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?

\(^1\)This 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

\(^2\)See 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.
Naomi Kritzer’s “Cat Pictures Please”

**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
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