ILLINOIS TECH | College of Computing

ITMM 485 / 585
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Legal and Ethical Issues in Information Technology

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Ch2: Ethical Concepts and Theories
P2: Three Schemes for Grounding the Evaluative Rules in a Moral System

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Upon completion of this Section the students should be able to:

➢ Define moral values
➢ Describe the Three Schemes for Grounding the Evaluative Rules in a Moral System
➢ Differentiate between Ethicists and Moralists

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The Role of Values in a Moral System

➢ The term *value* comes from the Latin *valere*, which translates roughly into having worth or being of worth (Pojman, 2006).
➢ Values can be viewed as objects of our desires or interests.
➢ Examples of values include very general notions such happiness, love, freedom, etc.
➢ Moral principles are ultimately derived from a society's system of values.

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Intrinsic vs. Instrumental Values

➢ Philosophers distinguish between two types of values: *intrinsic* and *instrumental* values.
➢ Any value that serves some further end or good is called an instrumental value because it is tied to some external standard.
➢ For example, automobiles, computers, and money are goods that have instrumental value.
➢ Values such as life and happiness are intrinsic because they are valued for their own sake.

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Core Values

➢ Another approach to cataloguing values is to distinguish *core values*, some of which may or may not also be intrinsic values, from other kinds of values.
➢ Moor (2004) argues that values such as life, happiness, and autonomy are core values because they are basic to a society's thriving and perhaps even to a society's survival.
➢ Not all core values are also *moral* values.

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Moral vs. Non-Moral Values

➢ Morals and values are are not necessarily identical.
➢ Values can be either moral or non-moral.
➢ Reason informs us that it is in our interest to develop values that promote our own survival, happiness, and flourishing as individuals.
➢ When used to further only our own self-interests, these values are not necessarily moral values.

Moral Values

➢ Once we bring in the notion of *impartiality*, we begin to take the "moral point of view."
➢ When we frame the rules of conduct in a moral system, we articulate a system of values having to do with notions such as autonomy, fairness, justice, etc., which are moral values.
➢ Our basic moral values are derived from core non-moral values.

Three Schemes for Grounding the Evaluative Rules in a Moral System

The principles are grounded in one of three different kinds of schemes:

➢ religion;
➢ law;
➢ philosophical ethics.

We will see how a particular moral principle or rule – e.g., "Do not steal" – can be justified from the vantage point of each scheme.

Approach #1: Grounding Moral Principles in a Religious System

➢ Consider the following rationale for why stealing is morally wrong:

Stealing is wrong because it offends God or because it violates one of God's (Ten) Commandments.

➢ From the point of view of institutionalized religion, stealing is wrong because of it offends God or because it violates the commands of a supreme authority.

Approach #2: Grounding Moral Principles in a Legal System

An alternative rationale would be:

Stealing is wrong because it violates the law.

➢ Here the grounds for determining why stealing is wrong are not tied to religion.
➢ If stealing violates a law in a particular nation or jurisdiction, then the act of stealing can be declared to be wrong independent of any religious beliefs that one may or may not happen to have.

Approach #3: Grounding Moral Principles in a Philosophical System of Ethics

▪ A third way of approaching the question is:

Stealing is wrong because it is wrong (independent of any form of external authority or any external sanctions).

▪ On this view, the moral "rightness" or "wrongness" of stealing is not grounded in some external authoritative source.
▪ It does not appeal to an external authority, either theological or legal, for justification.

Approach # 3 Continued

- Many philosophers and ethicists have argued that, independent of either supernatural or legal authorities, reason alone is sufficient to show that stealing is wrong.
- They argue that reason can inform us that there is something either in the act of stealing itself, or in the consequences that result from this kind of act, that makes stealing morally wrong.

Approach # 3 Continued

- In the case of both law and religion, specific sanctions against stealing exist in the form of punishment.
- In the case of (philosophical) ethics, the only sanction would be in the form of social disapproval, and possibly social ostracism.
- For example, there is no punishment in a formal sense.
- External conditions or factors, in the form of sanctions, are irrelevant.

The Method of Philosophical Ethics

- The method philosophers use to analyze moral issues is normative, in contrast to the descriptive method that is used by social scientists.
- Sociological and anthropological studies are descriptive because they describe or report how people in various cultures and groups behave with respect to the rules of a moral system.
- For example, a sociologist might report that people who live in nations along the Pacific Rim believe that it is morally permissible to make copies of proprietary software for personal use.

Philosophical Studies vs. Scientific Studies

- Philosophical studies and scientific studies are similar in that both require that a consistent methodological scheme be used to verify hypotheses and theories.
- These verification schemes must satisfy criteria of *rationality* and *objectivity* (or *impartiality*).
- Philosophical studies also differ from scientific studies because scientists typically conduct experiments in a laboratory to confirm or refute a hypothesis.
- Philosophers have no physical laboratory to test ethical theories and claims; they evaluate a claim or thesis by testing it against the rules of logical argumentation (see Chapter 3).

Ethicists vs. *Moralists*

- Ethicists study morality from the perspective of philosophical methodology and they appeal to logical arguments to justify their positions.
- Moralists often claim to have all of the answers regarding morality, and often they exhibit characteristics that have been described as "preachy" and "judgmental."
- Some moralists may have a particular moral agenda to advance.

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