

COMPUTER ETHICS & PUBLIC POLICY

Course Structure

- Lectures: 3
- Tutorial: 0
- Practical: 0
- Credit: 3

Books

- Johnson, Deborah G. (2001). Computer ethics, 3rd edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. A philosophical survey of the ethical issues arising around computer technology.
- Moor, James H. (1985). "What Is Computer Ethics?" *Metaphilosophy* 16(4): 266–275. Classic piece on why the study of computer ethics is needed.
- Advisory Committee on Automated Personal Data Systems. Records, Computers, and the Rights of Citizens. U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Publication No. (OS) 73–94, July 1973.

Course Contents

- https://iiitsurat.ac.in/assets/syllabus/UGCSE/old/sem-7_CSE.pdf

CS 731: UNIT 1

Unit 1

- Introduction: Why Computer Ethics?: A Brief History of Computers and the Internet, Meaning of Ethics, Distinction between Law and Ethics, Computer Ethics as a Unique Kind of Ethics
- Philosophical & Professional Ethics: Descriptive and normative claims, Ethical Relativism, Utilitarianism, Deontological Theories, Virtue Ethics, Individual and Social Policy ethics, Characteristics of Profession, codes of ethics and professional conduct, The Ethical Decision-Making Process, Steps in the Ethical Decision-Making Process, Culture Clash on the Net Case and its solution.

Meaning of Ethics

- Ethics is branch of philosophy that used to study ideal human behaviour and ideal ways of living.
- Diverse approaches to ethics amongst philosophers
 - Aristotle believed that ideal behaviours were practices that lead to the end goal of eudaimonia (high-level of happiness or well-being).
 - Kant believed that ideal behaviour was in accordance with one's duty.

Meaning of Ethics (Contd.)

- Philosophically, ethics is a systematic approach to understanding, analysing, and distinguishing matters of right and wrong, good and bad, and admirable and deplorable, related to well-being of and the relationships among sentient beings.
- Use formal theories, approaches, and codes of conduct (Profession or Religion).
- Ethics is an active process.
- Ethics is subjective but needs to be justified through logical theoretical arguments.
- Ethics- related decision requires balance of emotion and reason.
 - Example Adolf Hitler.

Meaning of Ethics (Contd.)

- Morals:
 - Specific beliefs, behaviours, and ways of being derived from doing ethics.
 - Reverse of Morality: Immorality
 - A person's behaviour is in opposition to accepted societal, religious, cultural, or professional ethical standards and principles.
 - Example, dishonesty, fraud, murder
- Amoral: Actions that can normally be judged as moral or immoral, but are done with lack of concern for good behaviour.
 - Example: Murder (Without any sense of Remorse)

Meaning of Ethics (Contd.)

- Unethical
 - Describes ethics in negative form.
 - Example, A person's character or behaviour is contrary code of conduct or admirable traits endorsed by the society, community, or Profession.

Types of Ethics

- Three Types:
 - Normative Ethics
 - Meta-ethics
 - Descriptive Ethics
- Normative Ethics:
 - An attempt to decide or prescribe values, behaviours, and ways of being that are right or wrong, good or bad, admirable or deplorable.
 - Inquires about
 - how human should behave
 - What ought to be done in certain situations
 - What type of character one should have
 - How one should be.

Types of Ethics (Contd.)

- Outcomes: answers to the normative questions (Prescription derived from questions)
- Common Morality
 - Normality Beliefs and Behaviours that the members of society generally agree about and that are familiar to most human beings.
 - Example: Robbing a bank is wrong
- Particular Morality: Depends upon the profession's moral norms and codes
 - Example: Nurse (Do I have an obligation to stay at work in a hospital during a category 5 hurricane rather than evacuating with my family?)

Types of Ethics (Contd.)

- Meta-Ethics
 - Understanding the language of morality through an analysis of the meaning of ethically related concepts and theories such as meaning of good, happiness, and virtuous character.
 - Example: Nurse engaging in meta-ethical analysis to determine meaning of a good nurse-patient relationship.

Types of Ethics (Contd.)

- Descriptive Ethics
 - Is Scientific rather than Philosophical ethical inquiry.
 - Researchers or ethicists describe what people think of morality or when they want to describe how people actually behave (their morals).
 - For example, nurses' attitudes regarding telling patients about their terminal illness.

Ethical Perspectives

- Two opposite views
 - Ethical Relativism
 - Ethical objectivism
- Ethical Relativism
 - Is a belief that it is acceptable for ethics and morality to differ among persons or societies.
 - Two types
 - Ethical Subjectivism
 - Believe “that individuals create their own morality that are no objective moral truths - only individual opinions.”
 - Cultural Relativism
 - “The ethical theory that moral evaluation is rooted in and cannot be separated from the experience, beliefs, and behaviours of a particular culture, and hence, that what is wrong in one culture, may not be so in another culture.”

Ethical Perspectives (Contd.)

- Ethical Objectivism
 - Is a belief that universal or objective moral principles exist.
- Values and Moral Reasoning
 - Value:
 - Is something of worth or something that is highly regarded.
 - One's evaluative judgements about what one believes is good or makes something desirable.
 - Reasoning
 - Is of abstract thought processes to think creatively, to answer questions, to solve problems, and to formulate strategies for one's actions and desired ways of being.

Ethical Theories and Approaches

- Virtue Ethics
 - Emphasises on excellence of one's character and considerations of what sort of person one wants to be is emphasized rather than centering on one's duties or consequence of one's actions
 - Plato and Aristotle's virtue called arete in Greek refers person or object being the best in accordance to their purpose.
 - For example, knife's purpose is to cut so arete in regard to knife is having sharp edge that cuts well.

Watch your thoughts; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.



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Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- For humans, the virtue ethics addresses:
 - What sort of person must I be to be an excellent person?
- According to Aristotle, A person of virtue is:
 - Who is an excellent friend to other people, an excellent thinker, and an excellent citizen of a community.
- Aristotle's approach bifurcates virtue ethics to two categories:
 - Intellectual Virtue
 - Exists and increases due to the result of teaching
 - Character or moral Virtue
 - Mindful attention to Excellent habits

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Aristotle points “It is not possible to possess excellence in the primary sense without wisdom, nor to be wise without excellence of character.”
- Believes that good things taken to an extreme could become bad.
- For example, Courage is a virtue, extremes of rashness and cowardice on either sides.
- Plato designated primary four virtues of
 - Prudence (wisdom)
 - Fortitude (courage)
 - Temperance (moderation)
 - Justice

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Hume believed that virtues flow from natural human tendency to be sympathetic or benevolent towards other people.
- Hume's philosophy of ethics is based on emotion as the primary human motivator for admirable behaviour.
- Focuses on usefulness of virtues. (Useful to other people, oneself and both).
- Nietzsche proposed the best charter for people to cultivate is based on a "will to power".

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Natural Law Theory
 - People who use natural law theory believe that rightness of actions is self-evident as morality is inherently determined by nature not by customs and preferences.
- Deontology
 - “Study of Duty”
 - Approach of ethics that focus on duties and rules.

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Kant defined person as rational, autonomous (self-directed) being with the ability to know universal objective moral laws and the freedom to decide to act morally.
- Kantian deontology prescribes that each rational being is ethically bound to act only from a sense of duty; when deciding how to act, the consequences of one's actions are considered to be irrelevant.
- It is only through dutiful actions that people can be moral.
- Kant believed that individuals are ethically bound to act from duty even if they don't want to.
- Kant believed each autonomous self-directed person has dignity and is due respect, and one should never act in ways that involve using other people as a means to one's personal ends.
- For example, failure to obtain informed consent from research participant even when the researcher believes that research will be beneficial to the participant.

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- There are two types of duties:
 - hypothetical imperative:
 - Optional duties or rules.
 - If-else imperatives
 - For example, If I want to become a nurse, then I have to graduate from nursing school.”
 - Categorical imperative:
 - Duties and laws are absolute and unconditional.
 - Ask a question: “If I perform this action, could I will that it should become a universal law for everyone to act in the same way?”
 - For example, Kant’s ethics imposes the categorical imperative that one should never tell a lie.
 - Suicide is never acceptable.

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Consequentialism
 - Considers consequences as moral value of one's action.
 - Example, Utilitarianism
- Utilitarianism
 - Actions are judged by their utility; that is, they are evaluated according to the usefulness of their consequences.
 - Believes that it is useful to society to achieve “the greatest good for the greatest number” of people who may be affected by an action.

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Utilitarianism
 - Jeremy Bentham proposed a theory for fair distribution of pleasure among all British citizens.
 - Approach was criticised as he equated all pleasures as being equal.
 - John Stuart Mill pointed particular experiences of pleasure and happiness have different qualities and different situations do not necessarily produce equal consequences.
 - For example, Higher intellectual pleasures (like enjoying work of art or a scholarly book) may be differentiated from lower physical pleasures.
 - Mill's philosophy focused on ethics that is politics and social utility. Each person's happiness is equally important.
 - Example, Mandatory Vaccination Laws

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Two types of Utilitarianism
 - Rule Utilitarians
 - Believes that there are certain rules - do not kill, do not break promises, do not lie when followed create best consequences.
 - Deontology makes decisions based on right duty whereas utilitarians on right consequences.
 - Act utilitarians

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Act utilitarians
 - Believes that each action chosen should be based on its likely good consequences rather than moral, universal rule.
 - For example, promise-breaking is permitted if consequence of action cause more happiness than suffering.

Ethical Theories and Approaches (Contd.)

- Prima Facie Rights
 - Something is accepted to be correct until or unless it is shown otherwise.
 - For example, nurse promised to return on time but the replacement caused delay.
 - Ross suggested that when prima facie good actions conflict, one has to decide where one's actual duty lies.
- Principlism
 - Rule-based criteria for conduct that naturally flow from identification of obligations and duties.
 - For example, principle-based documents like American Hospital Association's "The Patient Care Partnership".

- Characteristics of Profession, codes of ethics and professional conduct, The Ethical Decision-Making Process, Steps in the Ethical Decision-Making Process, Culture Clash on the Net Case and its solution, Individual and Social Policy ethics.

Example

- Suppose user owns company having good working experience (1-3 yrs) and one of the current projects involved designing an employee database for a large company. The database contains sensitive information like medical records, salary and many more. User must decide on the security required?
 - Presents all possible options (Security and cost) to client.
 - Emphasises the need for security.
 - The client chooses the cheapest and least secure option.
 - Should the user refuse to build the system?

WHY PROFESSIONAL ETHICS?

- What it means to act as a professional? What responsibilities do:
 - employees have to employers and vice versa
 - professionals have to the client and vice versa
- Professional role is special because it carries special rights and responsibilities.
- Some occupational roles are said to be strongly differentiated where by professionals are granted powers exceptional to ordinary morality (eg. Consider medical doctors).
- Most occupational roles are NOT strongly differentiated.

Characteristics of Profession

- Master of an esoteric body of knowledge
 - This is usually acquired by a higher degree.
 - Often the discipline embraces a division between researchers and practitioners.
- Autonomy
 - Members are autonomous in their work.
 - They make decisions and NOT take orders from others.
 - They regulate themselves and set their own admission standards.
 - They also have standards of practice.

Characteristics of Profession

- Formal Organisation:
 - There is often ONE unifying organisation which is recognised by the State.
 - This organisation:
 - Controls admissions
 - Accredits educational institution
 - Sets up and administrates disciplinary procedures
 - Has the power to expel members

Characteristics of Profession

- Code of Ethics:
 - This sets standards of the organisation and is used to maintain its autonomy.
 - Members must adhere to this irrespective of their employment contexts.
- Social Function:
 - A professional must be seen to fulfil some useful and important social functions.

Codes of ethics and Professional Conduct

- A code of ethics, can be described as a set of values that guides the behaviour and decision-making process of an organisation and its people.
- Companies may create a code of ethics in the form of a document that outlines their core values
- The ethical code document usually sets out the broad standards to follow while conducting business or interacting with customers in a business environment.
- The idea is to run a business equitably under socially acceptable norms.

Codes of ethics and Professional Conduct

- Different types of codes of ethics are as follows:
 - Regulatory code of ethics
 - A regulatory code of ethics is one that companies are legally obliged to follow.
 - For example, companies in the finance and public health domains may require to follow the ethical rules established by their respective regulatory bodies.
 - Some laws like the Indian Contract Act and the Sale of Goods Act apply to most businesses, however, some industries may be subject to specific ethical regulations like workers' safety, welfare and the environment.
 - The regulatory codes of ethics are more precise in nature, with clear-cut consequences for violations.
 - Companies
 - Appoint a compliance officer to ensure the implementation of these ethical codes.
 - Impart formal training to employees to help them better understand and comply with these guidelines.

Codes of ethics and Professional Conduct

- Voluntary code of ethics
 - A voluntary code of ethics is one that a business adopts willingly but not legally obliged to do so.
 - For example, a business that does not necessarily focus on climate change incorporating commitment to sustainability in its official code of ethics.
- A voluntary code of ethics comprises
 - the core values of the company.
 - the standards of conduct its employees are expected to follow. Such standards usually relate to the larger good of the community or the environment.
- Compared to regulatory codes of ethics, voluntary codes require a greater amount of self-regulation.
- Sometimes, a voluntary code of ethics require a third party to comply with certain values.
- For example, a dairy products company may refuse to work with vendors that send calves to slaughterhouses or raise cattle in unhealthy environments.

Codes of ethics and Professional Conduct

- Professional code of ethics
 - Several professions have ethical codes outlined by their governing bodies.
 - For example, legal, medical and chartered accountancy professionals are required to follow the professional code of ethics set by their respective governing bodies, such as the Bar Council of India, the Medical Council of India and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India.
 - These professional codes are based on ethical principles like integrity, transparency and fiduciary duty towards the clients and prevention of conflict of interest.
 - Non-compliance with these codes may attract disciplinary actions from the governing body.

Principles of Ethics

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Trustworthiness
- Loyalty
- Fairness
- Empathy
- Respect
- Compliance
- Pursuit of Excellence
- Leadership
- Reputation
- Responsibility

The Ethical decision making process

- Making good ethical decisions requires a trained sensitivity to ethical issues and a practiced method for exploring the ethical aspects of a decision and weighing the considerations that should impact our choice of a course of action.
- Series of basic questions that should be asked when confronted with ethical dilemmas.
- These are often complex situations with no clear-cut resolution, and without a right or wrong answer.
- The decision-making processes will go a long way towards helping all of us make informed decisions that can justify consequent actions.

Steps in The Ethical decision making process

- State the problem.
 - For example, "there's something about this decision that makes me uncomfortable" or "do I have a conflict of interest?".
- Check the facts.
 - Many problems disappear upon closer examination of the situation, while others change radically.
 - For example, persons involved, laws, professional codes, other practical constraints
- Identify relevant factors (internal and external).
- Develop a list of options.
 - Be imaginative, try to avoid "dilemma"; not "yes" or "no" but whom to go to, what to say.

Steps in The Ethical decision making process

- Test the options. Use some of the following tests:
 - harm test: Does this option do less harm than the alternatives?
 - publicity test: Would I want my choice of this option published in the newspaper?
 - defensibility test: Could I defend my choice of this option before a congressional committee or committee of peers?
 - reversibility test: Would I still think this option was a good choice if I were adversely affected by it?
 - colleague test: What do my colleagues say when I describe my problem and suggest this option as my solution?
 - professional test: What might my profession's governing body for ethics say about this option?
 - organization test: What does my company's ethics officer or legal counsel say about this?

Steps in The Ethical decision making process

- Make a choice based on steps 1-5.
- Review steps 1-6.
 - How can you reduce the likelihood that you will need to make a similar decision again?
 - Are there any cautions you can take as an individual (and announce your policy on question, job change, etc.)?
 - Is there any way to have more support next time?
 - Is there any way to change the organization (for example, suggest policy change at next departmental meeting)?

Culture Clash on the Net Case and its solution

- **Scenario:**

- We have a user here who is from some tribe in a small African country. The user has an antagonist out on the network from another tribe in that country. There was a war going on at the time, and the antagonists are from tribes on opposite sides of the war (and they weren't known for getting along before that.)
- They were both using a network newsgroup (soc.culture.[that-country-name]) as a forum for their views.
- However, both of them are choosing the most offensive, crude, threatening language possible for this "dialog."
- Every time our user posts one of these we get 20 or so complaints about our user's language and tone and, often, appropriateness. I assume that the other side gets the same when their user posts. Since this happens every day, we get 20 or so complaints every day, which ties up someone's morning every day.
- The messages unquestionably violate the published rules for the accounts, and the user even admits this.

Culture Clash on the Net Case and its solution

- User's point of view in all of this is actually quite defensible:
 - User is only replying to things directed at the oneself, and replying in exactly the same language and tone as that which was used against the user.
 - User's family honour, personal honour, and tribal honour have been dragged thorough the mud, and user feels that the it has a right to defend oneself and it's family and tribe.
 - Since they are both doing this, user feels that it is unfair to have its account terminated and not that of the other person.
 - We are effectively allowing someone else to insult the user and lie about the user publicly, worldwide (and therefore in its homeland), while denying the user any chance to respond.

Culture Clash on the Net Case and its solution

- A possible view is close to:
 - The user is causing us extra work, and is violating the rules to do so.
 - The user can defend oneself. The user just can't do it in an obscene objectionable way. [Even if that might be culturally accepted in user's country as the appropriate response to an attack that is obscene and objectionable.]
 - We can't terminate the other person since we have no control over any other site. And that person may not, in fact, be violating the rules of the site the other person is on.
 - We can't afford to keep dealing with the complaints, as long as they are valid, we have a responsibility to fix that part of the problem we have access to. If the user continues to use objectionable language, we can't let the user continue.

Individual and Social Policy ethics

- For egalitarian thinking, personal responsibility: A cornerstone of justice.
- Invoking Responsibility can signal two normative ideas:
 - Individual effort is to be taken into account in the distribution of social advantage.
 - Personal Accountability as a personal choice.
 - But, How can egalitarian theories that attach importance to personal responsibility justify incentives - which may generate inequality in labour market?

Individual and Social Polity

- All citizens have a duty to contribute to the realisation of the aims of justice, beyond their duty to comply with the formal rules governing society.
 - Social commitment as a personal choice.
 - Can egalitarian liberals consistently claim that the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, and not people's economic conduct?

Individual and Social Polity

- Incorporating an ethos of conduct can be the distinction between just policies and standards of justice.
 - Ethos: A term used to define the core values or beliefs that support a society, a country, or an ideology.
- Just policies select the best formal rules for a society with a given ethos of conduct that does not necessarily satisfies justice.
- Standards of justice are a criteria a society satisfies when both its formal rules and its ethos of conduct serve justice.

Thank You