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SI 410 ETHICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Week 1b: Computer/Information Ethics

ISSUES FOR TODAY

- Ethics and Morals
- Why we need better ethic (Moor)
- [quick] History of computer ethics (Bynum)
- Uniqueness of CE/IE (Tavani)

WHAT IS “ETHICS”?

○ II. *pl.* ethics.

2. (after Gr.). The science of **morals**; the department of study concerned with the principles of human duty.
- 3. In narrower sense, with some qualifying word or phrase: a. The **moral** principles or system of a particular leader or school of thought.
- 4. In wider sense: The whole field of **moral science**, including besides Ethics properly so called, the science of law whether civil, political, or international.

WHAT IS “MORAL”?

- **1. a.** Of or relating to **human character or behavior** considered as **good or bad**; of or relating to the distinction between **right and wrong**, or **good and evil**, in relation to the actions, desires, or character of responsible human beings; ethical.
- **b.** Of an **action**: having the property of being right or wrong, or good or evil; voluntary or **deliberate** and therefore open to ethical appraisal. Of a person, etc.: **capable** of moral action; able to choose between right and wrong, or good and evil.
- **c.** Of **knowledge**, an opinion, etc.: relating to the nature and application of the **distinction** between right and wrong, or good and evil.
- **d.** Of an **idea**, speech, etc.: involving ethical praise or blame.
- **e.** Of a **feeling**: arising from an apprehension or sense of the goodness or badness of an action, character, etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- What is the difference between an ethical model and a religion?
- **1836** EMERSON *Nature, Idealism* Wks. 164
 - “Ethics and religion differ herein; that the one is the system of human duties commencing from man; the other, from God.”
- Moral + ?? = Capacity for [un]ethical action.
 - Moral compass
 - Moral bankruptcy
 - Moral courage
 - Moral sense
 - Moral philosophy

COMPUTER/INFORMATION ETHICS

- Computer Ethics: (Moor)
 - “In my view, computer ethics is the analysis of the nature and social impact of computer technology and the corresponding formulation and justification of policies for the ethical use of such technology.”
- Information Ethics (Floridi, others)
 - **Information ethics** is the field that investigates the ethical issues arising from the development and application of information technologies.

UTILITARIAN ETHICS (CONSEQUENTIALISM)

- Parent: Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)
- Outcome trumps intention (will)
- Choose the act that does the most good (least harm) for the greatest number of people
- Morality of the action depends on the results



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<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project/>



DEONTOLOGY

- Promises (along with rights and duties) have an absolute quality
 - Cannot override based on how much pleasure or pain is caused
- Rules based approach to ethical behavior
 - Example: video game user agreements
 - Example: getting a loan (Kant's prime example)
- Absolutes: such as human rights
 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 - May also apply to avatars (stay tuned)

WHY WE NEED BETTER ETHICS

- Phases of technological revolutions
 - Introduction, permeation, power
- Computer ethics defined (beginning in 1985)
 - Computer generated policy vacuums
 - Policies for use of technologies
 - Ethical justifications for policies
- Three suggestions for better ethics
 - Dynamic process requires “constant vigilance”
 - Greater collaboration between ethicists and “scientists”
 - Better analysis – deeper thinking regarding technology

MOOR'S LAW

- “As technological revolutions increase their social impact, ethical problems increase.”
 - Rip | Mix | Burn [limits of sampling]
 - Online simulation [identity and community]
 - Wikipedia [authority, expertise, accountability]
 - Digital photo editing [truth, trust, meaning]

“This phenomenon happens ... because inevitably revolutionary technology will provide numerous novel opportunities for action for which well thought out ethical policies will not have been developed.”

Moor (2006): 117.

DISCUSSION

- What are the limits of a policy-oriented approach to computer ethics?

- Ethics and ignorance

“We want to lead lives that are interesting, exciting, fulfilling, and happy, and we want to lead lives that are morally good as well...We have reached a point where the advance of technology makes the joint realization of these two goals less likely – we may have to make an unpalatable choice between lives that are morally good, and lives that are interesting.” (p. 80)

Why?: Information technology has multiplied our *opportunities to know*, and our traditional ethical doctrines overwhelm us by turning these opportunities into newfound *obligations to know*.” (p. 86)

HISTORY OF COMPUTER ETHICS

- Norbert Wiener (1950s)
 - “purpose of life is to flourish as **information processing systems**”
 - Freedom, equality, benevolence
- The uniqueness debate (1980s) (Maner, Johnson, Moor)
- Professional ethics debate
 - ACM Code of Ethics (1973-1992)
- Information ethics (1990s)
 - Luciano Floridi and the Infosphere
 - Coexistence of humans and information objects
 - To be continued...

UNIQUENESS DEBATE AMONG PHILOSOPHERS

- CEIU = Computer Ethics is **Unique**
- **Unique**: new category, new theory, new foundation

- 1. Does CE introduce new **ethical issues** or new **ethical objects**?
 - Probably no, but maybe yes...

- 2. Does CE require new **moral principles** (theory or system) to understand ethical problems?
 - Probably no, but maybe yes...

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- Is there anything about information technology that presents “unique” ethical challenges?

OPEN QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- What “level of abstraction” is needed to get to a true understanding of ethical norms for new technologies?
- Is or is not technology the “driver” of our ethical norms?
- Do we need to recognize the power of information objects in a larger environment?

FLOURISHING ETHICS

- “The overall focus of ethics can and should be shifted away from the narrow anthropocentric goal of only human flourishing to the broader, and more reasonable, goal of the flourishing of life, ecosystems, and just civilizations.”



Luciano Floridi, 2004.



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