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
PI: Intro to Morality and Moral Systems

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

- Define morality
- Recall the basic components of a moral system Describe the basic components of a moral system
- Recall the four features of Bernard Gert's moral system
- Describe and discuss the role of values in a moral system

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Ethics and Morality

- The term *Ethics* is derived from *Ethos* (Greek), and *Morality* from *Mores* (Latin).
- Both terms translate roughly into notions affecting "custom," "habit," and "behavior."
- Ethics is defined as *the study of morality, which* raises two questions:

1) What is *morality*?
2) What is *the study of morality*?

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Moral Dilemmas and Moral Issues

- Not every dilemma is moral in nature.
- We sometimes tend to confuse the phrases *moral issue* and *moral dilemma*.
- Not every moral issue (or moral problem) that arises is (also) necessarily a moral dilemma.
- A dilemma is a situation where one must choose between two undesirable options, which often leads to one's having to choose between "the lesser of two evils."

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What is Morality?

- Morality can be defined as *a system of rules for guiding human conduct, and principles for evaluating those rules*.
- Moral rules can be understood as "rules of conduct," which are very similar to "policies."

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Rules of Conduct as "Policies"

- James Moor (2004) notes that *policies* can range from formal laws to informal, implicit guidelines for actions.
- Moor suggests that every act can be viewed as an instance of a policy.
- There are two kinds of rules of conduct:

1) *Directives* for guiding our conduct as individuals (at the micro-level)
2) *Social Policies* framed at the macro-level.

Directives vs. Social Policies

- *Directives* are rules (of conduct) that guide our actions, and thus *direct* us to behave in certain ways (micro-ethical)
  - "Do not steal"
  - "Do not harm others"
- Social Policies are rules of conduct to guide our actions at the "macro-ethical" level by helping us frame *social policies*.
  - "Proprietary software should not be copied"
  - "Software that can be used to invade the privacy of users should not be developed"
- Notice *correlation between directives & social policies*, e.g. rules involving stealing

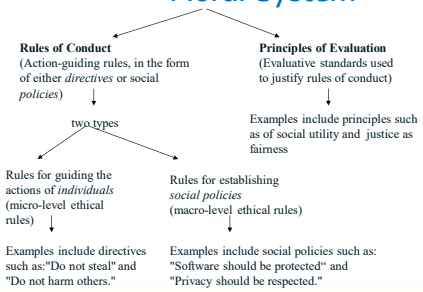
Principles

- The rules of conduct in a moral system are evaluated by way of standards called *principles*.
- For example, the principle of "social utility" (i.e., promoting the greatest good for the greatest number) can be used to evaluate a social policy such as
  - "Proprietary software should not be copied without permission."
  - "laptops should be given free of charge to every student in school."

Principles (Continued)

- In the previous example, the principle of *social-utility* functioned as a kind of "litmus test" for determining whether the policy pertaining to proprietary software could be justified on moral grounds.
- A policy, X, could be justified (on utilitarian grounds) by showing that following Policy X (i.e., not allowing the unauthorized copying of software) would produce more overall social utility (greater good for society).

Figure 2-1: Basic Components of a Moral System



Bernard Gert's Scheme of a *Moral System* *(2005)*

Morality is a *system* that is:

- like a game, but more like an *informal* game (e.g., a game of cards)
- *public* (open and accessible to all)
- *rational* (open to reason)
- *impartial* (as illustrated in Gert's "blindfold of justice").

Table 2-1: Four Features of Gert's Moral System (2005)

Public	Informal	Rational	Impartial
The rules are known to all of the members.	The rules are informal, not like formal laws in a legal system.	The system is based on principles of logical reason accessible to all its members.	The system is not partial to any one group or individual.

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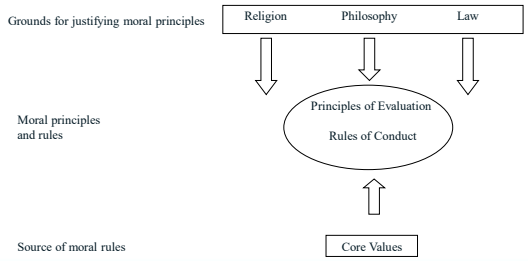
Figure 2-2: Components of a Moral System



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