**Ethics & Tech – An Introduction**

What is Tech Ethics?

* Ethics is the study of moral behaviors and the impact they have on others
* Tech involves things like AI and Machine Learning, but also includes data, the internet and any device that connects to it
* So, this class will be looking at how our interactions with tech affect the world around us

Tech Ethics

* Tech ethics isn’t a whole field on its own… its part of the larger picture of Applied Ethics
* And there really isn’t any ethics now that didn’t always exist, in some shape or form
* In order to really understand what’s going on with modern ethical issues, we try to reduce it to the simplest form
* Ethics works in kind of the same way. Except we’re trying to reduce the ethical situation we’re experiencing down to its simplest human trait
* So, trolling-> cyberbullying-> harassment-> being a jerk
* Or, gene editing-> ultimate control-> power over nature
* Or, government censorship-> oppression-> power over others

So Then, Does Tech Create New Ethics?

* Nope. All ethical issues have always existed, when you really think about it – they’re not tied to any culture or time – they define our human existence
  + Bullying, threats, fairness, cheating, manipulation, popularity, stealing, power & control, lying
* But something new is introduced… unique situations where old ethical issues can happen
  + Trolling, swatting, tech monopolies, pirating, phishing, influencer culture, hacking, cryptocurrencies, disinformation

Unique Situations in Ethics

* Tech and ethics go hand in hand – they cannot be separated… just like human nature and ethics go hand in hand
* Tech creates “new possibilities” for ethical situations to emerge
  + Computers are “logically malleable” – we can “mold” them to do what we want

“Policy Vacuums”

* We know that tech is heavily enforced by laws
* But some of the “new possibilities” have no laws or policies in place to guide our choices or protect against harm
* We call this a “policy vacuum”

Filling the Policy Vacuum

* In the case of protecting digital software:
  + First, you have to define what “software” is in our case
    - The definition is still disputed
  + Next, you have to define all terms under “protection”
    - Are there any exceptions under how you will protect it?
    - We could already be years in, at this point –
  + Then, you must get a law passed through Congress
    - Yeah… that’ll be easy…
  + And, you must somehow enforce that law in the wild

Applied Ethics

* We’ll be examining tech through the lens of Applied Ethics
  + Applied Ethics aims to define practical ethical issues that nay happen, or that have already happened
* It looks at moral issues from more than one perspective
* Focused in applying moral and ethical guidelines to situations

3 Perspectives of Applied Ethics

* Professional Ethics
* Philosophical Ethics
* Sociological Ethics

An Important Distinction

* Normative Approach
  + Prescribe what ought to be the case
* Descriptive Approach
  + Report or describe what is the case

Professional Ethics

* Professional Ethics aims to identify and analyze ethical responsibility for professionals in the field of study
* Professional ethicists commonly draw on ethical situations that have arisen in other fields to help guide them to ethical conclusions
* They usually examine ethical issues that can create “Policy Vacuums”

Philosophical Ethics

* Philosophical Ethics uses a 3-part system called the standard methodology to offer solutions to more difficult ethical issues
* 1. Identify a particular controversial practice as a moral problem
* 2. Define concepts and examine the factual data associated with that concept
* Apply moral theories and principles to reach a conclusion about the moral issue (take a side)

Sociological Ethics

* Sociological Ethics aims to describe and report how societies, groups and individuals view a particular moral issue
* If we understand how people view moral issues (descriptive), we can gain insight into the ethical worth of those issues (normative)