



CSCI 240: Computers and Society

Introduction to Morality and Ethics

What is **society**?

What is morality?

Take 2 minutes to draft
a list of bullets enumerating
what you believe are

UNIVERSAL MORAL VALUES

Universal Moral Values

Bernard Gert suggests a common core of values that all people share:

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1. Not killing others
 2. Not causing pain
 3. Not disabling
 4. Not depriving freedom
 5. Not depriving pleasure
 6. Being truthful
 7. Keeping promises
 8. Being honest
 9. Obeying the law
 10. Doing your duty

Question: Why is it important to promote moral values?

UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948

“Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.”

Moral Dilemma

What is the right thing to do when you are in a situation where moral rules conflict?

What is The Right Thing to Do?

What is The Right Thing to DoTM?

Normative Ethics

- **Consequence-based ethics**
 - **Hedonism or Egoism:** do what maximizes the benefits to yourself.
 - **Utilitarianism:** do what maximizes the benefits to everyone involved.
- **Duty-based ethics**
 - **Kant:** do what is supported by a rule that can be applied in all similar situations (universalizability).
- **Virtue-based ethics**
 - **Aristotle:** one should live a virtuous life; virtue will drive one to always do the right thing.

Morals are ground rules that allow us to get along.

Ethics are the means to resolve moral dilemmas.

Why ethics?

We are in a period of fast technological advances.
The use of the products we create may produce
harm and **benefit** to societies, at the same time.

We need to be able to **REASON** out the right thing to do.

Example: <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-ethical-questions-facing-self-driving-cars-2015-10>

Self-Driving Cars



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<http://moralmachine.mit.edu/>



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The Scope of Ethics



Voluntary, moral choices that people can make to solve a dilemma.



Choices outside the moral realm or involuntary are out of scope.

Problem

Cars traveling **5mph above the speed limit** posted on state's freeways and overpasses are statistically more prone to accidents that lead to the death of human beings.

Scenario

The state police installs cameras on freeways and overpasses. When cars travel 5mph above the speed limit, cameras capture license plate numbers and picture of the drivers. If software can match a picture of the registered owner to driver, a ticket is issued.
The system leads to 90% reduction of speeding cars.

The FBI asks and receives real time access to system.
Later on, use of the system helps the FBI arrest members of a terrorist organization.

Analyze the Scenario

1. Did the police do anything wrong?
2. Who benefits from the actions of the police?
3. Was anyone harmed by these actions? Who?
4. Were there alternative to the course of action the police took to solve the problem? Which?
5. Do you need additional information to answer questions 1-4?

What is **The Right Thing to Do?**

Subjective Relativism

“What is right for you may not be right for me.”

FOR

“Good” people may have opposite views about moral issues.

If morality is relative, both sides are right.

AGAINST

The light between right and wrong is blurry.

No moral distinctions between actions of different people.

A legitimate ethical theory should be based on **reason**.

Cultural Relativism

A society's moral guidelines vary according to place and time.

FOR

Different social contexts demand different moral guidelines.

One society should not have the right to judge another.

AGAINST

Because societies' mores don't agree, it doesn't mean that they should disagree.

How can we discern right from wrong if there are no cultural norms?

Societies do share some core values.

This is only indirectly based on reason.

Cultural Relativism

Question: Are “morals” a set of values or traditions that vary from one culture to another?

Question: Are the “morals” of any culture as good as the “morals” of other cultures?

Question: If we accept this idea, can we ever find fault in others for doing what we find immoral?

Question: Can there be any moral progress if we accept this idea?

Divine Command Theory

Good actions follow the will of God and bad actions are contrary to the will of God.

FOR

We owe obedient to our Creator.

God is all-good and all-knowing.

God is the ultimate authority.

AGAINST

Whose holy book is right?

Multicultural societies can't adopt religion-based morality.

Scripture doesn't address all moral problems.

Is this about obedience or reason?

Ethical Egoism

Each person should focus only on his or her self-interest.

FOR

It's a practical moral philosophy.

Empowers people to take care of themselves.

Society benefits when individuals protect their self-interests.

AGAINST

Easy doesn't mean good...

Society does know what is good for individuals.

Self-interest can lead to immoral actions.

There are moral principles superior to self-interest.

Kantianism

Act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to be universal moral laws.

Act so that you always treat both yourself and others as ends in themselves never only as means to an end.

FOR

“What if everybody acted that way?”

Produces *universal* moral guidelines.

All people are moral equals.

AGAINST

It can be hard to find a single rule to fully characterize an action.

Sometimes there is no way to resolve a conflict between rules.

No exceptions to perfect duties.

Act Utilitarianism

An action is right to the extent that it increases the total happiness of the affected parties.

FOR

Focuses on happiness.

It is practical.

It is comprehensive.

AGAINST

The “calculus” is not practice: a lot of energy for every moral decision.

Ignores sense of duty.

We have no crystal ball to predict consequences.

Rule Utilitarianism

Adopt the moral rule(s) that maximize the total happiness over all affected parties.

Applies the principle of utility to *moral rules*, not to individual moral actions.

FOR

Reduces the need for the utilitarian calculus.

Reduces the problem of bias.

Appeals to a wide cross section of society.

AGAINST

Uses a single scale to evaluate different consequences.

Ignores sense of duty.

We have no crystal ball to predict consequences.

Social Contract Theory

“Morality consists in the set of rules, governing how people are to treat one another, that rational people will agree to accept, for their mutual benefit, on the condition that others follow those rules as well.” James Rachels

FOR

Framed in the language of “rights.”

In the absence of common agreement, people act out of self-interest.

Under certain circumstances, civil disobedience can be morally right.

AGAINST

Who did ever sign the *social contract*?

Some actions can be characterizes in multiple ways.

May be unjust to those who cannot uphold their side of the social contract.

Rawl's Theory of Justice

Determine the rights and benefits of others using a **veil of ignorance** (before people know where they will be in society).

Principles of Justice:

1. Your claims for “adequate” rights and benefits must be consistent with the claims of others.
2. Inequalities are only fair if everyone has equal opportunities for growth and if the inequalities benefit the least advantaged.

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» Duty-based ethics

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» Virtue-based ethics

- Aristotle: one should live a virtuous life; virtue will drive one to always do the right thing.

What makes an action morally right?

Accordance w/correct moral rule.

Maximum increase of
total good
(ACT UTILITARIANISM)

Consistent with actions
of a virtuous person.
(VIRTUE THEORY)

What makes a moral rule
correct?

Maximum increase of
total good if all follow rule
all the time
(RULE UTILITARIANISM)

Everyone follows
rule without a logical
contradiction that
undermines it
(KANTIANISM)

Rational people accept
it as binding because it
brings benefit to group
(SOCIAL CONTRACT
THEORY)

A Rubric

1. What are the facts?
2. What are the moral issues?
3. Who is affected by the decision you have to make?
4. What are your options?
5. What are the expected outcome of each possible action?
6. What are the personal costs associated with each possible action?
7. Where can you get some help in thinking through the problem?
8. And the bottom line?

From: *The Right Thing to Do*

P.Aarne Vesilind, 2nd Edition, Lakeshore Press