# Ethics in IT

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# Introduction

- Objectives
  - What is ethics? And how does it differ from the law?
  - Why is ethics important?
  - What kind of ethical issues arise?
    - Normally? In computing?
  - How do we do ethical analysis?

# What is 'ethics'?

- "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation" Merriam Webster Online
- "The term 'ethics' refers to a code or set of principles by which people live and involves a process of self-reflection" Kesar and Rogerson

# What is ‘ethics’?

- It's not enough to simply know the difference between good and bad, but that your decisions and actions should be ethically correct, and that you have a responsibility to do so





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# What is 'ethics'?

- Why don't we push people under buses, damage property, rob banks?
  - Is it because we're afraid of the consequences if we're caught?
  - or because we don't want those things done to us?
  - or because we know they are essentially bad?
  - or because we've been 'brought up right'?

# What is 'ethics'?

- What is 'good' and 'bad'?
  - Who decides?
- Can something be 'right' in one country and 'wrong' in another?
- Can something be 'right' in one context but 'wrong' in another?
- Are there degrees of good and bad?
  - Can we do something bad to prevent something worse from happening?
- Is an action good or bad in itself?
  - or do the consequences of the action make the action good or bad?

# Computer Ethics

- Some debate about whether a separate field of ethics called 'Computer Ethics' is needed...
- Maner coined name in 1980's: he claims there are ethical issues unique to IT (Can you think of any?)
- Moor claims that "computer ethics is the analysis of the nature and social impact of computer technology and the corresponding formation and justification of policies for the ethical use of such technology"





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# Computer Ethics

- Hodges claims that there is nothing about computing which deserves special attention
  - should there be tractor ethics for drivers of tractors?
  - computing professionals just share a common tool (the computer), rather than sharing a common set of activities, concerns or standards.
  - computers can be misused or abused by anyone not just members of the computer profession (e.g., children with a computer, an internet connection, and knowledge)





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# Ethics and Computing

- Ethics seems to be taught, rather than innate
  - Different cultures may have different values
- Our parents, elder relatives, religion, teachers, role models, etc., teach us 'how to conduct ourselves'
- Computers are new:
  - few of us have parents who were taught how to use computers 'properly', and who pass it on
  - in any case, technology changes rapidly, leading to new situations requiring ethical decisions

# Ethics and the Law

- What is lawful is not necessarily ethical!
- What is ethical is not necessarily legal!
- Under Maltese law:
  - Parliament passes laws after discussion
  - Regulations specify penalties if law is broken
  - Judge/Magistrate/jury decides if law has been broken

# Ethics and the Law

- Ethics are 'adopted' by society, organisation, corporation
- May be organised into Codes of Ethics, Code of Conduct, Customer Charter, Citizens Charter, ...
- Indicate to public the level of service that can be expected
- Act as reminder to members, employees, government/civil service what level of service it to be provided

# Ethics and the Law

- Breach of Code of Ethics may result in termination of membership
- Breach of laws regulating a profession may result in suspension of warrant
- Rapid change in technology can result in Policy Vacuum, leading to problems
- May take years for something considered to be unethical to be enacted into law
  - In the meantime, how to control unethical behaviour?





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# Making Ethical Decisions

- Many different ethical frameworks:
  - Utilitarianism, Consequentialism, Egoism, Relativism, etc.
- Must argue consistently
- Must consider (from Reynolds, 2003):
  - Facts; stakeholders; consequences of your ethical decision; laws/guidelines/policies; different options
  - and then evaluate the results of your decision





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# How the Course will run

- Assessment:
  - 60% written exam
  - 40% assignment
- Assignment in collaboration with University of Limerick
  - Working on-line in groups of 6 (2 from UoM, 2 from Limerick, 2 from Mexico)
  - Regularly meet on-line to discuss ethical issues from variety of ethical perspectives
  - Write short reports, all of which will contribute to the assessment of this study-unit

# Registering with Moodle

- Go to http://moodle.csisdmz.ul.ie/
- Create a new account by clicking on the link on the right of the screen (under the login option)
- Use your university email account, there are problems with hotmail and gmail.
- When you get the confirmation email you can then register with the course by logging onto Moodle.
- Next click on the link for Collaboration 2008
- Enter the enrolment key which is collab2008
- You can now start using the course site.
- You should look at the Main forum and read the messages that are posted. You can put a message to introduce yourselves.

# Recommended Reading

- Johnson, D. (2001). Computer Ethics.
- Micah Hester, D. and Ford, Paul J. (2001). Computers and Ethics in the Cyberage.
- Reynolds, G. (2003). Ethics in Information Technology.
- Spinello, R.A. (2006). Cyberethics: Morality and Law in Cyberspace.
- Resources on Joe Griffin's Moodle web site.