

Computers and Society

CPSC 430

Lecture 6 — Unworkable Ethical Theories

<http://www.cs.ubc.ca/~kevinlb/teaching/cs430/>

Participation Quiz

- A wizard has two boxes. One is opaque, and one is clear.
- The clear box contains \$1000.
- The wizard offers you a choice:
 - A. Take an opaque box only.
 - B. Take the opaque box AND the clear box.
- Before he made the offer, the wizard predicted what you would choose, and filled the opaque box like this:
 - Predicted **one box**: put **\$1,000,000** into the opaque box.
 - Predicted **two boxes**: put **nothing** into the opaque box.
- The wizard is **very good** at predicting what people will do.

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- **Should you take one box, or two?**
 - A. Opaque box only
 - B. Both boxes
 - C. Flip a coin

Spoilers!

In today's class:

1. Recap the four ethical theories from the readings.
2. Think about an ethical dilemma.
3. Take the ethical theories for a test drive.

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.

Scenario: Intellectual Property

- A software company has created a financial management program.
- The program stores extremely sensitive financial data about the user on the user's hard drive.
- The program is very popular, and widely pirated.
- During an automatic software update, the company installs a back door that deletes the data of users that are running a pirated copy.
 - Only pirates have their data wiped; no user of a legal copy loses any data.

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- During an automatic software update, the company installs a back door that deletes the data of users that are running a pirated copy.
 - Only pirates have their data wiped; no user of a legal copy loses any data.
- **Has the company behaved unethically?**
 - A. The company behaved unethically
 - B. The company has not behaved unethically

Scenario Variations

Would your answer be different if:

- The program was for managing photos instead of finances?

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- The back door existed from the beginning instead of being installed with an update?
- The back door was disclosed in an End User Licensing Agreement?
 - (that nobody ever reads)

Persuasion Exercise

Try to persuade the other members of your group:

1. Groups of 4
 - Person A, B, C, D by alphabetical order
2. Person A: Argue using **subjective relativism** [5 min]
3. Group: Critique Person A's argument [5 min]
4. Person B: Argue using **cultural relativism** [5 min]
5. Group: Critique Person B's argument [5 min]
6. Person C: Argue using **divine command theory** [5 min]
7. Group: Critique Person C's argument [5 min]
8. Person D: Argue using **ethical egoism** [5 min]
9. Group: Critique Person D's argument [5 min]
10. Report back

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Persuasion Exercise

Try to persuade the other members of your group:

3. Group: Critique Person A's argument [5 min]

Persuasion Exercise

Try to persuade the other members of your group:

4. Person B: Argue using **cultural relativism** [5 min]

Persuasion Exercise

Try to persuade the other members of your group:

5. Group: Critique Person B's argument [5 min]

Persuasion Exercise

Try to persuade the other members of your group:

6. Person C: Argue using **divine command theory** [5 min]

Persuasion Exercise

Try to persuade the other members of your group:

7. Group: Critique Person C's argument [5 min]

Persuasion Exercise

Try to persuade the other members of your group:

8. Person D: Argue using **ethical egoism** [5 min]

Persuasion Exercise

Try to persuade the other members of your group:

9. Group: Critique Person D's argument [5 min]

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Discussion

- What was most convincing about the different arguments?
- What was least convincing?
- Was there a critique that applied to all of the theories?