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Ethics versus Morality

- **Morality** – adherence to standards of behavior accepted by the society as proper conduct.
  - Latin: *mores* = customs, habits

- **Ethics** - moral philosophy, i.e., systematic study of what morality is.
  - Greek: ἡθος (ethos) = custom, habit, but also character
Ethics versus Morality

• Can one adhere to moral behavior without any interest in studying ethics??

• This is a philosophical question: do we do bad things out of ignorance? Only out of ignorance?

• “Forgive them for they know not what they do”
  – Luke 23:43
Why should we study ethics??

- Does corporate fraud happen because CEOs have not studied enough business ethics in school?

- Like any other branch of philosophy, ethics does not provide definite answers.

- Why should we then bother with studying ethics?
Identifying moral issues

- Moral issues are unavoidable in life.

- Ultimately, everyone must rely on his own moral judgment.

- However, study of Ethics forces us to become aware of moral issues and sharpens our ability to make moral judgment.

- Be alert to moral standards of a new society.
Morality versus Law

• Assume you are confronted with a dilemma:

  1. You can do what law requires you to do, despite the fact that your moral standards compel you to do otherwise;

  2. You can do what your moral values compel you to do even though it is illegal;

• What is the proper moral choice: to adhere to law or to adhere to your moral values?
Morality versus Law in a Democracy

- Can we agree about what is moral in a pluralist democratic society?

- Can we agree about what is lawful?

- What if a law is unjust?
Typical Questions of Ethics

- What is “Good”? Is it an absolute notion or does it depend on circumstances?
- Can different societies have different ethical values and be “equally right” about them?
- Are humans by their nature selfish or kind?
- Can we teach people how to be good?
- Is morality about obeying social norms or is it about following some inherent principles?
- Why is it important to have good moral judgment?
- Moral dilemmas: the train example.
Studies of Ethics

• Central question for most moral philosophers: “What is a good life that is worth living??”
• Develop theories what “good” and “bad” is;
• Applied Ethics: study of practical cases from the perspective of various ethical theories
• Descriptive Ethics: study of facts about ethical standards of particular societies and how they evolve;
• Legal Ethics: study how particular laws comply with ethical principles accepted by the society (and charge us a fortune for every wise word).
Ethics: historic origins

Socrates

- First to advocate turning attention from the outside world to human condition.
- Most important knowledge is the one that has bearing on human life
- People will naturally do good things if they know what is right; evil is due to ignorance
- Doing what is good will make you happy
Ethics: historic origins

Plato

- Highest aim of moral thought: human well being
- Advocates austerity (and was an ultimate nerd):
  - Human soul should stay away from bodily pleasures
  - Individual wishes should be subordinate to the communal life
  - Morals should be dictated by philosophers who know what good is – no space for democracy
  - The Form of the Good – and abstract, absolute idea objectively existing outside of human mind as the source of human morality
  - Training in sciences and philosophy necessary for our understanding what is good for us
  - Cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance and justice.
Ethics: historic origins

Aristotle

- Follows Socrates and Plato in accepting that morality (virtue) is central to good life;
- Instead of studying sciences and philosophy (Plato) we need a proper appreciation how friendship, pleasure, virtue, honor and wealth fit together as a whole.
- Importance of proper practice to get the right social skills
- Importance of self realization  as the path to happiness
- Importance of moderation
The spectrum of Greek thought

**Hedonism**
- Good is what maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain.
- Range from indulgence in everything to pursuing purely spiritual bliss
- Aristippus: “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.”

**Epicureanism**
- Extreme indulgence can be detrimental;
- Fear is the main source of unhappiness,
- Especially such is fear of death, which is totally irrational.
The spectrum of Greek thought (cont.)

**Stoicism**

- Greatest good is in contentment and serenity
- Peace of mind highest goal
- Freedom from material attachments
- Control over your inner world is prerequisite for freedom and happiness
- Must accept things that cannot be changed, such as inevitability of death
- give up all desires
- Need for spiritual exercise
From Virtue to Duty

- Cicero: ethical behavior is doing your duty.
- Medieval philosophers: duties to God, self, others.

**Immanuel Kant:**

- **Universality Principle:** “Always act in such a way that the maxim of your action can be willed as a universal law of humanity.”
  - What is fair for one must be fair for all

- **Categorical Imperatives:** unconditional commands that are binding on everyone at all times.

  “Always treat humanity, whether in yourself or in other people, as an end in itself and never as a mere means.”
From Duty to Rights

Thomas Hobbes

- All our actions are aimed at pleasure or self-preservation
- A thing is good if it is the object of any man’s appetite or desire
- How do we reconcile opposing desires? By social contract: everyone agrees to give up his right to attack others in return for the same concession from everyone else.

John Locke

- Natural rights: life, health, liberty, possession
- There are no innate moral ideas; the criterion of moral actions is a man's well-being
- The moral norms are rational, and are identified with the divine right and with natural right.
Other Ethics Theories

- **Utilitarianism:**
  - Moral value of an action is determined by its contribution to overall happiness or pleasure as summed among all of the mankind.
  - Founder: Jeremy Bentham
  - Most significant proponent: John Stuart Mill, one of the founders of modern *Liberalism*
  - Mill’s *Harm Principle*: the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.

- **Divine Command Theory:**
  - An act is obligatory just in case it is commanded by God; ethical judgment is a form of revelation
Some Ethical Dilemmas

Reason versus Feelings
- Morality is a matter of purely rational judgment
- Morality is strictly matter of feeling – we have moral sense

Absolute versus Relative
- Good and Bad are absolute terms
- Good and Bad are relative social constructs peculiar to particular societies, no objective truth
  - stimulates tolerance and respect for differences??
  - should we tolerate different norms?
OK, that’s all very nice, but how is all that stuff relevant to computers and information technology???
The Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics

1. Thou shalt not use a computer to harm other people.
2. Thou shalt not interfere with other people's computer work.
3. Thou shalt not snoop around in other people's computer files.
4. Thou shalt not use a computer to steal.
5. Thou shalt not use a computer to bear false witness.
6. Thou shalt not copy or use proprietary software for which you have not paid.
7. Thou shalt not use other people's computer resources without authorization or proper compensation.
8. Thou shalt not appropriate other people's intellectual output.
9. Thou shalt think about the social consequences of the program you are writing or the system you are designing.
10. Thou shalt always use a computer in ways that insure consideration and respect for your fellow
Association of Computer Machinery (ACM) Code of Conduct

General Moral Imperatives
1. Contribute to society and human well-being
2. Avoid harm to others
3. Be honest and trustworthy
4. Be fair and take action not to discriminate
5. Honor property rights including copyrights and patents
6. Give proper credit for intellectual property
7. Respect the privacy of others
8. Honor confidentiality

http://onlineethics.org/codes/ACMcode.html
IEEE Code of Ethics

1. Accept responsibility in making engineering decisions consistent with the safety, health and welfare of the public, and disclose promptly factors that might endanger the public or the environment;

2. Avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest whenever possible, and disclose them to affected parties when they do exist;

3. Be honest and realistic in stating claims or estimates based on available data;

4. Reject bribery in all its forms;

5. Improve the understanding of technology, its appropriate application, and potential consequences;
IEEE Code of Ethics (continued)

6. Maintain and improve our technical competence and undertake technological tasks for others only if qualified by training or experience, or after full disclosure of pertinent limitations;

7. Seek, accept, and offer honest criticism of technical work, to acknowledge and correct errors, and to credit properly the contributions of others;

8. Treat fairly all persons regardless of such factors as race, religion, gender, disability, age, or national origin;

9. Avoid injuring others, their property, reputation, or employment by false or malicious action;

10. Assist colleagues and co-workers in their professional development and support them in following this code of ethics.

http://www.ieee.org/portal/index.jsp?pageID=corp_level&path=about/whatis&file=code.xml&xsl=generic.xsl
Ethics and IT:

1. Privacy

What is Privacy

- Essentially, the right to be left alone
  - Also: control over one's own personal information, such as
    - Medical records
    - Income
    - Age
    - whereabouts
    - habits
    - Who you vote for

- IT technology makes it hard to guard our personal information
Invasion of Privacy

- Your medical records are accessed by your employer to determine if you are likely to be sick.
- Your shopping habits with X inc. are sold to Y inc. to bombard you with unsolicited offers.
- Your phone is tapped by the police for no good reason.
- Your email is red by the police because of your ethnic background.
- Your internet surfing habits are monitored by your ISP.
Gathering personal information

- If you apply for a job, your prospective employer must collect some private information about you such as:
  - Your professional credentials
  - Information about you from your references
  - Criminal record check
  - Medical examination
- What are the limits for such information gathering??
  - Information must be **lawfully** obtained
  - Used **only** for the declared purpose
  - **Destroyed** after the purpose is completed
Security versus Privacy

- Should your ISP give the Police the details of your online activity without a court order?
- Should your mobile company give to the police your past whereabouts gathered from your mobile phone use without the court order?
- Should the Road Authority give to the Police the details of your movement gathered from your electronic tool payments without a court order?
- Should your bank give the details of your money transfers without a court order?
- All EASY to gather and so EASY to claim that the Police should be able to obtain without the “hassle” of a court order. Does this lead to an Orwellian “Big Brother”?
In the past majority of people were more concerned about our right to privacy than with security enforcement; recent events (such as 9/11) caused a major shift in what people consider acceptable surveillance by Government agencies. But can we afford erosion of the privileges of a democratic society?

Example: should encryption be available to all, precluding the Police from reading your email?
To be continued...