Technology and Ethics

• Dynamic between society and technology
• People discover/develop new technology
• People adopt/use that technology
• Use of technology changes society
• Impacts of technology
• Positive and negative effects
• Ethical issues
• Problems where one must decide whether to do an action or which action to do, realizing that there are different effects for those involved.
Ethical Problem I

• Several patients have a relatively rare disease for which medicine is in short supply.

• One patient is at an advanced stage of the disease but can be saved by 4 doses of the medicine.

• There are also 4 other patients with milder cases of the disease, that can be saved with one dose each.

• The hospital has 4 doses of the medicine. No more will become available. The patients will die without the doses indicated above, but will be saved with them.

• You must decide what to do.
Ethical Problem II

- One patient is at an advanced stage of a disease but can be saved by 4 doses of the medicine.
- You order 4 doses of the medicine for that patient.
- Then, 4 other patients with milder cases of the disease appear, who each can be saved with one dose each.
- No more medicine will become available. The patients will die without the doses indicated above, but will be saved with them.
- The 4 doses arrive. You must decide what to do.
Ethical Problem III

• 4 patients have a relatively rare disease.

• If a patient gets 2 doses of a medicine, she will survive. If she get one dose, she has a 50% chance of surviving.

• There are only 4 doses of the medicine available.

• No more medicine will become available. The patients will die without the doses indicated above.

• You must decide what to do.
Ethical Problem IV

• A runaway train approaches a track switch that you control.

• If the train goes straight through the switch, it will kill one worker that is on the track.

• If you switch the train, it will kill 4 workers on the side track.

• What will you do?
Ethical Problem V

• A runaway train approaches a track switch that you control.

• If the train goes straight through the switch, it will kill 4 workers that are on the track.

• If you switch the train, it will kill one worker on the side track.

• What will you do?
Ethical Problem VI

- A runaway train approaches under a bridge where you are standing with another person.
- If the train goes under the bridge, it will kill 4 workers on the track around the bend.
- If you push the person next to you off the bridge, the train will kill that person but stop before the others.
- What will you do?
Why Information Age Ethics?

• New issues accompany new technologies
  • New actions, new consequences
  • Old actions, new consequences

• “Common wisdom” not always adequate
Ethics

• Ethics: systematic, rational analysis of issues regarding performance of actions having both positive and negative impacts on self and others

• “Doing ethics”: creating answers to ethical problems with convincing justifications

• Explanations: facts, values, logic
Calvin and Hobbes

by Watterson

Whenever I need
to do some serious
thinking, I go for
a walk in the woods.

There are always
a million distractions out here.

I don't believe
in ethics any more.

As far as I'm concerned,
the ends justify the means.

Get what you can while
the getting's good—what I say
might makes right! The winners write
the history books!

It's a dog-eat-dog
world, so I'll do
whatever I have to,
and let others argue
about whether it's
"right" or not.

Hey!

Why'd you
do that??

You were in my way.
Now you're not.
The ends justify
the means.

I didn't mean for
everyone, you dolt!
Just me!

Ahh...
Ethical Theories

• Methods for considering the morality of actions

• Methods for evaluating whether actions should or should not be done

• Methods for guiding the design of ethical actions

• Sources of values and logics for explanation
Ethical Theories

- Workable ethical theory
  - values and logic that can produce explanations that can be persuasive to a skeptical, but open-minded audience
Ethical Theories

- Subjective relativism
- Cultural relativism
- Divine command theory

- These theories provide values and logic. They are not workable by our definition.
Subjective Relativism

- Relativism
  - No universal norms of right and wrong
  - One person can say “X is right,” another can say “X is wrong,” and both can be right

- Subjective relativism
  - Each decides right and wrong for himself or herself
  - “What’s right for you may not be right for me”
HOW ARE YOU DOING ON YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS?
I DIDN'T MAKE ANY.

SEE, IN ORDER TO IMPROVE ONESelf, ONE MUST HAVE SOME IDEA OF WHAT'S "GOOD." THAT IMPLIES CERTAIN VALUES.

BUT AS WE ALL KNOW, VALUES ARE RELATIVE. EVERY SYSTEM OF BELIEF IS EQUALLY VALID AND WE NEED TO TOLERATE DIVERSITY. VIRTUE ISN'T "BETTER" THAN VICE. IT'S JUST DIFFERENT.

I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN TOLERATE THAT MUCH TOLERANCE.

I REFUSE TO BE VICTIMIZED BY NOTIONS OF VIRTUOUS BEHAVIOR.
Case for Subjective Relativism

- Well-meaning and intelligent people can disagree on moral issues
- Ethical debates are disagreeable and pointless as no one is convinced of other’s viewpoint
Case Against Subjective Relativism for Ethics

- Blurs distinction between doing what you think is right and doing what you want to do .. egoistic ethics.

- Subjective Relativism and tolerance are not the same
  - can be strong disagreements with no resolution

- Decisions often not based on reason

  Not a workable ethical theory
Cultural Relativism

- What is “right” and “wrong” depends upon a given culture’s moral guidelines or current practices
- These guidelines vary from place to place and from time to time
- A particular action may be right in one society at one time and wrong in other society or at another time
Case for Cultural Relativism

- Different social contexts demand different moral guidelines
- Behavioral data indicate significant cultural differences
- It is arrogant for one society to judge another
- Morality is reflected in actual behavior within a culture
Case Against Cultural Relativism for Ethics

- Because two societies do have different moral views doesn’t mean they should have different views
- Doesn’t explain how moral guidelines are determined or evolve
- Provides no way for cultures in conflict to resolve issues
- Because many practices are acceptable, does not mean any cultural practice is acceptable (many/any fallacy)
- Societies do, in fact, share certain core values
Cultural Relativism

• Responding to cultural differences is a significant source of ethical issues in the information age.

• Global information space impacting local cultures and norms
Relativistic Analyses / Arguments

• You must decide whether to use a peer-to-peer site that allows you to download newly released movies for free.
Information Age Activities Survey

• Done by (nearly) all
  • use cell phone
  • text (send receive)
  • use Facebook, share photos online
  • use game/app on smart phone
  • watch YouTube
  • read news on-line
Information Age Activities Survey

- Done by about half
  - use Twitter
  - play a video game (XBox, Wii)
  - copy music from a friend
  - download music for free
  - rent a video online
  - use peer-to-peer video streaming
Information Age Activities Survey

- Done by only a few
  - play massive multiplayer online game
  - buy music from iTunes
  - buy a video
  - write a blog
Divine Command Theory

• Good actions: those aligned with God’s will
• Bad actions: those contrary to God’s will
• Holy books reveal God’s will
• Use holy books as moral decision-making guides
  • a variety of cultural relativism
For Divine Command Theory for Ethics

• We owe obedience to God
  • obedience is a kind of duty
• God is the ultimate authority
• Holy books are written
• Most religious rules are ethical
Against Divine Command Theory for Ethics

• Holy books can disagree
• Interpretation of holy books can differ
• Society is often multicultural, secular
• Not all moral problems addressed in scripture
• “good” ≠ “God” (equivalence fallacy)...
  • which came first
• Based on obedience, not reason
Ethical Theories

• Kantianism
• Social contract theory
• Act utilitarianism
• Rule utilitarianism

These can be considered workable.
Age of Enlightenment/Reason

• Europe, cc 1650-1800

• made possible by adoption of the printing press and spread of human, secular discourse
Kantianism

• Immanuel Kant (1720-1800)

• Only thing in the world that is good without qualification is good will ~~~ “dutifulness”

• what one ought to do is more important than what one wants to do

• Reason should cultivate desire to do right thing
Categorical Imperative (1st Formulation)

Act only from moral rules that you can make 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?

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

• Universalize rule: Everyone may make and break promises if they need to do so.

• This rule would make promises unbelievable, contradicting the desire to have promise believed.

• Extenuating circumstances generally are not important.
Categorical Imperative
(2\textsuperscript{nd} 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 can sometimes be easier to work with than the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative.
Plagiarism Scenario

- Carla
  - Is a single mother, working full time
  - Takes two evening courses/semester
- Carla’s History class
  - Requires more work than normal
  - Carla earning an “A” on all work so far
  - She doesn’t have time to write final report
- Carla purchases report online, submits it as her own
Kantian Analysis -- 1st Formulation

- Carla wants credit for plagiarized report
- General Rule: “You may claim credit for work performed by others (when you don’t have time to do the work yourself).”
- Written reports would no longer be credible indicator’s of a student’s knowledge
- Proposed moral rule is self-defeating
- It is wrong for Carla to turn in a purchased report
Kantian Analysis -- 2\textsuperscript{nd} Formulation

- Carla submitted another person’s work
- She attempted to deceive her professor
- She treated professor as a means to an end
- Therefore, what Carla did was wrong
- Circumstances are irrelevant, intent determines judgement
Case Against Kantianism

- Sometimes no one rule adequately characterizes an action or situation.
- What is the right rule to form and apply?
- There is no way to resolve a conflict between rules.
- Kantianism allows no exceptions to moral rules.
Case for Kantianism

• Rational

• Based on notion of universal moral guidelines.
  duty to do good

• Treats all persons as moral equals
Social Contract Theory

- Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)
- We implicitly accept a social contract
  - Establishment of moral rules to govern relations among citizens
  - Government capable of enforcing these rules when enacted as laws
Social Contract Theory

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788)
- In an ideal society, no one is above the rules
- This prevents society from enacting bad rules
Social Contract Theory

• The need for rights and duties arise in a social situation

• Actions impact others in a social context

• Maximize liberty while minimizing impacts

• Property and the rights to own and share property are major concerns
Social Contract Theory

• Ethical analysis performed in terms of people’s rights

• Society, implicitly or explicitly, assigns rights to its members

• Ethical actions are those that do not violate member rights... do no harm
Kinds of Rights

• Negative right: A right that another can guarantee by leaving you alone to do something (right to vote)

• Positive right: A right obligating others to do something on your behalf (right to education)

• Absolute right: A right guaranteed without exception

• Limited right: A right that may be restricted based on the circumstances
DVD Rental Scenario

- Bill owns chain of DVD rental stores
- Collects information about rentals from customers
- Constructs profiles of customers
- Sells profiles to direct marketing firms
Social Contract Analysis

• Consider rights of Bill, customers, and marketing companies.

• Does customer have right to expect name, address to be kept confidential?

• If customer rents DVD from Bill, who owns information about transaction? Ownership determines rights.
Social Contract Analysis

• If Bill and customer have equal rights to information, Bill did nothing wrong to sell information.

• If customers have right to expect name and address or transaction to be confidential without giving permission, then Bill was wrong to sell information without asking for permission.

• If customer gives limited right to information only for rental transaction, then Bill was wrong.
Case for Social Contract Theory

- Framed in language of rights and duties
- Provides clear analysis of certain citizen/government problems
- Workable ethical theory
Case Against Social Contract Theory

- No signed contract, disagreement on rights
- Some actions have multiple characterizations
- Conflicting rights problem
UN Declaration