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
How do we decide if an action is ethical?

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

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

HOW'S THAT DIFFERENT?

BAH!
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.
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