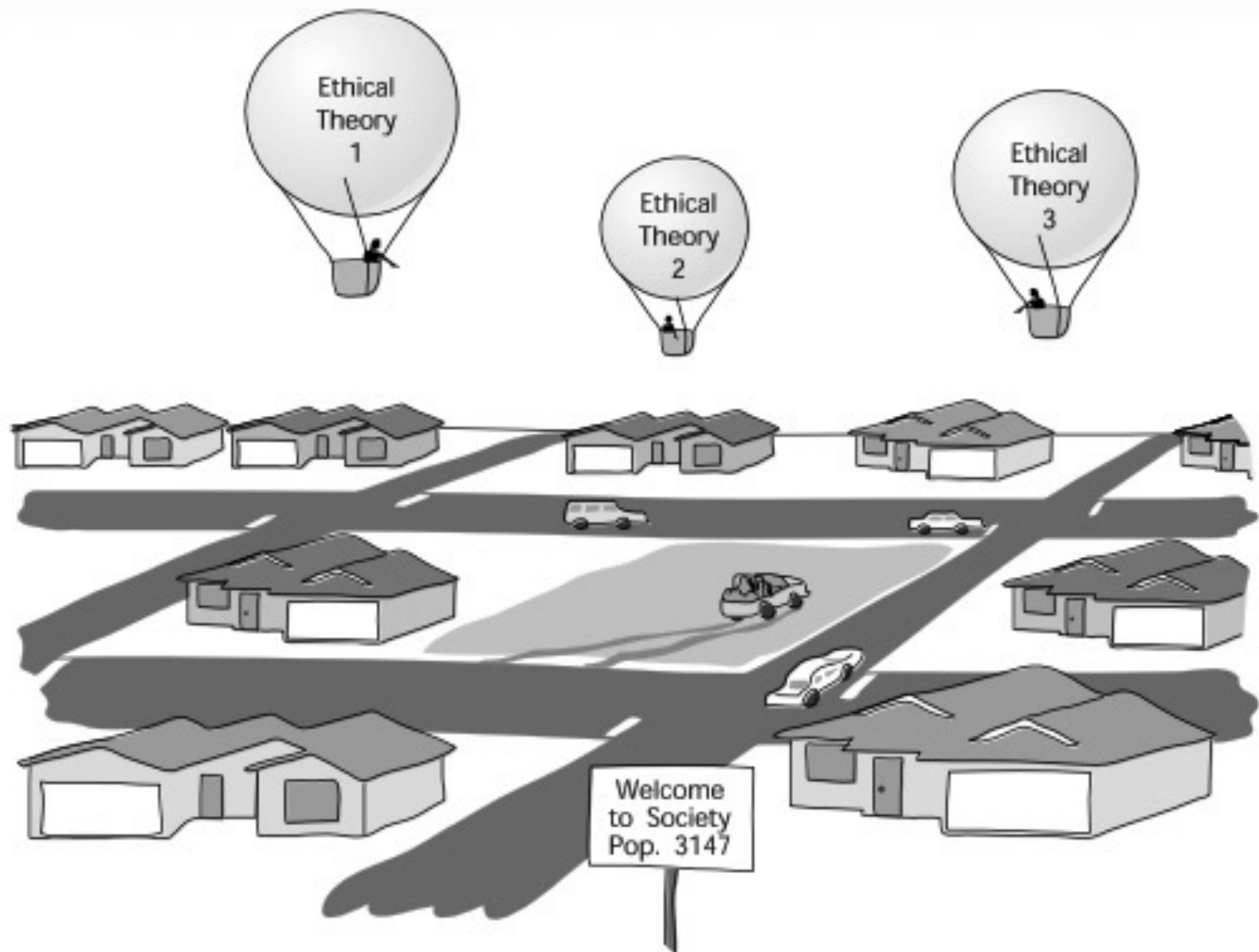


# CS 3001-C: Computing, Society, and Professionalism

Munmun De Choudhury | Associate Professor | School of Interactive Computing

# Week 3: Utilitarianism

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# Tests of an ethical theory

# The STOP Sign



# Detering speeders

- \*\* Scenario 3, p. 53 Quinn
  - East Dakota State Police (EDSP) installs cameras to detect speeders on the highway.
  - It takes picture of the driver and matches with the photo on the car's registration/license plate information.
  - Speeding reduces by 90%
  - FBI asks for these data.
  - Three months later five people are arrested under suspicion of belonging to a terrorist organization.
- Did EDSP do anything wrong?
- Who benefited? Who was harmed?

# Ethical Relativism

- It is the theory that there are no universal moral norms of right and wrong.
- That is, different individuals or groups of people can have completely opposite views of a moral problem, and both can be right
- Two kinds of ethical relativism: *subjective relativism* and *cultural relativism*

# Scenario Question

- Both Adolf Hitler and Mother Teresa spent their lives working towards what they believed was right
- Can you explain the morality of their actions with subjective relativism? Why or why not?

# Cultural Relativism

- It is the ethical theory that the meaning of right and wrong rests with a society's actual moral guidelines.
  - These guidelines vary from place to place and from time to time
- \*\* William Graham Sumner's position (p. 58)
  - Moral guidelines of a community, known as "folkways"



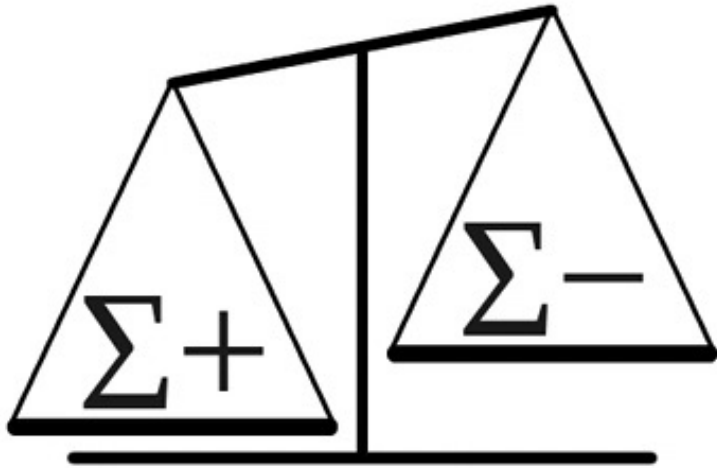
# Cultural Relativism Examples

- Polygamy
- Women not driving cars
- Hazing (fraternities)
- Residents working 36 hour shifts



# Utilitarianism

# Act Utilitarianism



- An action is good if its benefits exceeds its harms
- An action is bad if its harms exceed its benefits
- This theory is called utilitarianism, based upon the principle of utility\*, or the **Greatest Happiness Principle**
- \* Utility is the tendency of an object to produce happiness or prevent unhappiness for an individual or a community

# Act Utilitarianism

- The case for
- The case against

# Rule Utilitarianism

- Rule utilitarianism is a form of utilitarianism that says an action is right as it conforms to a rule that leads to the greatest good, or that "the rightness or wrongness" of a particular action is a function of the correctness of the rule of which it is an instance

# Rule Utilitarianism

- The case for
- The case against

# Discussion Point A

- Kao lives in Laos and really enjoys watching movies. The only way to watch movies (that he can afford) is to buy the illegally pirated versions sold on the streets of Vientiane, which he does when he has the money
- **Is what he does unethical?**
- **Examine with ethical relativism and utilitarianism**

# Discussion Point B

- John also really enjoy watching movies and is a tourist in Laos. John buys the pirated ones on the streets to take back to Canada; he also know this helps the local economy.
- **Is what John did unethical?**
- **Examine with ethical relativism and utilitarianism**



# Analysis

- Who benefits?
- Who gets harmed?
- What other ways can Kao or John achieve their objectives?
- What additional information would you need to evaluate whether this was an ethical decision?

# Limitations of Utilitarianism

- Not all benefits are the same or can be equally weighted
- Not all harms can be quantified