

Computers and Society

CPSC 430

Lecture 4 – Introduction to ethics

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<https://www.students.cs.ubc.ca/~cs-430/>

Original slides by 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.

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

Artificial Intelligence

“Contents generated by artificial intelligence systems (e.g., ChatGPT, DALL-E 2) that require minimal human input should not receive copyright protection.”

Persuasion Exercise

- Try to persuade the other members of your group:
- Form Groups of 4
 - Identify person A, B, C, D by alphabetical order of first name
- Person A: Argue using subjective relativism
 - Group: Critique Person A's argument
- Person B: Argue using cultural relativism
 - Group: Critique Person B's argument
- Person C: Argue using divine command theory
 - Group: Critique Person C's argument
- Person D: Argue using ethical egoism
 - Group: Critique Person D's argument
- 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?

Weekly Essays

- **Between Thursday, 7:00 PM and Tuesday, 4:45 PM (sharp!)**
 - Do **assigned readings** of up to one chapter from the textbook
Readings posted at <https://www.students.cs.ubc.ca/~cs-430/>
 - Take a **multiple-choice quiz** online to test your comprehension
 - Write one **short essay**
 - You'll often be given multiple prompts from which to choose
 - You'll be allowed up to 2500 characters; that's less than one single-spaced page
 - At first: do some **calibrated peer review**
 - This is practice for the following; details in a minute
- **Between Tuesday, 7:00 PM and Thursday, 4:45 PM (sharp!)**
 - Perform between 3 and 7 **peer reviews** of others' essays
 - the number assigned to you will depend on previous week's class attendance;