

# Introduction to Ethics

## Lecture 2-1

Computers & Society (CPSC 430)

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# Ethics and 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

# What we're up to here

- **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.

Kernel of truth: virtue of tolerance (but universalized to the point of absurdity)

# 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.

Kernel of truth: it can be hard to understand other cultures and superficial judgements have often been wrong in retrospect

# 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.

Kernel of truth: much moral wisdom in religious traditions