Class 4: Introduction to Ethics
Participation Quiz

Pick your favorite LOLcat (answer sincerely or ironically, as you prefer):

A. STOP! hammah time

B. i r not 4 sale!!!

C. HALP!

D. INVISIBLE BIKE

E. I QUESTION THE GENERAL ASSUMPTION THAT FELINES ARE INHERENTLY DEFICIENT IN THE AREA OF GRAMMAR AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE.
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 have we gotten so far?
What does any of this have to do with ethics?

Can you define ethics? How is it different from 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
New technologies lead to new ethical questions

Is it wrong for a mom to punish her kids by selling their toys on eBay?

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 bathtube!!!! We have received a quote of $500.00 to replace the tub, some tiles, and soap holder + labor of course! They had approximately $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!
New technologies lead to new ethical questions

Is it wrong for a father to punish his daughter by shooting her laptop and posting the video to her facebook page?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kl1ujzRidmU
0:00 – 1:20; 6:10 – 7:30
34 million views...
We need an ethical framework because we live in society

• 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
How do we evaluate whether an action is ethical?
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