



Class 4: Introduction to Ethics

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Where is Kevin and who am I ?



Jude Walker
Post-doc in Education
Social science researcher
Uses technology
Here today and Thursday

First clicker question for participation points!

Where is Kevin?

- a. In Paris at a computer science conference
- b. Teleported to the Starship Voyager
- c. Currently giving this class, only in *Second Life*
- d. Who's Kevin?
- e. All of the above

Department of Computer Science
Undergraduate Events

Events This Week

Women in CS Roundtable

Date: Mon., Jan 16
Time: 12 – 2 pm
Location: Rm 206, ICICS/CS

Resume Drop-in Editing

Date: Tues., Jan 17
Time: 2 - 4 pm
Location: Rm 253, ICICS/CS

IBM Info Session

Date: Wed., Jan 18
Time: 5:30 – 7 pm
Location: Wesbrook 100

CS Faculty Lecture

Speaker: Michael Friedlander
Title: Robust Inversion, Data Fitting
& Randomized Sampling

Date: Thurs., Jan 19
Time: 3:30 – 4:50 pm
Location: DMP 110

CSSS Board Game Night

Date: Fri., Jan 20
Time: 5 – 9 pm
Location: Reboot Café

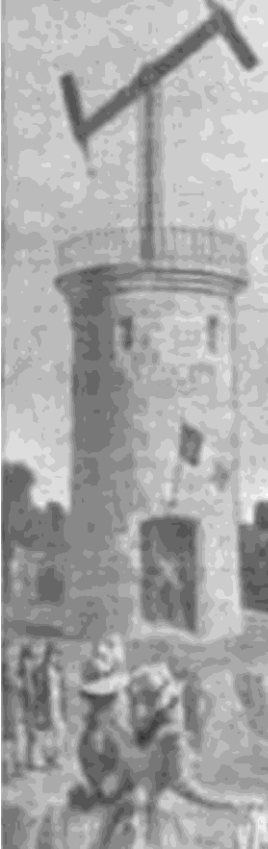
More details to be found in the weekly email that Michele Ng sends out.

The point of today's class

To:

- Introduce the concepts of morality, ethics, an ethical point of view, and ethical theories
- Examine some of the reasons why certain ethical arguments are stronger than others
- Explore two ethical theories related to relativism: subjective relativism (and cultural relativism)
- Get you to practice your powers of persuasion

Where are we at?



A QUICK LOOK AT PROGRAMMING LANGUAGES

YEAR: **1957**

LANGUAGE: **FORTRAN**

n, is the oldest
Created by John
was developed to
scientific, mathematical,
ons.

used in aerospace,
s, government, and

R SERVICE

IDE:

In Fortran 77
be 6 characters.

What does any of this have to do with ethics?

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

Mom sells kids' toys on eBay as punishment



Selling 8 Beyblades to Replace DESTROYED Bathtub

Item condition: Used
Time left: 8d 02h (Feb 13, 2011 11:24:51 PST)
Bid history: 18 bids

Current bid: **US \$69.00**

Your max bid: US \$ **Place bid**
(Enter US \$70.00 or more)

Save You'll earn **\$1.38** in **eBay Bucks**. See conditions

Seller info
daney21 (52)

[Save this seller](#)
[See other items](#)

Other items

Item number:
Item location:
Ships to:
Payments:

We are selling 8 Beyblades, 2 of them light up. As you can tell they are not happy about this! They have been using their bathtub as a 'battle arena' and Beyblades + Bathtub = Destruction!!! With the metal ones they managed to scrape the enamel off the tub, take a chunk of tub out and break off the soap holder. SO if you 'win' this auction DONT play with in a bathtub!!! We have recieved a quote of \$500.00 to replace the tub, some tiles, and soap holder + labor of course! They had approssamently \$125.67 in their piggy banks that will be going to toward the cost. We will use the profit from this auction towards the balance and then it is onto other toys!

Definition of terms

- **Society**
 - Association of people organized under a system of rules
 - Rules: advance the good of members over time
- **Morality**
 - A society's rules of conduct
 - What people ought / ought not to do in various situations
- **Ethics**
 - Rational examination of morality
 - Evaluation of people's behavior

Where does our study of ethics come from?



“Man should not simply live, but live well with conduct governed by moderate virtue. This is regarded as difficult, as virtue denotes doing the right thing, to the right person, at the right time, to the proper extent, in the correct fashion, for the right reason.”

An ethical point of view...

Most everyone shares “core values”, desiring

- Life
- Happiness
- Ability to accomplish goals

Two ways to view world

- **Selfish point of view:** consider only own self and core values
- **Ethical point of view:** respect other people and their core values

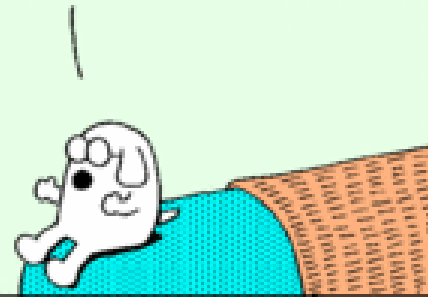
How do we evaluate whether something is ethical?

IS IT IMMORAL FOR MY COMPANY TO SELL FORTY-THOUSAND CALORIE, SHARD-FILLED DOUGHNUTS?



www.dilbert.com
scottadams@aol.com

YOU'RE NOT FORCING ANYONE TO EAT THEM; YOU'RE JUST MAKING THEM IRRESISTIBLY DELICIOUS.

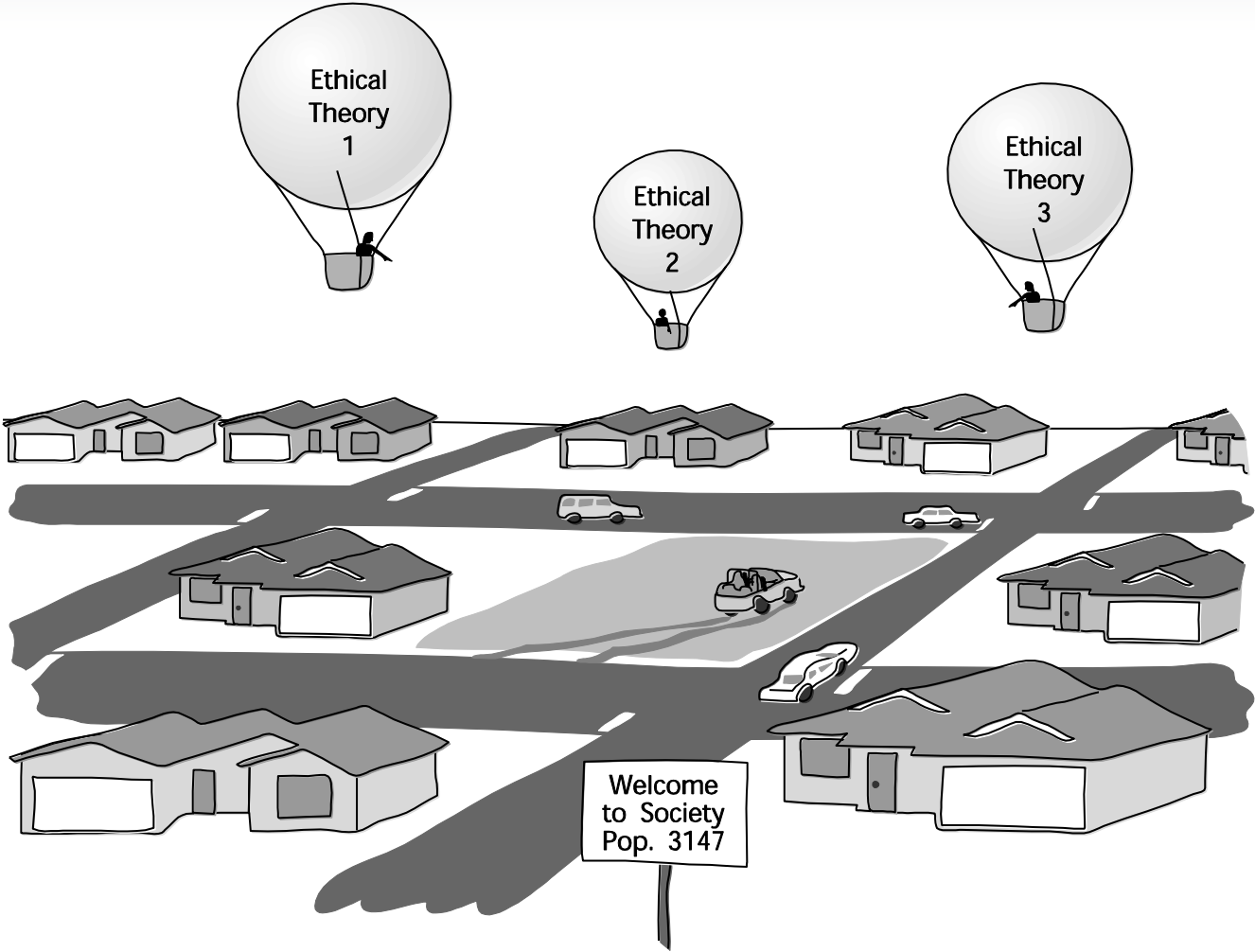


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HOW'S THAT DIFFERENT?



Ethical theories



Ethical dilemmas

Scenario 1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEkmO3gQQAs>

Questions we may ask when evaluating something from an ethical point of view

- Did Sheldon do anything wrong?
- Who benefited from Sheldon's course of action?
- Who was hurt by this course of action?
- Could Sheldon have achieved his goal in a better way?
- **What additional information, if any, would help you answer the previous question?**

Scenario 2

Kao lives in Laos and really enjoys watching movies. The only way to watch movies (that he can afford) is to buy the illegally pirated versions sold on the streets of Vientiane, which he does when he has the money

Is what he does unethical?

Scenario 3

I also really enjoy watching movies and am a tourist in Laos. I buy the pirated ones on the streets to take back to Canada; I also know this helps the local economy.

Is what I did unethical?

Questions

- Who benefits?
- Who gets harmed?
- What other ways can Kao or I achieve our objectives?
- What additional information would you need to evaluate whether this was an ethical decision?

- **Ethics:** a rational, systematic analysis
- **Workable ethical theory:** produces explanations that might be persuasive to a skeptical, yet open-minded audience
- Good, persuasive **arguments**. Really about argumentation drawing on Western philosophical framework (Aristotle, Plato, Socrates)

What makes an ethical theory persuasive?

- What makes a good argument?

In pairs:

New technologies have made us more social

Person A: (Higher in the alphabet): Argue for

Person B: (lower in the alphabet): Argue against

Try to convince your partner

Relativism

Morality is relative

No universal norms of right and wrong

Me or my group can say something's moral, you or your group can say something's immoral. I cannot judge you, you cannot judge me

Two unworkable theories

Subjective relativism

We each create our own morality—we each decide what is right and wrong

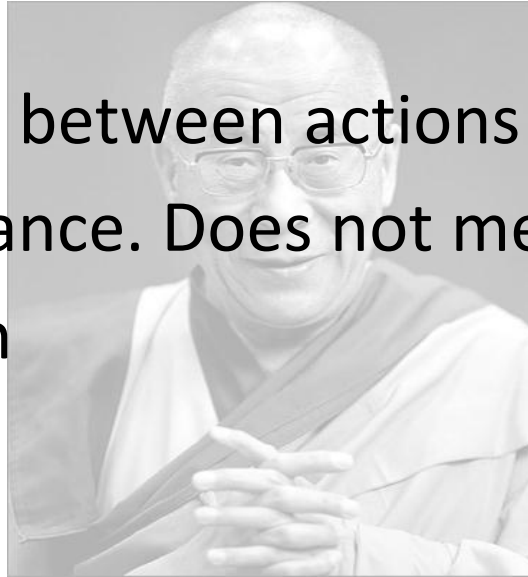
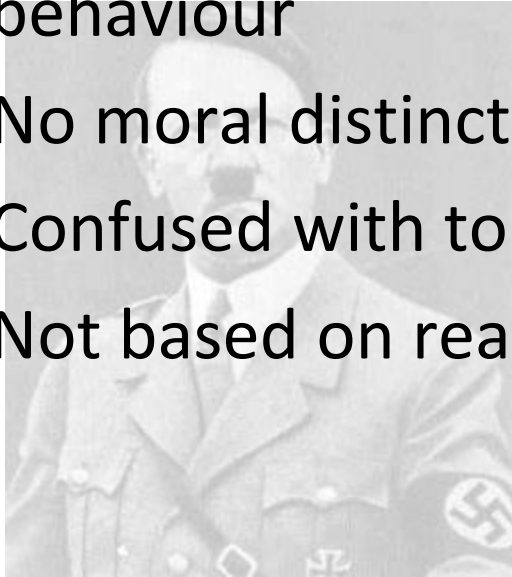
“I think it’s immoral for a CEO to make 400 times her employees. I think extreme wealth disparity is unethical. You don’t think that. That’s just your opinion; Let’s agree to disagree”

Case for subjective relativism

- Well-meaning and intelligent people disagree on moral issues (e.g., taxation & wealth disparity)
- Ethical debates are disagreeable and often get us nowhere.

Case against subjective relativism: Anything goes

1. Blurs doing what you think is right and doing what you want to do. People are good at rationalizing bad behaviour
2. No moral distinction between actions
3. Confused with tolerance. Does not mean tolerance
4. Not based on reason



Cultural Relativism

What is 'right' or 'wrong' depends upon the group's guidelines

Guidelines vary across time and place

Particular action may be wrong in a society at one time and wrong in another society or in another time—e.g., slavery

Cultural relativism examples

Brainstorm as many issues you can think of for which cultural relativism arguments have been given

Female genital mutilation

Polygamy (Bountiful)

Capital punishment—stoning,

Women not driving cars

Hazing (fraternities)

Residents working 36 hour shifts

Cultural relativism: the case for

Different social contexts may require different moral guidelines (think resource constraint)

It is arrogant for one society to judge another's

We rarely understand enough to be able to judge fairly or adequately

Case against cultural relativism: Gag order

- Because two societies **do** have different moral views doesn't mean they **ought to** have different views
- It doesn't explain how moral guidelines are determined
- What if there are no cultural norms?
- Cultural norms may not be accepted across the board
- It doesn't account for evolution of moral guidelines.
- **It provides no way out for cultures in conflict**
- Existence of many acceptable practices does not imply all practices are acceptable (many/any fallacy)
- Societies do, in fact, share certain core values
- Only indirectly based on reason. History not reason.

Wrap up

Be alert over the next two days to subjective and cultural relativism arguments—from family, friends, in the media...

See if you can come with an example next class that relates in some way to new technologies