

DIGITAL MEDIA ETHICS

DGM 723

Prepared by:

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Lecture 10



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Chapter 5

Digital Media Ethics: Overview, Frameworks, Resources

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Lecture
9

Remember:

**** Ethics of Artificial Intelligence in Journalism:**

- The rise of AI in journalism and its transformative impact.
- Ethical dilemmas: Bias, misinformation, and transparency.
- AI's influence on media jobs and the future of journalism.
- Best practices for responsible AI use in newsrooms.
- Ethical guidelines for using AI in journalism

Lecture
10

Outlines:

**** A Synopsis of digital media ethics**

- Computing code of ethics
- Global media ethics

**** Basic ethical frameworks**

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| - Deontology | - Virtue Ethics |
| - Moral Absolutism | - Moral Relativism |
| - Moral Pluralism | - Consequentialism |
| - Utilitarianism | |

Lecture
10

A Synopsis of digital media ethics



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10

A Synopsis of digital media ethics

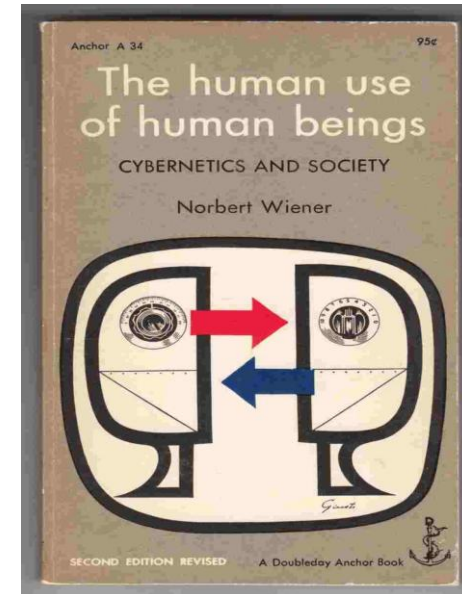
Computing code of ethics

Much of the ethical reflection on digital media – most especially, on the ethical dimensions of information and communication technologies (ICTs) – arose alongside the technologies themselves.

But this means that, until the last two decades or so, most of the discussion and reflection on digital media ethics took place primarily within Western countries, utilizing primarily Western ethical traditions and ways of thinking.

To begin with, there is widespread agreement that Norbert Wiener's The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society (1950) stands AS the first book in computer ethics.

For over two decades, "computer ethics" was the concern of a very small group of professionals – principally computer scientists and a few philosophers.



Lecture
10

A Synopsis of digital media ethics



“Computer ethics” as its own term emerged only in the 1970s, mainly through the work of Walter Maner, but also manifest, for example, in the first professional code of computer ethics of the Association for Computing Machinery in 1973 (and subsequently revised – most recently in ACM [2018]).

Following the emergence of the internet and World Wide Web in the lives and awareness of most people in the developed world in the early 1990s,
a number of savvy observers began to predict (rightly) that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, information and computing ethics (ICE)
would become a global ethics – i.e., a domain of ethical issues, debate, and possible resolution, of concern to more and more people representing an increasingly global diversity of cultural norms and ethical and religious traditions.

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10

A Synopsis of digital media ethics

Along the way, an important meta-ethical debate has emerged – and frequently arises again among those new to these now long histories. Briefly, will ICE, especially as it becomes globalized, require:

- (a) largely a continuation of traditional ethics, but now applied to new problems; or
- (b) a radical transformation of ethical thinking, as constantly evolving ICTs introduce us in turn to radically new ethical difficulties?

As is often the case, the **eventual responses** to **such** either/or possibilities rather constitute a “both/and”: that is, **both (a) and (b) are correct.**

On the one hand, there may well be specific instances that point toward the need for distinctively new approaches.

On the other hand, there are very many examples of how “everything old is new again”

For example, deontology and virtue ethics are central ethical pillars in European Union philosophy and policy developing around the emergence of AI and the Internet of Things.



Global media ethics

What is global media ethics?

Global media ethics aims at developing a comprehensive set of principles and standards for the practice of journalism in an age of global news media.

New forms of communication are reshaping the practice of a once parochial craft serving a local, regional or national public.

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10

A Synopsis of digital media ethics

Today, news media use communication technology to gather text, video and images from around the world with unprecedented speed and varying degrees of editorial control.

The same technology allows news media to disseminate this information to audiences scattered around the globe.



Despite these global trends, **most codes of ethics** contain **standards** for **news organizations** or **associations** in **specific countries**.

International associations of journalists exist, and some have constructed declarations of principle. **But** no global code has been adopted by most major journalism associations and news organizations.



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10

A Synopsis of digital media ethics

The global media debate: The idea of a global media ethics arises out a larger attempt change, improve or reform the global media system to eliminate inequalities in media technology and to reduce the control of global media in the hands of minority of Western countries.

This attempt to re-structure the media system have been controversial, often being accused of being motivated by an agenda to control media or inhibit a free press. The debate continues today.

Beginning in the 1970s, there was an attempt to establish a “New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)” prompted by concerns that Western media and its values were threatening the cultural values in non-Western, developing nations.

The main players in NWICO were non-aligned nations, UNESCO, and the Sean McBride Commission. The recommendations of the McBride report in 1980, One World, Many Voices, outlined a new global media order.

Lecture
10

A Synopsis of digital media ethics



The dream of a set of principles and policies for equitable and responsible dissemination of information worldwide has not died. More recently, the United Nations has held two meetings of a movement called “World Summit on the Information Society.” At a summit in Geneva in December 2003, 175 countries adopted a plan of action and a declaration of principles.

A second summit was held in Tunisia in November 2005
which looked at ways to implement the Geneva principles. At
the heart of the summits' concerns was the growth of new
online media and the “digital divide” between the Global North
and South.

Lecture
9

A Synopsis of digital media ethics



The attempt to reform the global media system is much wider in scope than an attempt to construct a global media ethics.

The former looks at what norms should guide media practitioners when they face difficult decisions on what to report. The latter goes beyond ethical reflections to include the economics, politics, and technology of media.

New stage in journalism ethics: Since the birth of modern journalism in the 17th century, journalism has gradually broaden the scope of the people that it claims to serve — from factions to specific social classes to the public of nations.

The journalistic principle of “serving the public interest” has been understood, tacitly or explicitly, as serving one’s own public, social class or nation.

Lecture
10

A Synopsis of digital media ethics

The **other principles** of **objectivity**, **impartiality** and **editorial independence** were limited by this parochial understanding of who journalism serves. For example, “impartiality” meant being impartial in one’s coverage of rival groups within one’s society, but not necessarily being impartial to groups outside one’s national boundaries.



Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks



Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks

Deontology: is an ethical theory that uses rules to distinguish right from wrong.

Deontology is often associated with philosopher Immanuel Kant.

Kant believed that ethical actions follow universal moral laws, such as “Don’t lie, Don’t steal, Don’t cheat.”

Deontology is simple to apply, It just requires that people follow the rules and do their duty. This approach tends to fit well with our natural intuition about what is or isn’t ethical.

Unlike consequentialism, which judges actions by their results, **deontology** **doesn't require** weighing the costs and benefits of a situation. This avoids subjectivity and uncertainty because you only have to follow set rules.

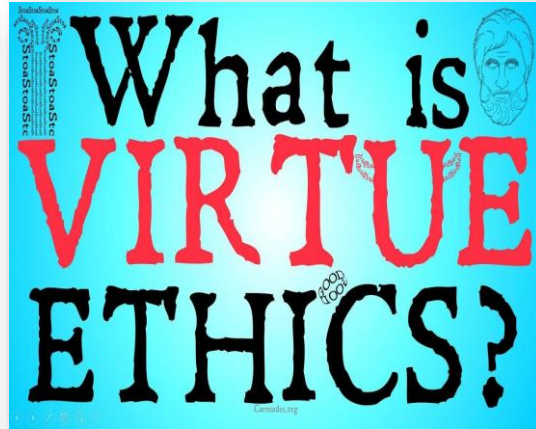
Despite its strengths, rigidly following deontology can produce results that many people find unacceptable.

Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks

For example, suppose you're a software engineer and learn that a nuclear missile is about to launch that might start a war. You can hack the network and cancel the launch, but it's against your professional code of ethics to break into any software system without permission. And, it's a form of lying and cheating. Deontology advises not to violate this rule. However, in letting the missile launch, thousands of people will die.

So, following the rules makes deontology easy to apply. But it also means disregarding the possible consequences of our actions when determining what is right and what is wrong.



Virtue ethics: is a philosophy developed by Aristotle and other ancient Greeks. It is the quest to understand and live a life of moral character.

This character-based approach to morality assumes that we acquire virtue through practice. By practicing being honest, brave, just, generous, and so on, a person develops an honorable and moral character.

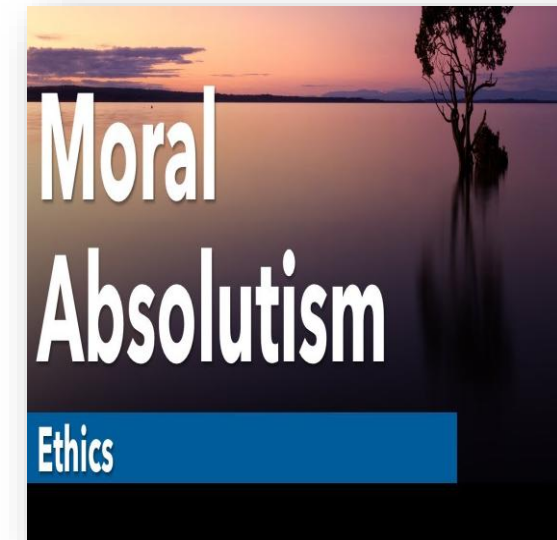
According to Aristotle, by honing virtuous habits, people will likely make the right choice when faced with ethical challenges.

Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks

Moral absolutism: asserts that there are certain universal moral principles by which all peoples' actions may be judged. It is a form of deontology.

The challenge with moral absolutism, however, is that there will **always** be **strong disagreements** about which **moral principles** are **correct** and which are **incorrect**.



For example, most people around the world probably accept the idea that we should treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves. **But beyond that,** people from different countries likely hold varying views about everything from the morality of abortion and capital punishment to nepotism and bribery.

Moral absolutism **contrasts with** moral relativism, which denies that there are absolute moral values. It also **differs from** moral pluralism, which urges tolerance of others' moral principles without concluding that all views are equally valid.

Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks



Moral Relativism: is an important topic in metaethics. It is also widely discussed outside philosophy (for example, by political and religious leaders), and it is controversial among philosophers and nonphilosophers alike. This is perhaps not surprising in view of recent evidence that people's intuitions about moral relativism vary widely.

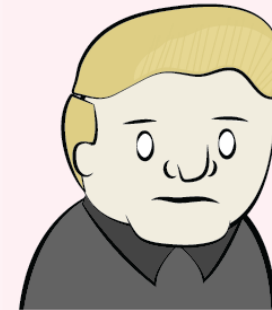
Though many **philosophers** are quite **critical** of **moral relativism**, there are several contemporary philosophers who defend forms of it. These **include** such **prominent figures** as **Gilbert Harman**, **Jesse J. Prinz**, **J. David Velleman** and **David B. Wong**.



Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks

The term 'moral relativism' is understood in a variety of ways. Most often it is associated with an empirical thesis that there are deep and widespread moral disagreements and a metaethical thesis that the truth or justification of moral judgments is not absolute, but relative to the moral standard of some person or group of persons.

**MORAL
RELATIVISM**

Moral Pluralism: is the idea that there can be conflicting moral views that are each worthy of respect.

Moral pluralists **tend** to be open-minded when faced with competing viewpoints. They **analyse** issues from several moral points of view before deciding and taking action.

Moral pluralists believe that many moral issues are extremely complicated. Thus, **no single philosophical approach will always provide all the answers.**

Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks

For example, assume a building is on fire. A woman has the opportunity to rush inside and save the children trapped in the burning building. But in doing this she may die, and leave her own child an orphan.

A moral pluralist would conclude that there is no definitive way to decide which is the better course of moral action. Indeed, moral pluralism declares that it is sometimes difficult to choose between competing values.



So, **moral pluralism** occupies a sensible middle ground between “**there is only one right answer**” as **moral absolutism** says, and “**there is no wrong answer**” as **moral relativism** claims.

Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks

Consequentialism is an ethical theory that judges whether or not something is right by what its consequences are. For instance, most people would agree that lying is wrong. **But** if telling a lie would help save a person's life, consequentialism says it's the right thing to do.

Two **examples** of consequentialism are **utilitarianism** and **hedonism**. Utilitarianism judges consequences by a "greatest good for the greatest number" standard. **Hedonism**, on the other hand, says something is "good" if the consequence produces pleasure or avoids pain.

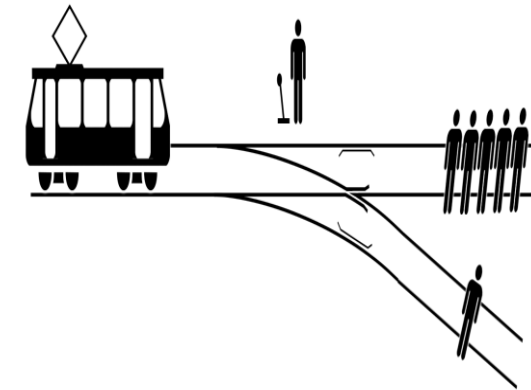
Consequentialism is sometimes criticized because it can be difficult, or even impossible, to know what the result of an action will be ahead of time. Indeed, no one can know the future with certainty.

Also, in certain situations, consequentialism can lead to decisions that are objectionable, even though the consequences are arguably good.

Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks

For example, let's suppose **economists** could prove that the **world economy** would be **stronger**, and that **most people** would be **happier**, **healthier**, and **wealthier**, if we just **enslaved 2%** of the **population**. Although the majority of people would benefit from this idea, **most would never agree to it.** However, when judging the idea solely on its results, as classic consequentialism does, then “**the end justifies the means.**”



Utilitarianism: is an ethical theory that determines right from wrong by focusing on outcomes. It is a form of consequentialism.

Utilitarianism holds that the most ethical choice is the one that will produce the greatest good for the greatest number. It is **the only** moral **framework** that can be used to justify military force or war. It is also the most common approach to moral reasoning used in business because of the way in which it accounts for costs and benefits.

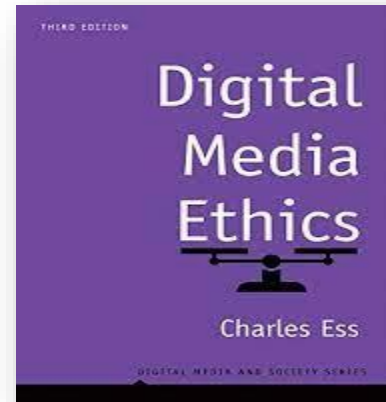
Lecture
10

Basic ethical frameworks

However, because we cannot predict the future, it's difficult to know with certainty whether the consequences of our actions will be good or bad. This is one of the limitations of utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism also has trouble accounting for values such as justice and individual rights. For example, assume a hospital has four people whose lives depend upon receiving organ transplants: a heart, lungs, a kidney, and a liver. If a healthy person wanders into the hospital, his organs could be harvested to save four lives at the expense of one life. This would arguably produce the greatest good for the greatest number. But few would consider it an acceptable course of action, let alone the most ethical one.

Digital Media
Ethics (Digital
Media and
Society Series),
3rd Edition, by
Charles Ess



Intro

Recommended Reference



Lecture
10

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| - Moral Absolutism | - Moral Relativism |
| - Moral Pluralism | - Consequentialism |
| - Utilitarianism | |



Thank You

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