CS305 - Social, Ethical, and Legal Implications of Computing

- **Lecture 2a: Ethical Systems** -
Bart Massey (bart@cs.pdx.edu)
Warren Harrison (warren@cs.pdx.edu)

Ethical Behavior

Society

Association of people organized under a system of rules designed to advance the good of its members over time

Cooperation promotes the common good

People in society compete with each other to divide limited benefits amongst themselves

Morality

Rules of conduct describing how people should behave in various situations

Moral dilemma – When a person belongs to multiple societies with conflicting rules

- A pacifist living by the rules of his/her religion forced to live in a country with a mandatory draft law)

- What are some moral dilemmas you have encountered?

Ethical Behavior

Ethics

Philosophical study of morality

Examination of moral beliefs and behavior

Rational, systematic analysis of conduct that can cause benefit or harm to other people

- Focused on voluntary, moral choices people make

- Not focused on choices that do not affect others

- Not focused on involuntary choices

Technology forces us to update our moral guidelines constantly!

- We must decide if problems are morally bad, good, or neutral based on our current (possibly out-of-date) moral guidelines

Ethical Behavior

Ethical Theories

Provide a framework for moral decision-making

- Applied consistently to determine whether an action is right or wrong
- Allow a person to present a persuasive, logical argument as to why certain actions should or should not be allowed

Theories covered in book

- Subjective relativism
- Cultural relativism
- Divine command theory
- Ethical egoism
- Kantianism
- Act utilitarianism
- Rule utilitarianism
- Social contract theory

Subjective Relativism

Each person decides right and wrong

Case For

Intelligent people can have opposite opinions about moral issues

Ethical debates are disagreeable and pointless

- Morality is relative so you don't have to reconcile opposing views

Case against

What is right and what you do are not sharply drawn

- People are good at rationalizing bad behavior

No moral distinction between actions of different people

Subjective relativism and tolerance are two different things

Should not give legitimacy to an ethical theory that is not based on reason

Cultural Relativism

Right and Wrong rests with a society's actual moral guidelines

Vary from place to place and from time to time

Case For

Different social contexts demand different moral guidelines

Arrogant for one society to judge another

Case Against

Does not explain how individual discovers moral guidelines

Does not do a good job of explaining how moral guidelines evolve

No framework for reconciliation between cultures in conflict.

Suggests that there are no universal guidelines

Only indirectly based on reason - *moral guidelines are a result of tradition - not a powerful tool to construct ethical evaluations*

Divine Command Theory

Good actions are those aligned with the will of God, bad actions are contrary to the will of God

Case For

> Most people are religious and submit to God's law

> Create rules that align with it

Case Against

> Many holy books, some disagree

> Unrealistic to assume a multi-cultural society can agree on a religion-based morality

> Some moral problems are not addressed directly in Scripture

> Based on obedience, not reason

Not a powerful weapon for ethical debate in a secular society

Ethical Egoism

Each person should focus exclusively on his/her self-interest

Man as a heroic being with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life

Only help others if it helps you

Kantianism

Reasoning method to determine universal morals

Often coincide with those in the Bible, but derived via reason

Formulation

Kant argues for dutifulness

- Doing what we ought to do (based on moral rule) versus what we want to do

How does one know if an action is grounded in a moral rule?

- Kant's categorical imperative (second formulation)

- Act so that you always treat both yourself and other people as ends in themselves, and never only as a means to an end - Empathy!

Act Utilitarianism

An action is right (or wrong) to the extent that it increases (or decreases) the total happiness of the affected parties/beings

Based on the principle of utility (greatest happiness principle)

Focus is on consequences (consequentialist theory)

Motive is irrelevant (compared to Kant?)

Agreeing on affected parties is an issue (animals?)

A rational ethical theory for determining right or wrong

Rule Utilitarianism

Adopt moral rules which, if followed by everyone, will lead to the greatest increase in total happiness

Principle of utility applied to moral rules not individual actions

A workable theory for evaluating moral problems

Social Contract Theory (Hobbes)

Morality consists of rules governing how people treat one another, that rational people agree to accept, for their mutual benefit, on the condition that others follow those rules as well

Requires:

- Moral rules to gain the benefits of social living and prevent us from living in a "state of nature"

- Government must be capable of enforcing the rules

Arrangement of giving rights to rational people is the "social contract"

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