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Ethics and Facebook
The Ethics of Facebook: Part One

Some Preliminary Questions
The Ethics of Facebook: Part Two

Faculty Ethics on Facebook
5. Not looking at student profiles unless the faculty member has been friended by the student and even then using Facebook information judiciously and for educational purposes. In short, not spying on students, but getting to know them better when invited to do so.
7. Taking extreme care with privacy settings and faculty profile content to limit profiles to information relevant to educational purposes. A broad variety of information may be appropriate, however, given the area of expertise / subject, the local customs of an instructor's school, and the personal dynamics of his or her classroom. Content should be placed thoughtfully and periodically reconsidered to maintain this educational standard.
8. Exercising appropriate discretion when using Facebook for personal communications (with friends, colleagues, other students, etc.) with the knowledge that faculty behavior on Facebook may be used as a model by our students.
The Ethics of Facebook: Part Three

Varieties of Ethical Theory
The Varieties of Ethical Theory

- Divine Command Theory

God declares what is good.

Classical rebuttal: Does God declare the good because it is good, or is it good because God declares it so?
The Varieties of Ethical Theory

- Natural Law Theory

  The good thing to do is the “natural” thing to do.

  Classical rebuttal: If humans are a part of nature, how can anything they do be unnatural?
Emotivism

Moral judgments are merely the emotional expressions of what is appealing and what is repulsive.

Classical rebuttal: Emotivism means that there are no objective moral truths.
The Varieties of Ethical Theory

- Cultural Relativism

To be moral, one must merely follow the practices of their own culture.

Classical rebuttal: Moral civil disobedience is impossible.
Consequentialism

The outcome of an action determines the morality of an action. The ends justify the means.

Two varieties: Egoism and Utilitarianism
Consequentialism: Egoism

What is good for me is what is right.

Plausibly held by several people because what is best for me might be to be good to you.

Common criticism: It’s just plain selfish.
The Varieties of Ethical Theory

- Consequentialism: Utilitarianism

  What is good for the greatest number is what is right.

  Common criticism: It justifies violating individual rights to serve the well-being of the majority.
The Varieties of Ethical Theory

- Deontology

Right action is determined by duty, where duty is usually determined according to some kind of rational principle.

The classic example is Kant’s Categorical Imperative.

Common criticism: Sometimes it seems justified to violate individual rights to promote the general welfare.
Social Contract Theory

Right action is determined by an implicit and tacit social agreement to abide by the laws of the state that promote and enable my livelihood.

As old as Socrates and as new as John Rawls.

Common criticism: May imply that there is no objective standard for ethics. It consists of mere agreement.
Virtue Ethics

Right action flows from proper conduct as determined by one’s character.

The prime exemplar of this view is Aristotle.

Common criticism: Virtue ethics cannot provide a code of conduct, since character and not action determines what is right.
The Varieties of Ethical Theory

- All of these theories can provide and have provided the basis for analyzing the moral dimensions of Facebook.

- In my view, none of them really works for settling ethical questions.
The Ethics of Facebook: Part Four

Recent Ethical Debates
Recent Ethical Debates

Some recent ethical debates have centered around:

- **Individual rights concerning:**
  - Privacy
  - Property
  - Power
  - Fairness
Recent Ethical Debates

- Individual rights concerning PRIVACY

  Do employers and universities have the right to use Facebook profiles for selection procedures?

  Does Facebook’s tagging system intrude on my right to privacy?
Recent Ethical Debates

- Individual rights concerning PRIVACY
Recent Ethical Debates

- Individual rights concerning PRIVACY
Recent Ethical Debates

- Individual rights concerning PROPERTY

Who owns the content uploaded to Facebook?

Notice, btw, how Facebook resolved this issue and the next.

(Notice, btw, that I used “btw”;))
Recent Ethical Debates

- Individual rights concerning POWER

  Can Facebook pretty much do whatever it wants?
Recent Ethical Debates

- Individual rights concerning FAIRNESS

Does Facebook have an obligation to treat all of its users the same way?

If my name is Batman, should I have more difficulty getting a Facebook account than Smith and Jones?
The Ethics of Facebook: Part Five

Five “Ethical” Issues
Five “Ethical” Issues

ONE

Does Facebook redefine friendship in ways that are potentially helpful or harmful?
TWO

Does Facebook’s algorithm for determining what goes into a user’s newsfeed and in what order it appears influence which friendships will develop and which will not?
THREE

Does Facebook play a positive or negative role in helping users attain a meaningful sense of purpose, community and self-identity?
Does the opportunity for self-disclosure in Facebook put us more in touch with ourselves, as we struggle between a representation of self that is something we ourselves can accept and that others will also accept?
Is it possible that the opportunity for constructing a public self-portrait in front of multiple constituencies carries with it the necessity of accountability?
Might authentic self-identity be established in the interactivity between persons and less so in any finished self-representation?
FOUR

Does Facebook contribute to remembrance and the coherence of one’s life for older users and will it eliminate the need for this for younger users?
Will the openness of our private lives on Facebook lead to restructuring the social and moral expectations placed on us as human beings ...

... and, in turn, help us better understand and accept ourselves for who and what we are?
Five “Ethical” Issues

I’m willing to bet that it already has.
The Ethics of Facebook: Part Six

Your “Ethical” Issues with Questions, Comments, and Observations