CSCI 215 Social & Ethical Issues In Computing

Class a lot – Classical Ethics
Notes

• Last Week
• Guest Speakers tomorrow
• Final Wednesday
Ethics

• What does the term “ethics” mean?
  • moral principles that govern a person's or group's behavior

• What does “Moral” mean?
  • concerned with the principles of right and wrong
Ethics

- **Golden Rule**
  - Do onto others as they would do onto you
  - Negative Golden Rule?
    - don’t do unto others as we would have others not do unto us.
  - What are some strengths and weaknesses with this approach?
Ethics

- **Subjective Realism**
  - Do what you think is right

- What are some strengths of this approach? What are some weaknesses?
Ethics

• Divine Command Theory
  • Bible/Torah/Book of Mormon/Quran
  • What are the strengths and weaknesses of Divine Command Theory?
Ethics

• **Cultural Realism**
  - Right and wrong are relative to your culture – follow what your society says is right and wrong. Don’t butt into other cultures.
  - What are some good things and bad things with this approach?
Ethics

• Kantianism
  • Determine right and wrong on rules, not outcomes
  • *What would happen if everybody did it?*
  • Strengths? Weaknesses?
Ethics

• **Utilitarianism or Act Utilitarianism**
  • If good outweighs the bad, it is right.
  • Strengths? Weaknesses?
Ethics

• Social Contract Theory
  • Follow your society’s laws, if you don’t like them just leave.
  • Strengths? Weaknesses?
Case Study 1

One year the top (in terms of GPA) CS senior, Fred, was also working part time at the Office of Systems and Computing Services (the old name for ITC). He went to his supervisor and asked for the root password for the main CS server, caesar, because he wanted to do some systems work on it. His supervisor gave him caesar’s root password without telling Computer Science. The student was taking CS 4xx and used the password to get into the instructor’s account and find a copy of an upcoming test, and also a copy of a solution (which was incorrect) to their current programming assignment which he submitted as his own. The 4xx instructor recognized the badly messed up code that he had written (and had subsequently fixed) and confronted the student, who admitted what he had done and said that the reason that he had done it was that he was scared that he was going to get a B in the course, which would hurt his GPA and his chances for a top job.
Case Study 2

MSU got a cease and desist letter from the lawyers at a major movie company that said that an MSU computer was acting as the source site for a movie sharing group, and that we were distributing one of their recent major copyrighted movies. They also threatened further action against MSU. ITC attempted to find out where this was coming from. Initially they thought that it was some students in a department across campus, and questioned them accusingly without success. They finally found that the person who was doing it was a new faculty member, Fred, whose research and teaching areas were very dependent on computing. What should MSU do?
A former student working at Microsoft contacted a CS faculty, we’ll say me for ease of further conversation, through a friend who was still a student here. Microsoft had a policy that employees could buy software at cost for personal use. The former student (Fred) had a roommate who also worked for Microsoft who was getting the cheap software and trading it with other people for computer components. As a result the roommate had a wonderful computer system worth over $10K that Fred really liked. Fred was concerned that Microsoft would find out about the scam and also blame him for doing nothing about it. He didn’t want to have to look for a new apartment. What should I advise Fred to do?
A former student phoned me (again, it really wasn’t me) as I came into work to ask for advice. She wouldn’t give me her name because she was afraid that our discussion would get back to her company somehow. She was the sys admin at a small company and the company President had come to her and asked whether another employee, Fred (Fred’s had lots of troubles), had some specific files on the company’s computer. Everyone liked Fred (except for his old boss, co-worker, roommate and ITC), including her. She found that the files were on the computer and knew that if she turned them over to the President then Fred would be fired. Also, everyone would know that she was the only person who could have given the files to the President, and everyone would be mad at her. She wouldn’t tell me what was in the files. What should I have advised her to do?
Case Study 5

This is an ongoing problem for faculty members who regularly work with recruiters. Recruiters will often ask me to recommend students to them, typically with a request like “can you send us the names and email addresses of your top graduates or potential interns?” What are the potential issues here, and how should I respond to this type of request? Should the response be different if the company is a major financial supporter of the department? Do I need to ask Fred before I recommend him, love that guy.