IT Ethics
Ethical Theories

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License

Topics

Topics

Descriptive Claims

- descriptive claim: what is
- subject of sociology, psychology, anthropology, political sciences

example

85% of computer users don't obey license agreements

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Normative Claims

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Moral System

- rules of conduct: individual directives, social policies
- evaluation principles: social utility, . . .

- *public*: rules are known to all members
- *informal*: no enforcement
- *rational*: based on principles of reason
- *impartial*: not biased to any member

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Setting Rules

- considering core values
- *intrinsic*: happiness, autonomy, privacy, . . .
- *instrumental*: money, . . .

- grounding the principles:
- religion
- law
- philosophy

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Topics

- dialectic

- make a claim, state a principle
- test the principle in various cases
- adjust your claim and/or the principle

Dialectic Example

- "euthanasia is wrong
  because human life should not be ended intentionally"

- conscious and in too much pain

- unconscious and has brain damage

- young - old

- "quality of life"

- consistency when applying to other problems:
  war, capital punishment, abortion, . . .

- "self defense, saving others, . . ."

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Discussion Stoppers

- philosophers disagree on fundamental issues
- how can others agree?

- experts in other fields also disagree
- light: waves or particles?

- there is agreement on many issues

- disagreement on principles - disagreement on facts

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Relativism

- cultural relativism
- "different cultures have different beliefs
  about morally right and wrong behaviour"

- descriptive claim, stated normatively:
- "what is morally right or wrong for members of a culture
  can be determined only by that culture"
- moral relativism

- there are some universal moral laws

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Topics

- why do we need ethical theories?

- help us decide what to do when faced with options
- help us analyze moral issues

Golden Rule

- "do unto others as you would have them do unto you"

counterexample

- I'm a software developer.
- I don't mind others copying and distributing my works without my permission.
- So I can copy and distribute other people's works without their permission.

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Utilitarianism

utilitarianism

an act is morally permissible
if its consequences produce
the greatest amount of good
for the greatest number of persons
affected by it

- consequence based

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

Utilitarianism Problem Example

- I enter a clothing store and see a shirt that I like.
- Should I steal it?
- Calculate and decide.

- I go out, enter another store and see a tie that I like.
- Should I steal it?
- ...

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rule utilitarianism

act so that more people
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if everyone acted that way

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Utilitarianism Problem Examples

act utilitarianism

- "let's kill one person and save ten using his organs"
- "let's make 1% of the society work as slaves for the other 99%"

rule utilitarianism

- "making 1% of the society work as slaves would cause unrest"

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Critique of Utilitarianism

- morality is tied to happiness or pleasure

- consequence of action not known beforehand: *moral luck*

- not helpful for decisions
- how to do the utilitarian calculus?

- fair distribution of good outcomes?

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Deontology

- intutiton is sufficient to seek happiness
- capacity of reasoning is what separates humans from animals
- this capacity creates a moral duty
- duty based

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Categorical Imperative

categorical imperative

- never treat others merely as a means to an end
- act always on that rule that can be universally binding, without exception, for all human beings

- what if duties conflict?

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Categorical Imperative Example

- slavery is wrong because

- a group of people would be treated as a means to an end
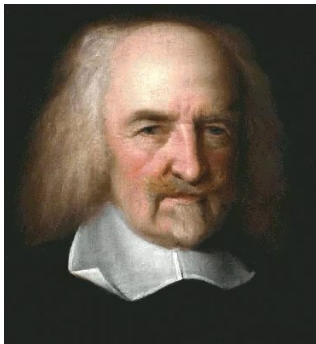- people wouldn't want this to be an impartial, universal rule

Topics

Social Contract Theory

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

- premoral state: everyone acts to satisfy their own needs
- there is a sense of freedom but also a constant threat
- we surrender some of our freedom to a sovereign
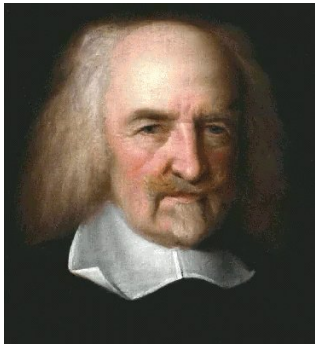
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Critique of Social Contract Theory

- if there is no contract, there is no moral issue
- nobody has to help anybody
- what is illegal is not necessarily morally wrong

example: race discrimination laws

- USA, South Africa (apartheid)
- is it wrong to disobey these laws?

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Rights

- **negative** rights:
  not to be interfered with

examples

- voting
- higher education

- **positive** rights:
  supported by society

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- basic education
- health care?

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Virtue Ethics

Platon (4th century B.C.)

- acquire good character traits
- not "what should I do in this case" but "what kind of a person should I be"

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References

Required Reading: Tavani

- Chapter 2: Ethical Concepts and Ethical Theories