

EAAI '17 Ethics Panel

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Introduction to Judy Goldsmith's Section

- Descriptive vs. Normative/Prescriptive Ethics
- Wedging ethics into an already crowded AI syllabus
- Science Fiction and Computer Ethics: The Class

Descriptive vs. Normative Ethics

- Descriptive ethics: What do people think is right?¹
- Meta-ethics: What does "right" even mean?
- Normative (prescriptive) ethics: How should people act?
- Applied ethics: How do we take moral knowledge and put it into practice?

¹This slide from Wikipedia: Descriptive Ethics, accessed 1/24/17

Intros to AI Ethics should include intros to main ethical theories, including at least

- Utilitarianism
- Deontology
- Virtue Ethics

These should be used to describe/frame/analyze dilemmas

Important takeaways:

- Framing changes the question
- Framing changes the answer

The Minimum

Introduce the theories (1-3 lectures)²

Look for dilemmas/challenges in textbooks, overheard conversations, news media

Give short writing exercises or use discussion time

²See our Summer 2017 AI Magazine Article — now available in long form on arXiv

Case Studies vs. Stories

Typical ethics textbook uses case studies:

- No character development
- Often there's a “right answer”

Case studies are rarely memorable, emotionally gripping, or subtle.

Fiction gives both emotional connection and distance.

Very rough story summary: The singularity has happened, and there's an intelligent agent, that wants to help people. Unsubtle methods don't work, but some subtler ones do: matchmaking, attempts to solve expressed problems.

Technical issues it raises:

- Privacy
- Manipulation by machine agents
- Social parsing of needs/desires

Why Science Fiction and Computer Ethics

- Stories provide rich vein for ethical dilemmas
- Emotional distance from fiction allows for analysis
- Interpreting decisions from particular ethical frameworks enhances understanding of frameworks, choices, consequences
- Emotional connection to stories makes discussions memorable when real-world dilemmas arise