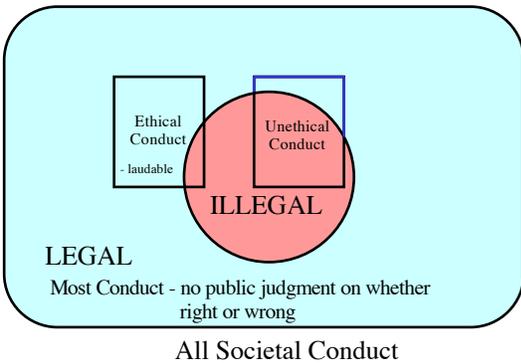
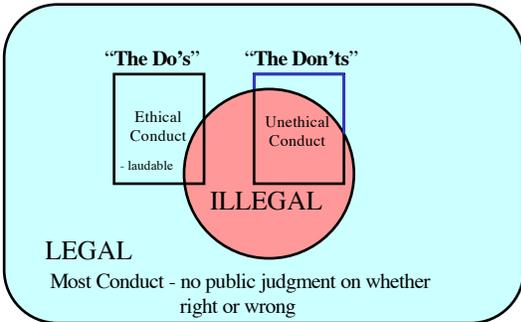


INT 601 RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

Introduction

Professor Harlan J. Onsrud
Spatial Information Science and Engineering
School of Computing and Information Science
National Center for Geographic Information & Analysis
University of Maine





When talking about ethics, are you typically referring to right side or left side?

Users of information are faced with ethical conflicts on a daily basis.

- should I design a vehicle navigation system for purposes unknown to drivers for other than guiding the drivers?

Developers of databases and technologies face similar conflicts.

- advance science or techniques that allow for stricter control over information systems (keep out thieves) or those that ensure continued open and equitable access to information systems (advance democracy, fairness, knowledge advancement)

"right" versus **"wrong"**
... answer is easy although acting may be difficult

"right" versus **"right"**
What course of action allows one to "do the right thing"?

Example:

How should we design the software, database and communication technologies for a *vehicle navigation system*?

“gathering detailed digital data about customers for marketing and yet unanticipated purposes is good for society because it allows a more efficient marketplace and large segments of society benefit from that increased economic efficiency”
versus

“gathering detailed data about customers without their informed consent and explicit permission violates their privacy, impinges upon their security, and knowing they are under constant digital surveillance has a chilling effect on their freedom of action”

These are competing moral arguments.

Right versus Right

It is right to support market efficiency through our design
versus
It is right to protect individual privacy

Moral goals and arguments are often in conflict.

Which should I and others support?

Science of ethics helps sort out which moral arguments have greater validity.

I.

Theoretical Underpinnings in Support of Practical Assessment of Ethical Dilemmas

Ethics: the theoretical examination of morals

1. **deontological** theories (concerning duty)
 - concerned with the rightness and wrongness of actions
2. **teleological theories** (concerning ends)
 - concerned with the ends of actions and their goodness or badness

Shortcoming of philosophical reasoning:

... no universal theory has emerged

... thus, no clear cut guide for our actions

... yet primary lines of ethical thought have many areas of agreement

Contemporary solutions:

Focus on intermediary principles comporting with the primary ethical theories

One Example:

Principlism (Beauchamp and Childress)

- prima facie duties
 - autonomy of the person
 - nonmaleficence
 - beneficence
 - justice
- each duty always in force but they may conflict

When assessing a planned action, all of the *prima facie duties* always apply

- **autonomy** - duty to support self determination in defining, planning and pursuing a good life in self and others
- **nonmaleficence** - duty to avoid unnecessary harm to others
- **beneficence** - duty to advance welfare of others when able to do so
- **justice** - duty to treat all fairly and impartially

Which should be given more weight in the event of conflicts among duties?

Possible considerations:

- are there no *alternative actions* that honor all of the conflicting obligations?
- if not, does proposed action have realistic prospect of *achieving the moral objective* you are choosing to honor?
- does action *minimize the effects of infringing* on the prima facie duty that can't be fully supported?

II.
Practical Assessment of Ethical Conflicts

Assessment of a Planned Action

1. Consult Guidelines of Practical Ethicists that incorporate Moral Theory Approaches
2. Consult Professional Codes of Conduct?
3. Both?

For an individual, **moral issue consciousness** and knowledge of **processes for assessing contemplated actions** are far more important than generalized disciplinary codes

..... although **professional codes of conduct have substantial value** and professionals need to be fully familiar with their provisions.
