



Class 4: Introduction to Ethics

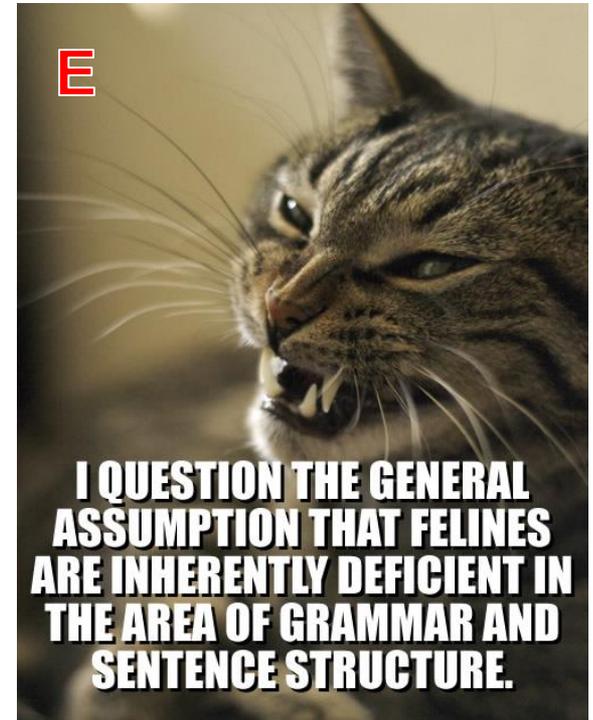
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Participation Quiz

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



Result of online vote for best essay

Which was the best final essay arguing FOR?

A total of 52 vote(s) in 111 hours



Which was the best final essay arguing AGAINST? is now closed

A total of 35 vote(s) in 111 hours



What did you take away from last class?

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

How do we evaluate whether an action is ethical?



- **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

Scenario: Intellectual Property

- A software company made a financial management program
 - The program stores extremely sensitive financial data about users on users' hard drives
 - 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 who are running a pirated copy
 - Only pirates have their data wiped
 - No user of a legal copy loses any data
- Is the company's behavior unethical?
 - A. Yes: The company behaved unethically
 - B. No: The company did not behave unethically

Scenario Variations

- Would your answer be different if:
 - The program was for managing photos instead of finances?
 - The data was stored on the company's servers instead of the user's hard drive?
 - 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. Form Groups of 4
 - Identify person A, B, C, D by alphabetical order of first name
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

Discussion

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