

Introduction to Ethics

Lecture 2-1

Computers & Society (CPSC 430)

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Ethics and Morality

Ethics

Study of morality

Morality

What people ought to or ought not to do

Why do we have a course about ethics and technology?

- Generally need a way to decide the best thing to do
- New problems accompany new technologies
- “Common wisdom” may not exist for novel situations brought about by new technologies

How do we decide if an action is ethical?



What we're up to here

- **Ethics:** a rational, systematic analysis
- **Workable ethical theory:** produces explanations that aim to be persuasive to a skeptical, yet open-minded audience
- Good, persuasive **arguments**.

Subjective Relativism

“Who are you to criticize my values?”

- There's no universal standard of right or wrong.
- Every individual must decide for himself or herself.

Cultural Relativism

“Who are you to criticize my culture's values?”

- Moral actions are based on a culture's actual moral guidelines.
- Different cultures have different moral standards.
- It is presumptuous to judge another culture's values.

Divine Command Theory

“Stealing is wrong, because the Bible says so.”

- Good actions are actions that God has willed.
- We should therefore use holy books as guides for moral decision making.

Ethical Egoism

“Surly looks out for one guy: Surly!”

- People’s self-interest is their only ethical obligation
- Morally right actions are those which advance one’s own long-term interests
- Helping others is moral only insofar as it advances one’s own interests