Ethics in Computing

A Young Profession Coping with Ethical Debt
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@POSTWAIT
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DISCLAIMER

I AM NOT AN ETHICIST.
THIS TALK HAS MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS.
The philosophy of ethics is about systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct.

Normative Ethics can be viewed from three lenses:
- Virtue Ethics
- Deontology (Duties & Rules)
- Consequentialism (Consequences)
Virtues

- Perfect virtues vs. continence
- Understanding the importance of practical wisdom
Change Over Time

- Ethics exist only within the context of human society.
- Human society changes
  - Globalization
  - Scientific understanding
  - Supernatural belief structures
Applying Ethics

- Clergy
Applying Ethics

- Clergy
- Medical
Applying Ethics

- Clergy
- Medical
- Business
- Professional
- Computing
VW Emissions
Uber Autonomous Vehicle Operation
Strava Global Heatmap
Technical Concepts
Hand Soap Dispenser
Antecdotes ~ What now?

- What can we do?
  - From day to day ask, “what can I do?”
- Is this really my responsibility?
  - Yes it &$%@*ing is.
- Build more diverse teams.
Dissenting

- Be aware that you are not alone
- Understand that ethics are a spectrum
- Keep records
- Build a dispassionate defense
- Work the system
- Resigning
Start The Conversation

- I don’t come with answers... I come with questions.
- Familiarize yourself with a code of ethics for computing.
  - ACM’s Ethics policy (current 1992, new one expected 2018)
  - ACM’s “Ask and Ethicist”
- We need to ask “what are the ethical implications?” all the time.
Notes

Virtue Ethics:
https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/

ACM Code of Ethics
http://ethics.acm.org/code-of-ethics/

ACM “Ask an Ethicist”
http://ethics.acm.org/integrity-project/ask-an-ethicist-faq/

IEEE Dissention Guidelines
http://ethics.iit.edu/ecodes/node/5707

Uber Greyball

Uber’s Brazen Illegal Behavior
https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/16/uber-self-driving-cars-california-illegal-unethical-tactics

Soap

Volkswagen Emissions Scandal
https://www.npr.org/tags/443453659/volkswagen-emissions-scandal

Strava Global Heatmap