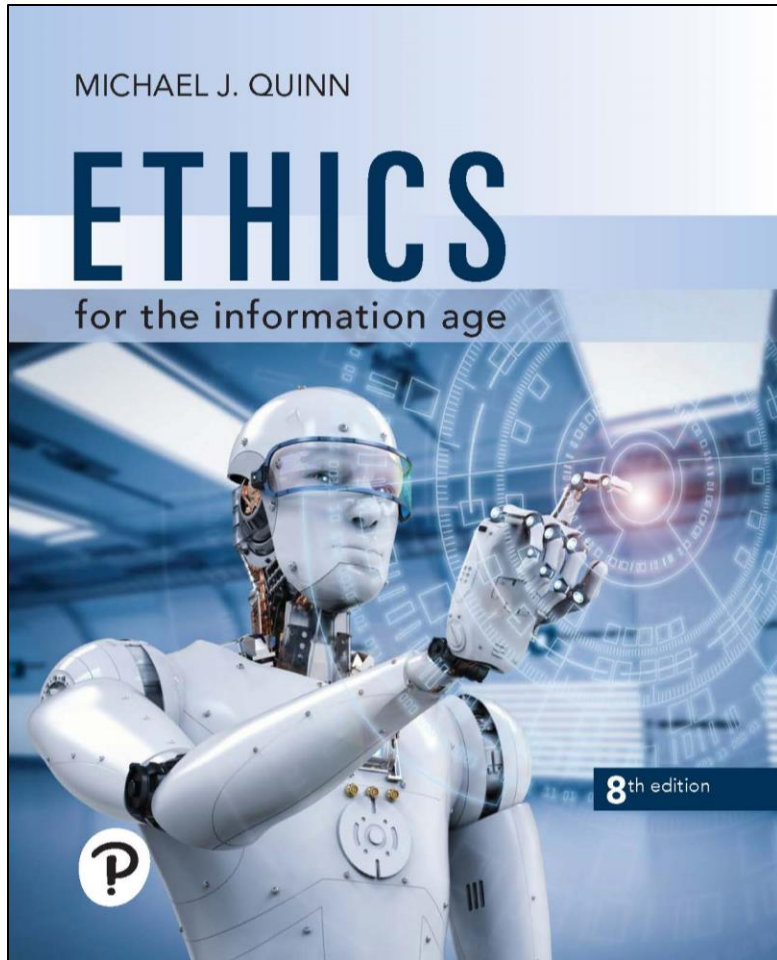


Ethics for the Information Age

Eighth Edition

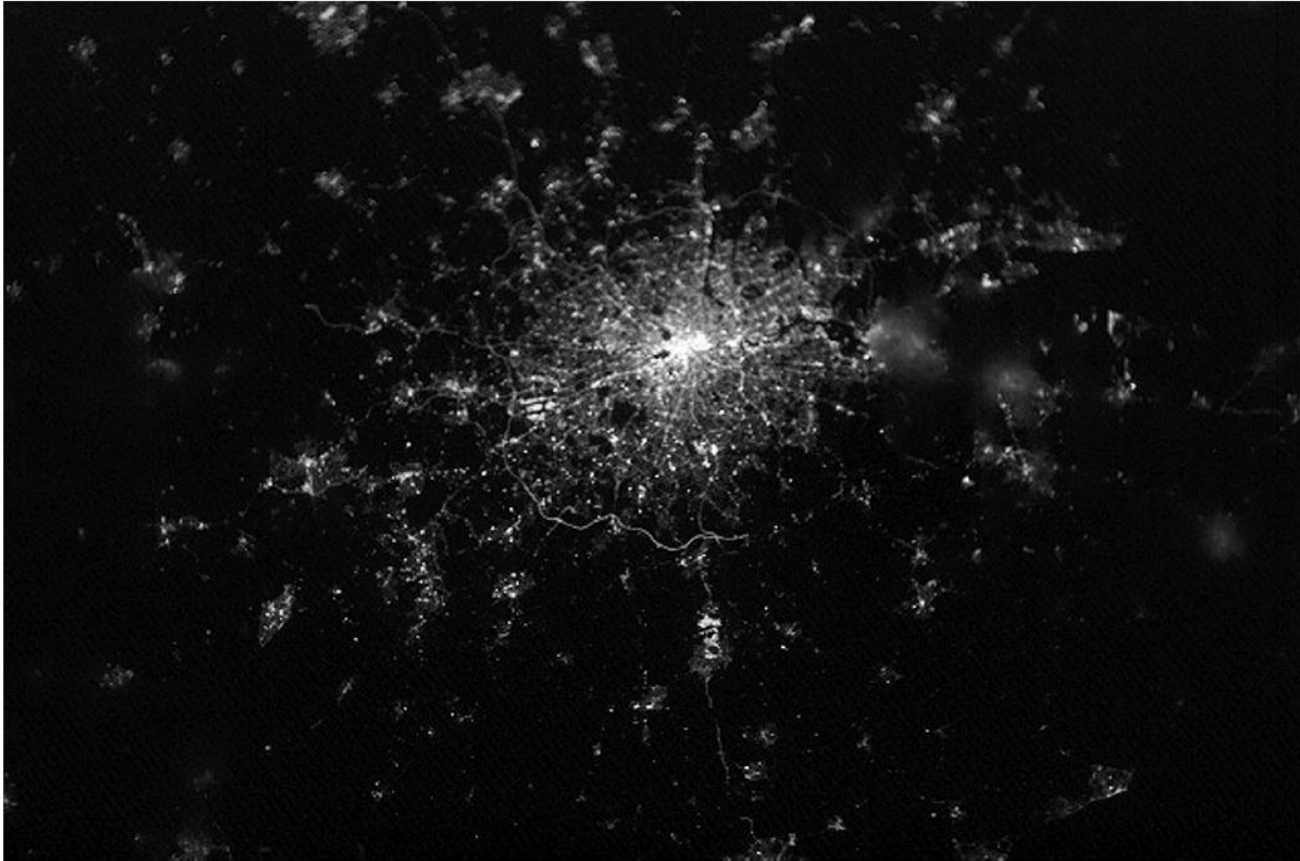


Chapter 2

Introduction to Ethics

2.1 Introduction

We Live in Communities



Looking down on London, England, at night from space. (Courtesy of NASA)

Living in Communities

- Benefits
 - More secure against external dangers
 - Facilitate exchange of goods and services
 - Higher standard of living from economic specialization
 - Opportunities for fulfilling personal relationships
- Costs
 - Certain actions are prohibited
 - Other actions are obligatory
 - Nonconformance can lead to punishment
- Communities exist because benefits outweigh costs

The Ethical Point of View

- Most everyone shares “core values”, desiring:
 - Life
 - Happiness
 - Ability to accomplish goals
- Two ways to view world
 - Selfish point of view: consider only your own self and your core values
 - Ethical point of view: respect other people and their core values

Defining Terms

- A **society** is an association of people organized under a system of rules designed to advance the good of its members over time.
- **Morality**
 - Every society has rules of conduct describing what people ought and ought not to do in various situations. We call these rules **morality**
 - What people ought / ought not to do in various situations
- **Morality may vary by:**
 - Age
 - Cultural group
 - Ethnic (عرقي) background
 - Religion
 - Life experiences
 - Education
 - Gender

Defining Terms

- **Ethics** is the philosophical study of morality, a rational examination into people's moral beliefs and behavior.
- **Ethics**
 - Set of beliefs about right and wrong behavior
- **Virtues (فضائل)**
 - Habits that incline people to do what is acceptable
- **Vices (الرذائل)**
 - Habits of unacceptable behavior
- **Virtues and vices define a personal value system**
 - Scheme of moral values

The Difference Between Morals, Ethics, and Laws

- **Morals**: one's personal beliefs about right and wrong
- **Ethics**: standards or codes of behavior expected of an individual by a group
- **Law**: system of rules that tells us what we can and cannot do
 - Laws are enforced by a set of institutions
 - Legal acts conform to the law
 - Moral acts conform to what an individual believes is the right belief of right and wrong

Why Study Ethics? (1 of 6)

“I changed as a person during this course because I can look at situations from different viewpoints now, viewpoints that I didn’t really have before taking this course.”

— Quote from a student evaluation

Why Study Ethics? (2 of 6)

“I like to think that I do a good job of listening to someone else’s perspective but learning the ethical theories has allowed me to better understand the other person’s side and not just hear it.”

— Quote from a student evaluation

Why Study Ethics? (3 of 6)

“I’ve changed as a person from this course by learning to look at issues more holistically. Ethical issues aren’t often obvious and take some deep diving to come to appropriate decisions.”

— Quote from a student evaluation

Why Study Ethics? (4 of 6)

“It is apparent that most of what I have learned was information that I did not know that I did not know. In other words, it had never even occurred to me to ask the questions that were discussed in the course.”

— Quote from a student evaluation

Why Study Ethics? (5 of 6)

“Despite having five years of college education, this is the first course that has made me stop and think, ‘Should I do this, even if I have the ability to?’”

— Quote from a graduate student evaluation

Why Study Ethics? (6 of 6)

“Because of this course I have changed the way I approach my work. I co-own a data science startup called **<name omitted>** where we are developing analytics services that could potentially be misappropriated. Before this course my focus was simply on expanding the service to include as many features as possible. Now, I have instead a process with which to weigh the ethical ramifications of what we do.”

— Quote from a graduate student evaluation

Introduction to Ethical Thinking

- For each scenario
 - Everyone reads the scenario
 - Everyone reads the questions following the scenario
 - Each person reflects on their own responses to the questions
 - Students share their responses

Scenario 1 (1 of 2)

Alexis, a gifted high school student, wants to become a doctor. Because she comes from a poor family, she will need a scholarship in order to attend college. Some of her classes require students to do extra research projects in order to get an A. Her high school has a few older PCs, but there are always long lines of students waiting to use them during the school day. After school, she usually works at a part-time job to help support her family.

One evening Alexis visits the library of a private college a few miles from her family's apartment, and she finds plenty of unused PCs connected to the Internet. She surreptitiously looks over the shoulder of another student to learn a valid login/password combination. Alexis returns to the library several times a week, and by using its PCs and printers she efficiently completes the extra research projects, graduates from high school with straight As, and gets a full-ride scholarship to attend a prestigious university.

Scenario 1 (2 of 2)

- Was Alexis deceitful?
- Did Alexis treat anyone unfairly?
- Did Alexis violate anyone's rights?
- Who benefited from Alexis's course of action and how great were the benefits?
- Who was harmed by Alexis's course of action of how great were the harms?
- Would you call Alexis a good role model for other students?
- Are there better ways Alexis could have accomplished her objective?
- Did Alexis do the right thing?

Scenario 2 (1 of 2)

An organization dedicated to reducing spam tries to get Internet service providers (ISPs) in an East Asian country to stop the spammers by protecting their email servers. When this effort is unsuccessful, the antispam organization puts the addresses of these ISPs on its blacklist. Many ISPs in the United States consult the blacklist and refuse to accept email from the blacklisted ISPs. This action has two results. First, the amount of spam received by the typical email user in the United States drops by 25 percent. Second, tens of thousands of innocent computer users in the East Asian country are unable to send email to friends and business associates in the United States.

Scenario 2 (2 of 2)

- Did the antispam organization do anything deceitful?
- Was the organization unfair to anyone?
- Did the organization violate anyone's rights?
- Who benefited from the organization's action and how great were the benefits?
- Who was harmed by the organization's action and how great were the harms?
- Could the organization have achieved its goals through a better course of action?
- Did the organization do the right thing by creating the blacklist?

Scenario 3 (1 of 2)

To address the problem of accidents caused by speeding, the East Dakota State Legislature passes a law authorizing the East Dakota State Police (EDSP) to install video cameras on all of its freeway overpasses. The cameras are connected to computers that can reliably detect cars traveling more than five miles per hour above the speed limit. Sophisticated image recognition software enables the system to read license plate numbers and capture high-resolution pictures of vehicle drivers. If the picture of the driver matches the driver's license photo of one of the registered owners of the car, the system issues a speeding ticket to the driver, complete with photo evidence. The new system receives extensive media coverage, and six months after the system is put into operation, the number of people speeding on East Dakota freeways is reduced by 90 percent.

The FBI asks the EDSP for real-time access to the information collected by the video cameras. The EDSP complies with this request. Three months later, the FBI uses this information to arrest five members of a terrorist organization.

Scenario 3 (2 of 2)

- Did the East Dakota State Police do anything deceitful?
- Was the EDSP unfair to anyone?
- Did the EDSP violate anyone's rights?
- Who benefited from the actions of the EDSP and how great were the benefits?
- Who was harmed by the actions of the EDSP and how great were the harms?
- What other courses of action could the EDSP have taken to achieve its objectives?
- Did the EDSP do the right thing by complying with the request of the FBI?

Scenario 4 (1 of 3)

You are the senior software engineer at a start-up company developing an exciting new mobile app that will allow salespeople to generate and email sales quotes and customer invoices from their smartphones. You were given stock options when you joined the company, and if it has a successful initial public offering of stock, you will be able to sell these options for at least \$10 million.

Your company's sales force has led a major corporation to believe your product will be available next week.

Scenario 4 (2 of 3)

Unfortunately, at this point the software still contains quite a few bugs. The leader of the testing group has reported that all of the known bugs appear to be minor, but it will take another month of testing for his team to be confident the product contains no catastrophic errors.

Because of the fierce competition in the mobile app industry, it is critical that your company be “first to market.” To the best of your knowledge, a well-established company will release a similar product in a few weeks. If its product appears first, your start-up company will probably go out of business.

Scenario 4 (3 of 3)

Consider at least three possible actions, and for each of them, answer the following questions:

- What are the most likely benefits and harms that will result from this action?
- Do you have any obligations to people who may be negatively affected by your action?
- Does this action require you to be dishonest, deceitful, or unfair to others?

A Good Ethical Theory Enables You to Make Persuasive, Logical Arguments



Insights Offered by Various Theories (2 of 2)

- Social contract theory: We should collectively promote human rights, such as the rights to life, liberty, and property.
- Virtue ethics: You can count on a good person to do the right thing at the right time in the right way.

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