Introduction

CS 391: Social and Ethical Issues in Computer Science

With rapid technological change, technology-related fields are filled with important social, legal, and ethical issues.

As you work with technology, you will face many of these issues. You will have to make a decision about how to act.

Our goal in this course: give you some tools to help you analyze situations and make decisions whose implications will affect other people (thousands, millions, or even billions of people!)
Introduction

Topics include:
• Software & hardware risks, accountability for software/hardware-related harm
• Governance & regulation
• Privacy, data collection, surveillance
• Artificial intelligence and algorithmic bias
• Automation, labor, and work & wealth generation
• Social media, online anonymity, conspiracy theories, fake news, free speech, censorship

Introduction

• Sometimes decisions related to these issues are extremely complex, involving many stakeholders and little existing precedent.

• We need to understand ethics to be able to make choices in such situations.
Ethics and Morality

• **Ethics** and **morality** are both concepts related to making decisions and behaving rightly in the world.

• These terms are often used interchangeably, but in this class, we want to distinguish between them.

• In particular, **morality** refers to one’s own personal principles regarding right and wrong behavior.

Ethics and Morality

• By contrast, **ethics** refers to the study of morality.

• Ethical study often results in sets of rules or guidelines for behaving rightly, e.g. a society’s laws, professional codes of conduct, religious principles, formal ethical frameworks (e.g. utilitarianism).
  • Generally, one’s own morals are drawn from many different sources like these.
  • Sometimes, one’s own morals can be in conflict with the ethics prescribed by a given source.
  • E.g., a defense lawyer’s morals may tell them that murder is absolutely wrong, but their professional ethical code may require them to defend to the best of their abilities a murderer who they know is guilty.
Ethics and Morality

In this course, we’ll examine several formal ethical frameworks, including:
1. Utilitarianism
2. Kantianism
3. Virtue Theory
4. The social contract

Discussions in this course

• This course will involve a lot of in-person and online discussion of topics that can be controversial.
• In general, you should adhere to these guidelines (adopted from Pam Van Londen) during class discussions
  http://classes.engr.oregonstate.edu/eecs/fall2019/cs391-001/guidelines.html
Participation

Part of your grade for the course will be based on your participation in our course discussions.

Suggestions:

• Try to participate in the lecture discussion at least once per week.
  • This is not a hard and fast rule, just a guideline to help you understand how much I’d like you to participate.

• Contribute something meaningful and relevant to the discussion.
  • Just commenting “good point” or something like that isn’t super meaningful.

• Engage with your fellow students and the points they’re making.

• Cite sources when you can.

• Feel free to bring the discussion online using our course Canvas forum.