self-discipline

- Aristotle encouraged us to find a 'golden mean' or virtue between two vices of excess/deficiency

- By living according to these virtues, we can achieve authentic happiness and flourishing and endure misfortune
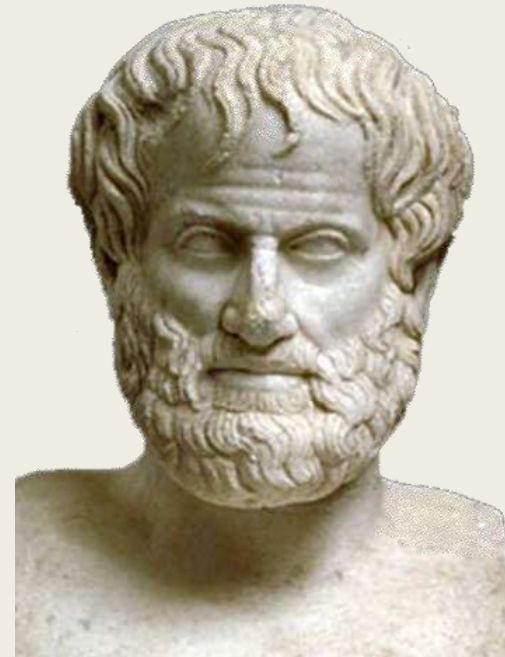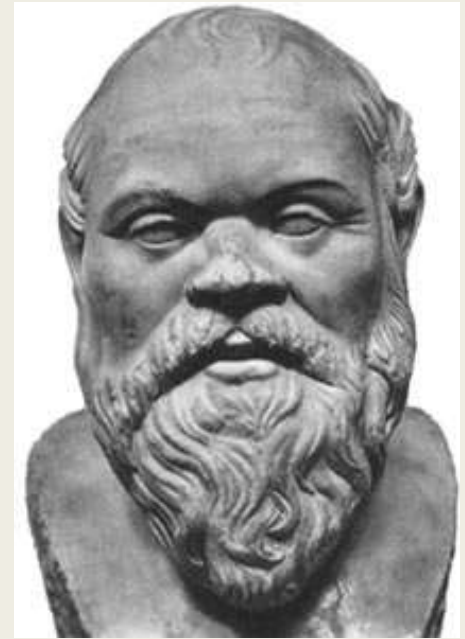
Utilitarianism
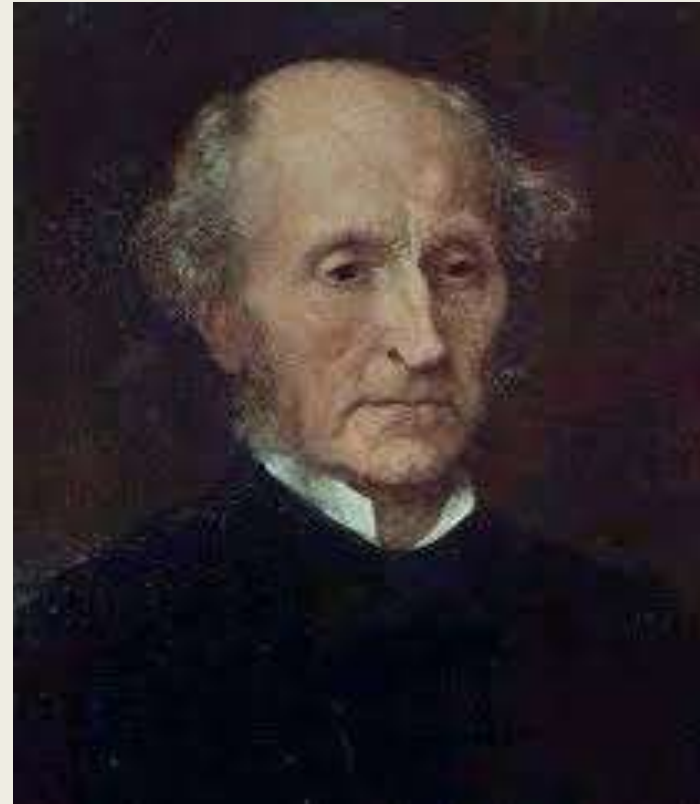
Auto-icon, Jeremy Bentham, London

Utilitarianism

Auto-icon, Jeremy Bentham, London

■ A moral action is the one that brings the greatest good to the greatest number of people

■ This called "the principles of utility" (J.S. Mill)

■ Utilitarianism is called a *Consequentialist* theory of ethics – the key in factor in assessing an action are the consequences that follow from it

■ Consequences matter to us and the consequences of an action are *facts* – and facts can be measured objectively

■ So there could be a factual, objective answer to the question of what the good things to do is – the one the results in the best consequences

Deontology

Deontology

YES WE KANT

■ Immanuel Kant encourages us to instead focus on our duty (deontology)

■ He proposes a moral theory based on obeying our own internal moral laws, and doing the right thing regardless of the consequence

■ The Categorical Imperative: that our actions should be universalisable and apply equally to everyone at every time

■ Every person has free will – the ability to do otherwise. They realise this in their minds, and their freedom is in using their reason, and obeying the moral law

■ But do all societies share the same moral law?

What should a moral theory do?

- Each of these moral features relies on claims about human nature which are themselves debatable

- Should a moral theory push us to excel our baser natures, or reflect our all-too-human behaviours?

- Think back to the Groucho Marx quote earlier...

- What features *do you think* a moral theory should have?

- What problems should it tackle? What should it try to explain?

Some suggestions...

- Help us solve moral dilemmas and problems

- Explain *why* moral claims can be objective

- Give us a *reason* to act morally rather than immorally

- Explain which factors are important when we make moral decisions

- Explain what we the term 'good' means when used in a moral context

- Be practical and useful in everyday life

Why did we just do that?

- Because having these criteria in mind can help us when we come to *evaluate* a theory of morality

- It's easy to nit-pick in philosophy but if we can keep in mind the problems that they are trying to solve, then we can better appreciate what is worthwhile in a theory, even if it 'fails'

- Helps us to think *philosophically....*

We've won a prize!

- Because OFSTED think the Mary Ward Centre is so good, they've given us a cheque for £1 million! Hurrah!

- **And** we can have another £1 million if we can show that we spent the money in the best way – i.e., the most *moral* way, that we could. Hurrah!

- **But** we have to let the Beginner's philosophy class decide how to spend the money. Oh!

Spend the money!

- In your groups, think of how the MWC could spend the money to do the 'right thing'. We could do anything!

- For example, we could:

- Subsidise the cost of courses (but which ones?)

- Spend it on resources and teachers (but what kind)?

- Donate it to other charities (but which ones)

- Spend it all on a jolly for the class (but where would we go?)

Spend the money!

- In your groups:

- Try to come up with some ways that MWC could spend the money (2 mins)

- Consider some *principles* that you could appeal to in helping you to decide between these alternatives (7 mins)

- The we'll feedback what you thought – you don't all have to agree!

Some principles?

- Consequences – we are interested in what the consequences of our choices are when making moral decisions

- Maximising the good – we want to do as much good as possible, when deciding between alternatives

- What maximises the good? That which brings the most *benefit*

Utilitarianism recap

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Utilitarianism

- Developed as a theory in the 19th Century by the British Liberals, particularly Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and later by John Stuart Mill (James' son).

- All three shared the modern ideal that questions could be put on an objective, 'scientific' basis

- Again taking their lead from a 'naturalistic' and scientific point of view, Bentham and John Mill noted that it was *fact of human nature* (possibly biological) that all humans prefer happiness to unhappiness and, given the choice, would seek to maximise happiness and minimise unhappiness

- This fact about human nature allows us to explain 'the good' – the good is whatever *maximises* happiness, because this is something *all* human beings want

Utilitarianism

- "The greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, that is the measure of right and wrong in the human sphere" (J. Mill)

- Mill and Bentham also added to this a principle of altruism, namely that when making calculations of utility as have to consider other people's pleasure as of equal moral as one's own (i.e. We can't put our pleasure ahead of others)

Utilitarianism

- More generally, Utilitarianism insisted on a principle of equality – that everyone had to be considered as, in principles, equal when considering consequences of actions

- "Each to count as one, and none as more than one."

Utilitarianism

- Bentham, as a particularly strict naturalist, thought that we could further refine the notion of happiness, to make it more objective

- He further reduced the notions of happiness and unhappiness to the more basic principles of pleasure and pain

- So the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people is equal to the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of people

- This is called "hedonistic utilitarianism"

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- Encounter Utilitarianism, our first philosophical theory of social morality

- Homework: please complete the "First Thoughts" sheet and read up on Utilitarianism

Moodle login

Username: firstnamelastname

Password: FirstNameInitial (capitals)

E.g. Donald Trump

Username: donaldtrump

Password: DONALDT