Ethics in Computing

A Young Profession Coping with Ethical Debt
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@POSTWAIT
FOUNDER CIRCONUS
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)
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
Greyball
Strava Global Heatmap
Technical Concepts
Hand Soap Dispenser
Antecdotes ~ What now?

- Is this really my responsibility?
  - Yes it &$%@*ing is.
- Many ethical infractions are the result of privacy violations
  - Privacy is a human right
- Forecasting ethical consequences can be hard
  - It requires anticipating the consequences to humans (that don’t look or think like you)
  - Build more diverse teams.
- The software development lifecycle is not a universally fixed thing
  - Capitalize on its flexibility by introducing “ethical considerations”
  - From day to day ask, “what can I do?”
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
  - ACM’s “Ask and Ethicist”
- We need to ask “what are the ethical implications?” all the time.
Dissenting

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtue Ethics:</th>
<th>Uber Greyball</th>
<th>Volkswagen Emissions Scandal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACM Code of Ethics</td>
<td>Soap</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACM “Ask an Ethicist”</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://ethics.acm.org/integrity-project/ask-an-ethicist-faq/">http://ethics.acm.org/integrity-project/ask-an-ethicist-faq/</a></td>
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<td>IEEE Dissention Guidelines</td>
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