Introduction to Ethics Lecture 2-1

Computers & Society (CPSC 430)

Kevin Leyton-Brown

Ethics and Morality

Ethics

Study of morality

Morality

What people ought to or ought not to do

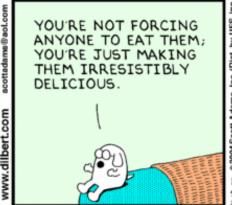
Why do we have a course about ethics and technology?

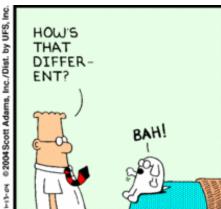
- Generally need a way to decide the best thing to do
- New problems accompany new technologies
- "Common wisdom" may not exist for novel situations brought about by new technologies

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