

Glossary of Important Concepts, Theories, and Debates¹

Metaphysics is the field of philosophy tasked with investigating the fundamental nature of reality, determining what exists, and explaining how what exists is related to what fundamentally exists. Metaphysical questions include: Do any composite objects exist? Can an apparently composite object (such as the ship of Theseus) lose any of its parts while remaining the very object that it is? Is everything physical or amendable to study through the empirical sciences?

Philosophy of mind is the field of philosophy concerned with questions about the nature of consciousness. Questions in the philosophy of mind include: Does consciousness exist? Which things are conscious? How can we be justified in believing that anything is conscious? What am I? What is a subject of experience? What is a person? When do these things begin to exist? What conditions must be met for these things to persist through time? What is it to undergo an experience? What is it to be in a mental state? Are all mental states representational? How do mental states relate to the external environment? Is the mind wholly physical? Do mental states cause behavior? What is the relationship between mental causation and ordinary physical causation?

Epistemology is the field of philosophy concerned with knowledge and anything that is importantly related to knowledge, such as belief, intuition, evidence, justification, inference, and so on. Epistemological questions include: What is it to know something? What is the relationship between knowledge and truth? What is a reason for belief? What is it for a belief to be justified? What is an intuition? What is evidence? What is it to have evidence? Can intuitions count as evidence? What is an inference? See **THE EPISTEMIC** chart (p. 11).

Ethics is the field of philosophy concerned with questions about right and wrong, good and bad, and so on. It divides into three main subfields (in decreasing generality): metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. See **CASE 1** below for an example of an answer to an ethical question and some further ethical questions it raises.

Metaethics is the field of philosophy concerned with foundational questions about morality, especially metaphysical and epistemological questions. Metaethical questions include: What is the best account of moral thought and language? What is the relationship between moral judgment and motivation? What is the nature of moral facts? How do moral facts (if there are any) fit into a scientific picture of the world (if at all)? Which moral facts (if any) are more fundamental than others? How can we come to know moral facts (if at all)? See the **METAETHICS** chart (p. 14).

Normative ethics is the field of philosophy concerned with developing general theories about how to act in a wide range of particular circumstances. Questions in normative ethics include: How should we make ethical decisions and approach moral problems? Are there moral principles (or laws)? If so, what are they, and how do they interact? What is the relationship between rights, values, duties, reasons for action, and so on? Is there a morally relevant difference between doing and allowing? Does an agent's attitudes make a difference to the moral status of that agent's actions? See the **MORAL METHODOLOGY** chart (p. 12) and the **MORAL THEORY BUILDING CHART** (p. 13).

¹ To add additional terminology for me to define, please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/y8kobhay>

Applied ethics is the field of philosophy tasked with investigating the morality of specific areas of everyday life and society. Questions in applied ethics include: Is it morally permissible to bring children into existence? Are we morally obligated to use our financial resources to alleviate global poverty? How should we address the threat of climate change (if at all)? Is it morally wrong to buy meat and other animal products?

CASE 1 (The Fortuitous Interview)

Case: You're about to interview for a job. However, you recently discovered that another candidate, Bob, is likely to get it. You know Bob from college, and you happen to know that he has a serious medical condition that has sent him to the emergency room in the past.

On your way to the interview, you notice that Bob has collapsed in the parking lot. It is very early in the morning, so the parking lot is completely empty. You realize that if you do nothing, it is very likely that Bob will die, whereas if you call 911, it is very likely that Bob will live. You also realize that if Bob dies, you are very likely to get the job. Suddenly, you notice Bob struggling to reach for his iPhone in a final panic to call for help. He's gasping for air, and you can tell that he doesn't have much longer to live. You then have the sudden epiphany: if you push Bob's phone out of reach, it is almost certain that he will die. No one will notice.

Question: Set aside what you *would* do. That's a psychological question. What *should* you do? That's an ethical question.

Answer: For many of us, the answer is obvious: you should call 911! It would certainly be *wrong* to push Bob's phone out of reach.

Further issues: When we judge situations like this, we're doing ethics. We're reaching conclusions about what *should* be done and what would be *wrong* to do. It just so happens that *this* situation is extremely straightforward! However, even if it is straightforward, it still raises a number of philosophical questions. These include: How do we *know* that it would be wrong to push Bob's phone out of reach? What *justifies* us in believing this? How does this apparent moral fact fit into a scientific picture of the world? Can we subsume this apparent moral fact under a general moral principle?

Normativity concerns *norms* or *standards* of behavior. Something is said to be *normative* when it entails that something is *good* or *bad*; that there are *reasons* for or against something; that something *ought* (not) to be done; that there is an *obligation* (not) to do something; or that something is *justified* or *unjustified*, *right* or *wrong*, *permissible* or *impermissible*, *appropriate* or *inappropriate*, *fitting* or *unfitting*, or *correct* or *mistaken*; and so on. Ethics and epistemology are both concerned with normativity.

Practical reason is the ability of an agent to reflect on and answer the question of *what to do*. See [CASE 1](#) (above), [CASE 2](#) (p. 3), and [CASE 3](#) (p. 5)

A **reason** is a consideration that *counts in favor* of a response and makes a contribution to the overall normative status of that response. See [CASE 2](#) (p. 3), [CASE 3](#) (p. 5), the [REASONS FOR ACTION](#) chart (p. 6), [THE EVALUATIVE](#) chart (p. 8), and [THE DEONTIC](#) chart (p. 9).

CASE 2 (The Tempting Pub)

You're at the pub, and you've already had three IPAs. You can't decide whether or not to have another beer. What should you do? You begin deliberating on this question by adducing various considerations that count in favor of, and against, drinking another beer. You reason that the brew is rare and you're unlikely to have another any time soon—and that *counts in favor* of drinking another now. It also tastes very good, which is another reason to drink more of it. However, you realize that when you drink more than three IPAs, you tend to get a hangover—and that *counts against* drinking more beer. Ordinarily, the hangover might be worth it, but then you remember that your rough draft is due tomorrow! Having weighed up these various reasons, you conclude that you have more reason to go home early than to drink another beer. Going home early, you think, is *justified*, and if you were to drink another beer, you would be making a *mistake*.

Goodness/badness are properties of various entities, most notably *states* (such as *pleasure* or *pain*). See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE EVALUATIVE** chart (p. 8).

Personal goodness/badness concern what is good or bad *for* a particular individual. See **CASE 3** (p. 5) and **THE EVALUATIVE** chart (p. 8).

Ought/should concern what one *ought to do* (or *not to do*). One *ought* to act in some way if and only if one *should* act in that way. In ethics, it is common to use the terms “ought” and “should” interchangeably with “morally ought” and “morally should.” However, we may recognize other kinds of oughts, such as *legal*, *prudential*, *epistemic*, or *conventional* oughts; this raises the difficult question of how these differ and interact. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9).

Duty concerns what one has *duty to do* (or *not to do*). Moral duty concerns what one has *moral* duty (not) to do. However, we may recognize other duties, such as *legal* or *epistemic* duties. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9).

A **right** is an entitlement (not) to act in some way or (not) to be in a certain state, or an entitlement that others (not) act in some way or (not) be in a certain state. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9), and the **RIGHTS** chart (p. 10).

Requirement concerns what one is *required to do* (or *not to do*). Moral requirement concern what one is *morally* required (not) to do. However, we may recognize other requirements, such as *legal* or *epistemic* requirements. Intuitively, if one is *morally* required to act in some way, then one *must* act in that way—and it would be *impermissible* not to do so. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9).

Obligation concerns what one is *obligated to do* (or *not to do*). One *has* an obligation if and only if one is *obligated* (not) to do something; and an action is *obligatory* for a person if and only if that person is obligated to perform it. Moral obligation concerns what one is *morally* obligated (not) to do, and when we use the term “obligation,” we often have moral obligation in mind. However, we may recognize other obligations, such as *legal* or *epistemic* obligations. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9).

Rightness/wrongness are properties of actions and other kinds of doings or responses. Intuitively, it would be right *to* act in some way if and only if it would be wrong *not* to act in that way. Conversely, it would be wrong *to* act in some way if and only if it would be right *not* to act in that way. And so on. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9).

Moral impermissibility concerns what one *mustn't* do. Intuitively, if it would be morally impermissible to act in some way, then it would be wrong to act in that way. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9).

Moral permissibility concerns what one *may* do, or what is *morally optional*—that is, neither morally required nor morally forbidden. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9).

Supererogation concerns what is *above and beyond* the call of duty. A supererogatory action is morally good *to* perform but morally permissible *not* to perform. You might think of a supererogatory action as a kind of *moral bonus*: it isn't against the rules of morality to refrain from performing it, but one earns moral bonus points by performing it. See **CASE 3** (p. 5), the **MORALITY** chart (p. 7), and **THE DEONTIC** chart (p. 9).

Knowledge-that is knowledge *that* something is the case. See **THE EPISTEMIC** chart (p. 11).

Epistemic justification concerns what there is *justification* to believe and one is *justified* in believing. See **THE EPISTEMIC** chart (p. 11).

Numerical identity is the relation that everything bears to itself and to nothing else. See “Numerical Identity” on Canvas --> Files --> Handouts --> Identity.pdf.

POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS

The above normative concepts appear to be connected in various ways. **CASE 3** below (on p. 5) describes a situation in which almost all of them symmetrically coincide.

On the charts starting on p. 6, the arrows represent *potential* connections between these concepts. Sometimes these potential connections are *hierarchical*: they indicate that the concepts on one level may fall under a more general category at a higher level. They may also indicate that the application of a certain concept is a *necessary* and/or *sufficient condition* for the application of another concept.

However, it is open to philosophical debate not only *whether* some of these concepts are connected but also *how* they are connected. (The question marks signal this.) For example, in “Doing Good and Doing the Best,” Jeff McMahan suggests that there may be a class of actions that are morally wrong but neither permissible nor impermissible—a suggestion that he offers “without being confident that it is coherent” (100). Moreover, one might adopt an *error theory* with respect to some of these concepts but not others. Consequentialists, for example, might insist that if no two actions produce equally good (or bad) consequences, then no actions are supererogatory.

So, while these charts may help you to visualize how these concepts fit together, you should approach them with philosophical suspicion!

CASE 3 (The Unfortunate Toddlers)

Jack, a billionaire, offers you \$1 million to pour gasoline into a cage of toddlers and set them on fire. He's incapable of telling a lie, and he tells you that you won't face any legal repercussions if you accept the offer. If you don't accept, he's going to set them on fire himself 15 minutes later. What should you do?

Well, let's face it: \$1 million is a significant amount of money, and you can use that money in various ways to improve the quality of your life. You can even use some of the money to pay for the therapy you'll need to cope with whatever psychological trauma you might suffer by going through with it. The fact that the money would better your life in various ways is at least *some* reason to set the toddlers on fire.

On the other hand, if you were to set the toddlers on fire, that would cause them to experience *excruciating* pain—and pain, it seems, is intrinsically *bad*. Not only that: this pain would be *bad for* the toddlers. The fact that the toddlers would experience excruciating pain is at least some reason not to do it. The toddlers also appear to have a *right* against your causing them excruciating pain, which gives you an additional reason not to set them on fire. What do you have all things considered reason to do?

In this situation, the second two reasons appear to be much stronger than the first. After all, the toddlers don't consent to being set on fire, and it isn't in their best interests to die slow and painful deaths. Indeed, the second two reasons not only appear to be stronger than the first; they appear to be *decisive*. Putting this altogether, you have all things considered reason not to set the toddlers on fire.

It also appears that a number of other important normative concepts coincide on this case. You not only have all things considered reason not to set the toddlers on fire; you also have a *duty* not to set them on fire, and you're morally *obligated* not to set them on fire. In this case, morality *requires* you to refrain, and it would be both *impermissible* and *wrong* to violate this moral requirement. You *mustn't* set the toddlers on fire; you *shouldn't* set the toddlers on fire; and you *ought* not to set the toddlers on fire. The *right thing to do* is to decline the offer.

However, Jack has told you that if you decline, he's going to set the toddlers on fire himself 15 minutes later. Once you decline, what should you do then? You see that Jack has a holstered gun on his belt, and you realize that if you try to stop him within the next 15 minutes, he may kill you in the process. As a result, some philosophers would claim that it is *morally permissible* to get the hell out of there! Attempting to save the toddlers is *supererogatory* of you: a *very good* thing to do, but not *morally required* of you. Perhaps you're morally required to call 911 once you've escaped to safety, but you aren't morally required to risk your own life to save anyone. Or so some philosophers claim.

THE STRUCTURE OF NORMATIVITY

REASONS FOR ACTION

PRO TANTO REASON

In our daily lives, we reason about what to do by considering the pro tanto reasons for and against various courses of action. A pro tanto reason is a consideration that *counts in favor* of (or that *counts against*) ϕ -ing. It makes a *contribution* to the overall normative status of the action (e.g., whether it is *justified* or *unjustified*, *right* or *wrong*, etc.), but it *may* be outweighed by countervailing considerations. For example, that beer tastes good is a reason for Jones to drink one, but whether Jones *should* drink a beer depends on what other reasons he may have in a given situation. Reasons can also have more or less *strength*. Thus, its being happy hour may be a weaker reason for Jones to drink a beer than its tasty flavor.

EXCLUSIONARY REASON

An *exclusionary* reason is a second-order reason not to act on the basis of one or more first-order reasons to ϕ . For example, that Jones needs a new laptop may be a reason for Jones to steal Smith's laptop, but that doing so would violate Smith's property right to his laptop may itself be a reason not to act on that first reason. An exclusionary reason may or may not be decisive.

DECISIVE REASON

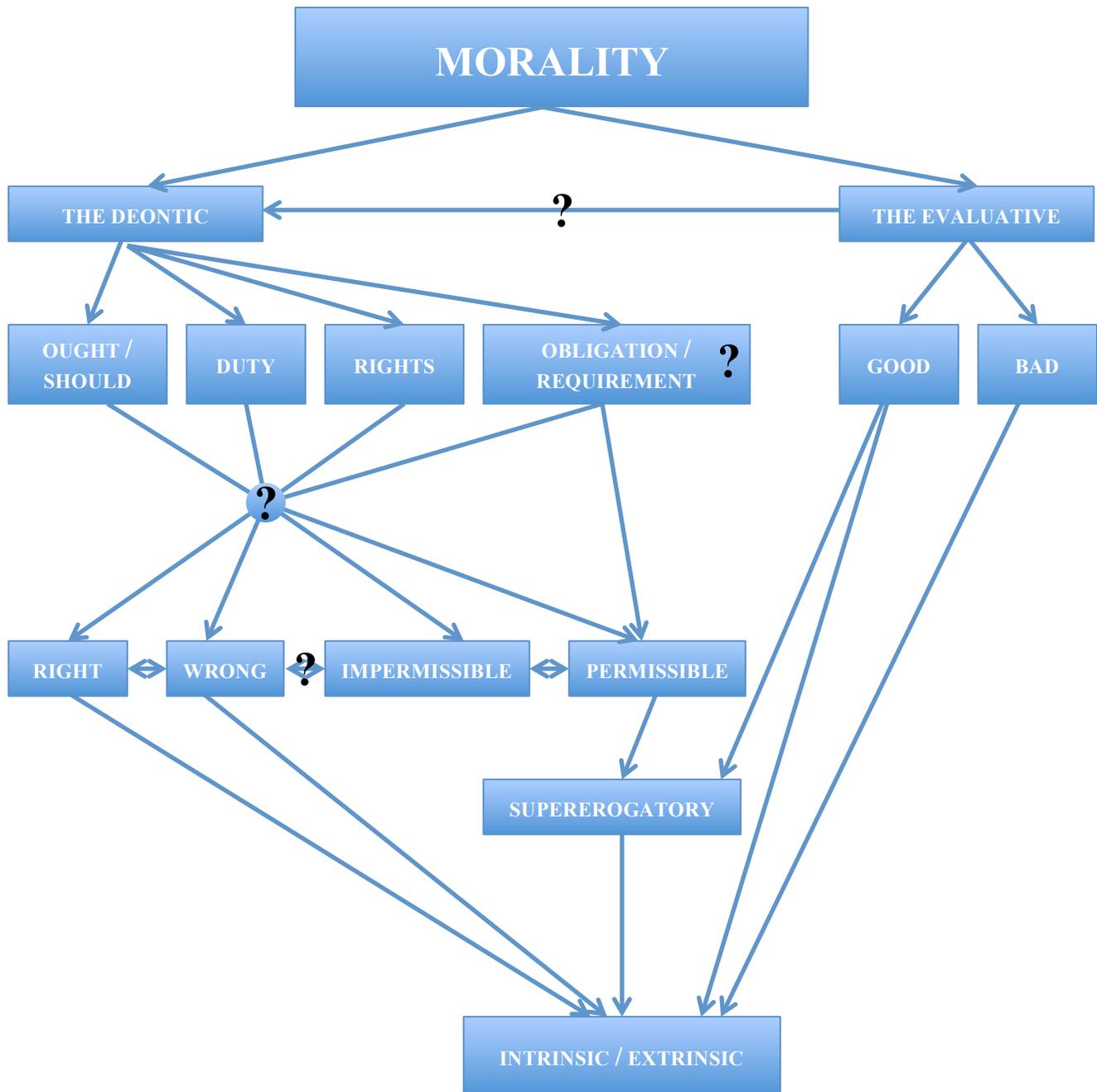
A *decisive* reason to ϕ is a reason to ϕ that is (typically) sufficient to make it *justified* or *right* to ϕ (and *unjustified* or *wrong* not to ϕ). If one has a *decisive* reason to ϕ , then one has *all things considered* reason to ϕ .

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED REASON

An agent has *all things considered* reason to ϕ if and only if either (i) the agent has a *decisive* reason to ϕ or (ii) there are more reasons for the agent to ϕ than not to ϕ (that is, the *balance of reasons* is on the side of ϕ -ing rather than not ϕ -ing). Having *all things considered* reason to ϕ is (typically) sufficient to make it *justified* or *right* to ϕ (and *unjustified* or *wrong* not to ϕ).

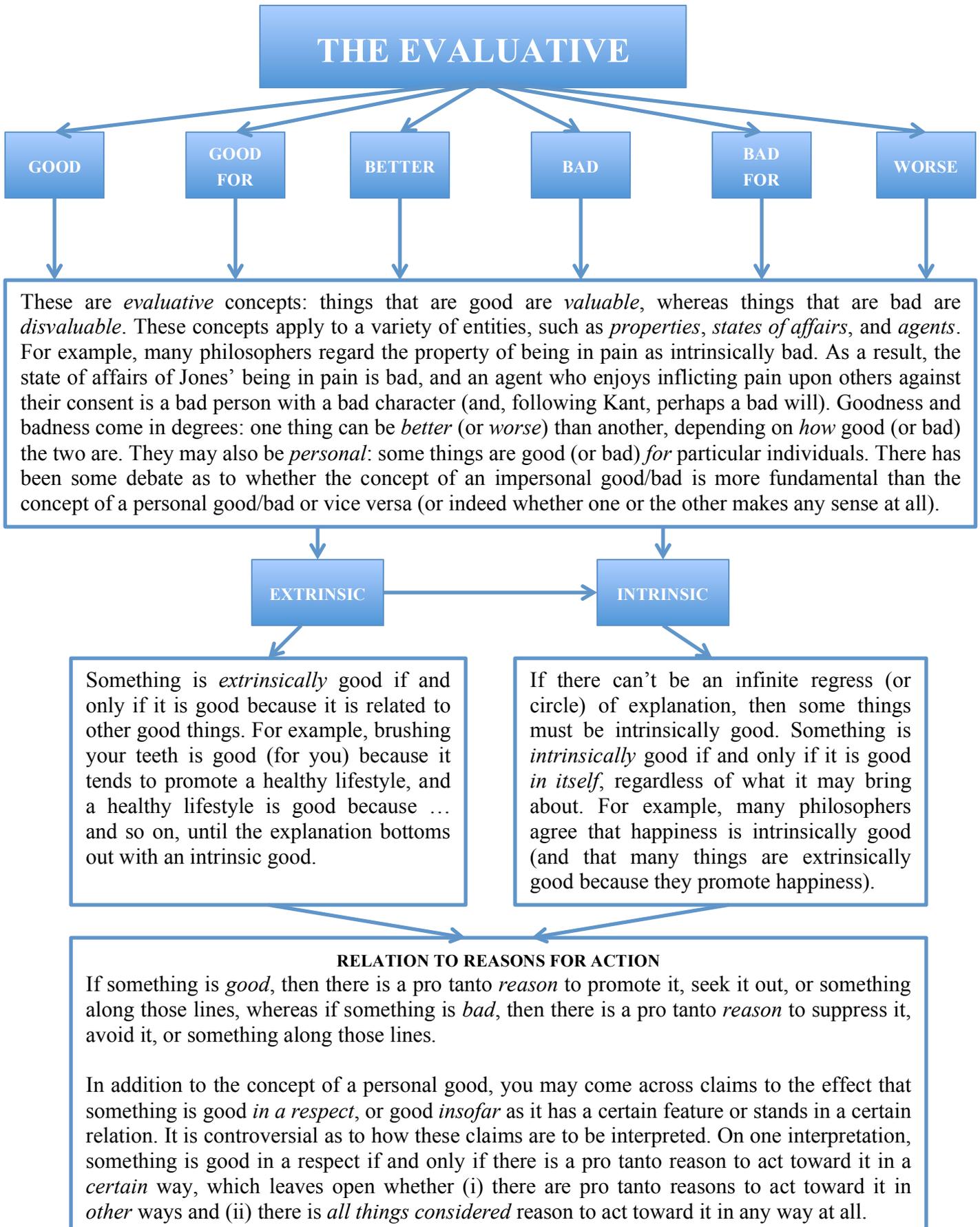
RELATION TO MORALITY

As indicated above, some philosophers believe that moral facts can be explained in terms of facts about reasons. For example, if it is wrong for Jones to kill Smith, there must be something about killing Smith *in virtue of which* it is wrong for Jones to kill Smith. Here is one potential explanation: Jones has all things considered reason to refrain from killing Smith, because Smith's right to life gives rise to a very strong reason for anyone to refrain from killing him. If this view about the relationship between morality and reasons is correct, then moral reasoning is no more mysterious than practical reasoning more generally.



WHAT'S MISSING?

The above chart is incomplete. It leaves out *virtue*, *vice*, *justice*, *fairness*, *culpability*, *praiseworthiness*, *blameworthiness*, *fittingness*, and other normative concepts. Where would you place these on the chart? What else is missing?



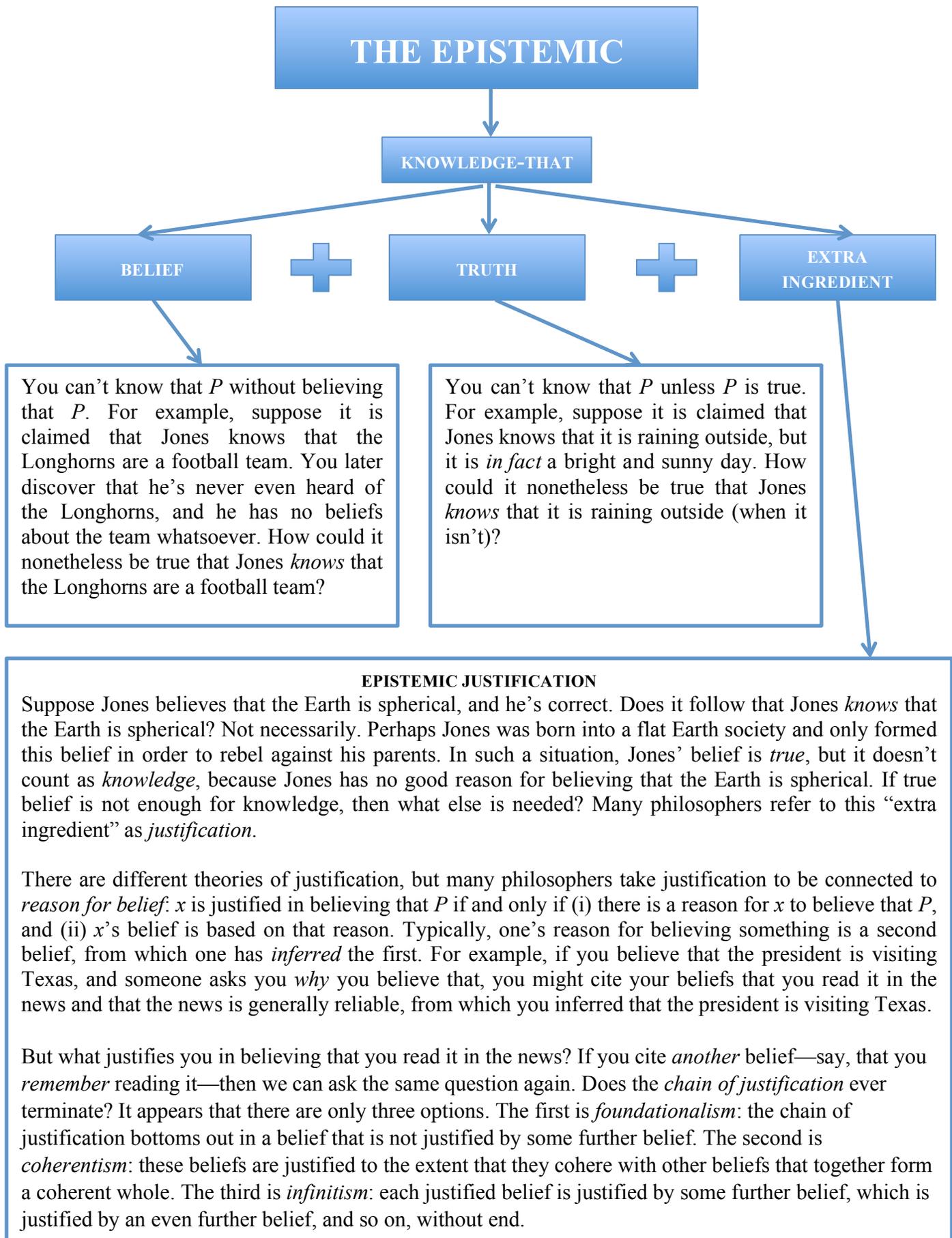
RIGHTS

RIGHT	An entitlement (not) to act in some way or (not) to be in a certain state, or an entitlement that others (not) act in some way or (not) be in a certain state.
CLAIM	Others have a pro tanto reason (or duty) (not) to act toward the right-holder in a certain way.
PRIVILEGE	The right-holder has no duty not to act in a certain way.
POWERS	Right-holders have the ability to alter how their rights interact with the duties of other people (e.g., by <i>consenting</i> to others acting in certain ways).
IMMUNITIES	Right-holders are such that other individuals lack the ability to alter at least some of their claims, privileges, powers, and other immunities.

GIVEN THAT YOU HAVE A PROPERTY RIGHT OVER YOUR COMPUTER, YOU HAVE...

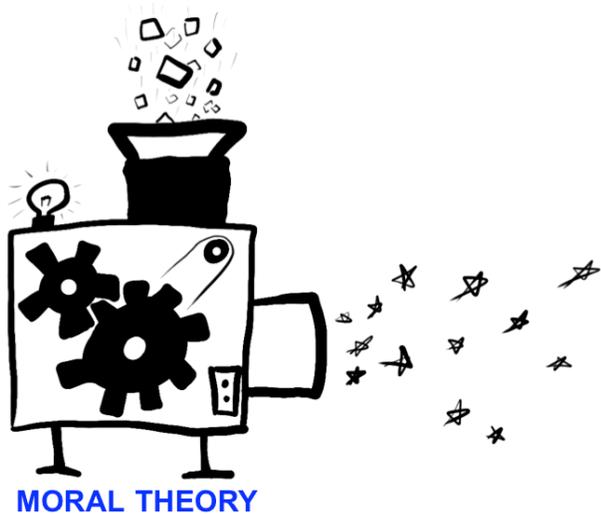
POWER to wave, annul, or transfer your...	IMMUNITY against others altering your...
PRIVILEGE to use the computer	CLAIM against others using the computer

Note: there are ongoing debates about how to understand rights (e.g., the *will theory* versus the *interest theory*; *status-based theories* versus *instrumental theories*; and so on). Visit the *SEP* for additional background information: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights>



MORAL METHODOLOGY

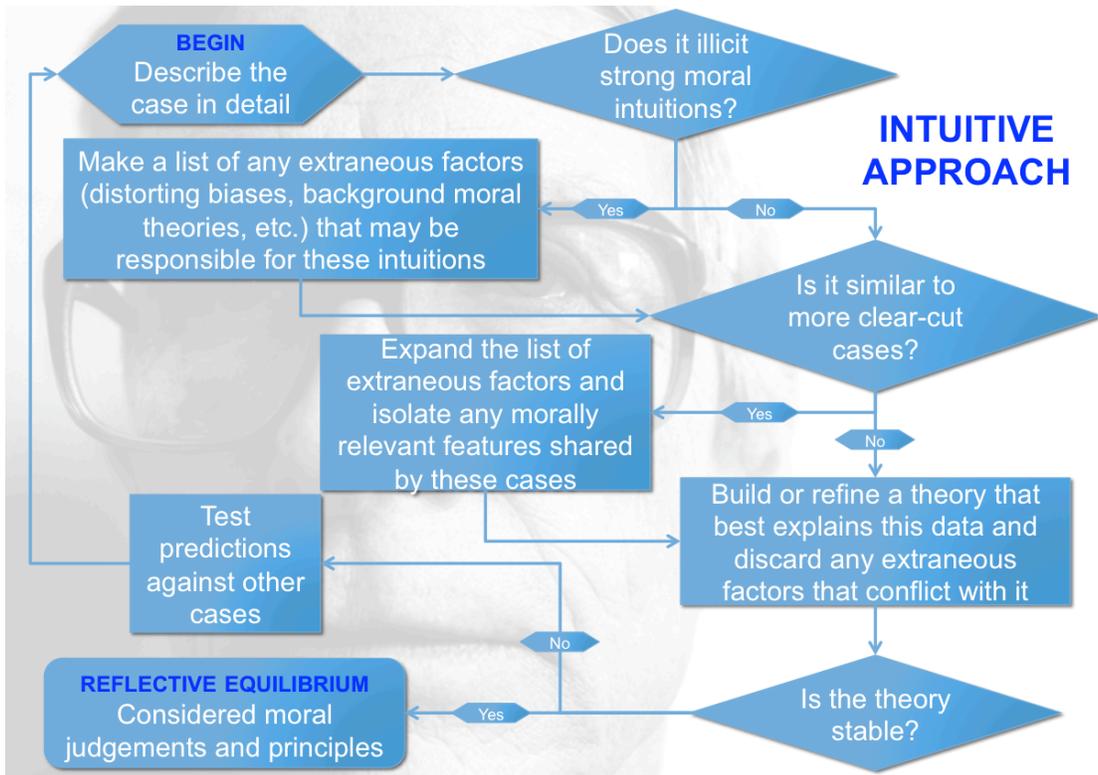
THEORETICAL APPROACH



STEP 1
Discover the correct moral theory

STEP 2
Plug in particular cases to get verdicts

STEP 3
Act accordingly



MORAL THEORY BUILDING

SIMPLICITY

The theory yields a complex body of moral judgments out of a sparse base of more fundamental moral principles.

POWER

The theory offers guidance on unclear cases.

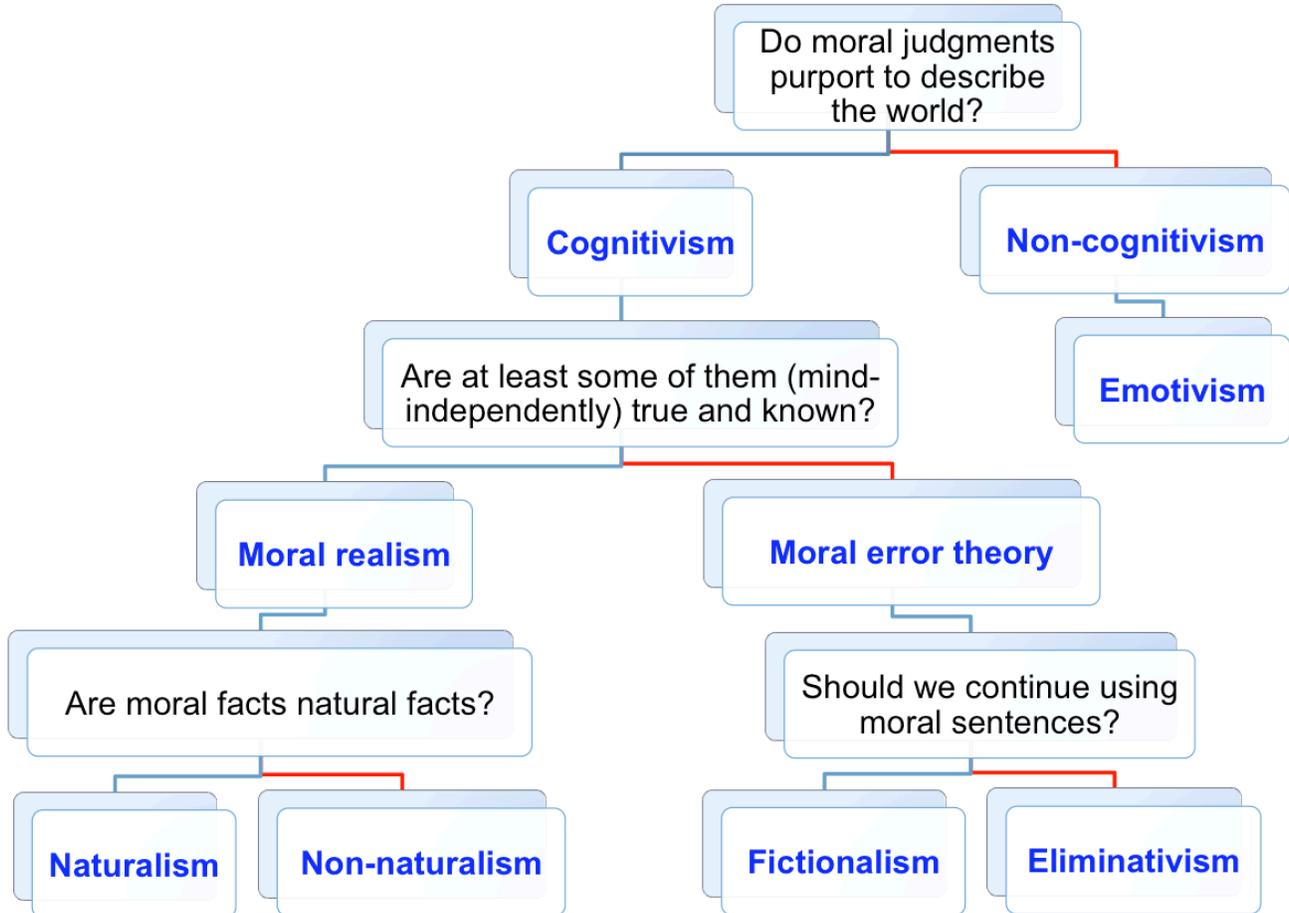
COHERENCE

The theory is internally consistent and includes mutually supportive principles and judgments.

EXPLANATORINESS

The theory helps us to understand the moral realm by explaining data that is in need of explanation, such as why certain principles, distinctions, and so on should matter; it minimizes “dangling distinctions.”

METAETHICS



PHILOSOPHICAL CHOICE POINTS

Note: the following tables represent positions that are explicitly endorsed in the readings (or positions that the authors have explicitly endorsed elsewhere). Keep in mind that what a particular author *thinks* is unimportant; what matters are the author's *arguments*.

Are there any moral facts?		
Literally: Yes	Make-believedly: Yes	Literally: No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moral realists - David Enoch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fictionalists - Richard Joyce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotivists - Moral error theorists - A. J. Ayer - John Mackie - Richard Joyce

Consequentialism: Yay or Nay?		
Yay!	Nay!	It depends on the situation!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilitarians - Jeremy Bentham - John Stuart Mill - Peter Singer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deontologists - Immanuel Kant - Robert Nozick - Judith Jarvis Thomson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W. D. Ross

Must rights be satisfied before we even think about maximizing the good?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robert Nozick - Judith Jarvis Thomson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Act consequentialists - Peter Singer

Deprivation Account of the Wrongness of Killing: Yay or Nay?	
Yay!	Nay!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tristram McPherson - Alexander Pruss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Michael Tooley

Does the right to life entail a right not to be killed?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alexander Pruss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Judith Jarvis Thomson

Is suffering intrinsically bad and happiness intrinsically good?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilitarians - Value pluralists - Jeremy Bentham - John Stuart Mill - Peter Singer - Tristram McPherson - David Benatar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None of the authors we've read have explicitly said this.

Do we have <i>direct duties to non-human animals</i> so that we can <i>wrong</i> them?		
Yes	Maybe	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peter Singer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tristram McPherson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immanuel Kant

Is it typically wrong to inflict suffering upon non-human animals?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jeremy Bentham - Peter Singer - Tristram McPherson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None of the authors we've read have explicitly said this.

Is it typically wrong to kill non-human animals?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peter Singer - Tristram McPherson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None of the authors we've read have explicitly said this.

Is it typically wrong to purchase animal products?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peter Singer - Tristram McPherson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None of the authors we've read have explicitly said this.

What am I?		
Immaterial soul	Biological organism	Embodied mind
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many religious traditions - Substance dualists - René Descartes - Richard Swinburne 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some religious traditions - Animalists - Alexander Pruss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embodied Mind theorists - Jeff McMahan

When do I begin to exist?	
At (or very shortly after) conception	When the capacity for consciousness begins to exist
- Alexander Pruss	- Jeff McMahan - Richard Swinburne

Can I survive the complete disintegration of my body and brain?	
Yes	Probably not
- Many religious traditions - Substance dualists - René Descartes - Richard Swinburne	- Animalists - Embodied Mind theorists - Jeff McMahan - Peter van Inwagen

Am I essentially a person?	
Yes	No
- Alexander Pruss	- Michael Tooley

Is it typically wrong to have or perform an abortion?	
Yes	No
- Alexander Pruss - Richard Swinburne	- Peter Singer - Michael Tooley - Jeff McMahan - Judith Jarvis Thomson

If early-term abortion is wrong, does it wrong an unborn person?	
Yes	No
- Alexander Pruss	- Richard Swinburne

Is it typically wrong <i>not</i> to have an early-term abortion?	
Yes	No
- David Benatar	- Christine Overall

Is there an intrinsic moral difference between early-term and late-term abortion?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jeff McMahan - Richard Swinburne 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peter Singer - Alexander Pruss - Michael Tooley

Is infanticide wrong?	
Almost always	Not necessarily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alexander Pruss - Judith Jarvis Thomson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peter Singer - Michael Tooley - Jeff McMahan

Is it always wrong to procreate?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - David Benatar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Christine Overall

Are the affluent morally obligated to make personal sacrifices to alleviate suffering?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jesus (as interpreted by Thomas Crisp) - Peter Singer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Judith Jarvis Thomson - Jan Narveson

If a person is willing to donate money to charity, is it typically <i>wrong</i> for that person to donate that money to a charity that will do <i>less</i> good than the alternatives?	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joe Horton - Jeff McMahan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None of the authors we've read have explicitly said this.