Approaches to Ethics

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Starting Points

What is the basis for statements about the ethics of learning analytics?

Giulia Forsythe https://www.e-learningmatters.com/new-emerging-tech-part-2-learning-analytics-adaptive-learning/

Cover image: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/extraordinary-500-year-old-shipwreck-rewriting-history-age-discovery-180978825/?utm_source=pocket-newtab

Starting Points

"To satisfy expectations of the 'born digital' / 'born social' generations, there is a likely requirement to take on ethical considerations, which may run contrary to the sensibilities of previous generations, especially in respect of the trade-off between privacy and service." (Kay, D., Korn, N. & Oppenheim, C., 2012)
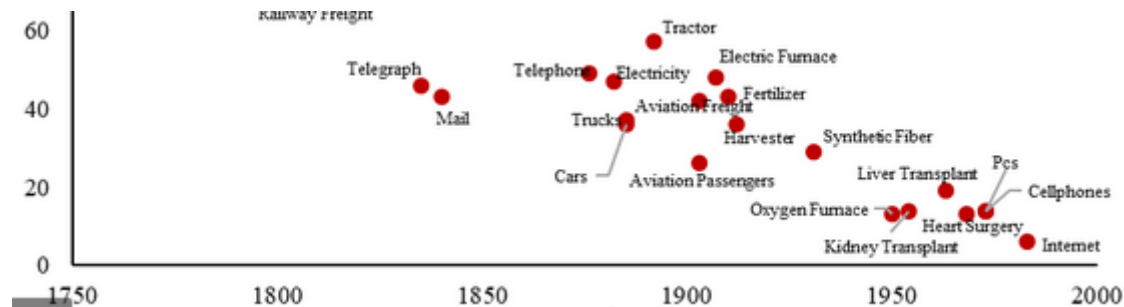
- Really? Is that why we're doing it?

Kay, D., Korn, N. & Oppenheim, C., 2012. Legal, Risk and Ethical Aspects of Analytics in Higher Education, Available at: http://publications.cetis.org.uk/2012/500

Starting Points

Drew (2016) states that "people think that it would be irresponsible not to use data science in certain cases, and that we should not lag behind other countries."

- Are we to draft our ethical principles based on "what people think" or on whether we "lag behind" other countries? If not, why not?

https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/01/17/whoever-leads-in-artificial-intelligence-in-2030-will-rule-the-world-until-2100/ Brookings
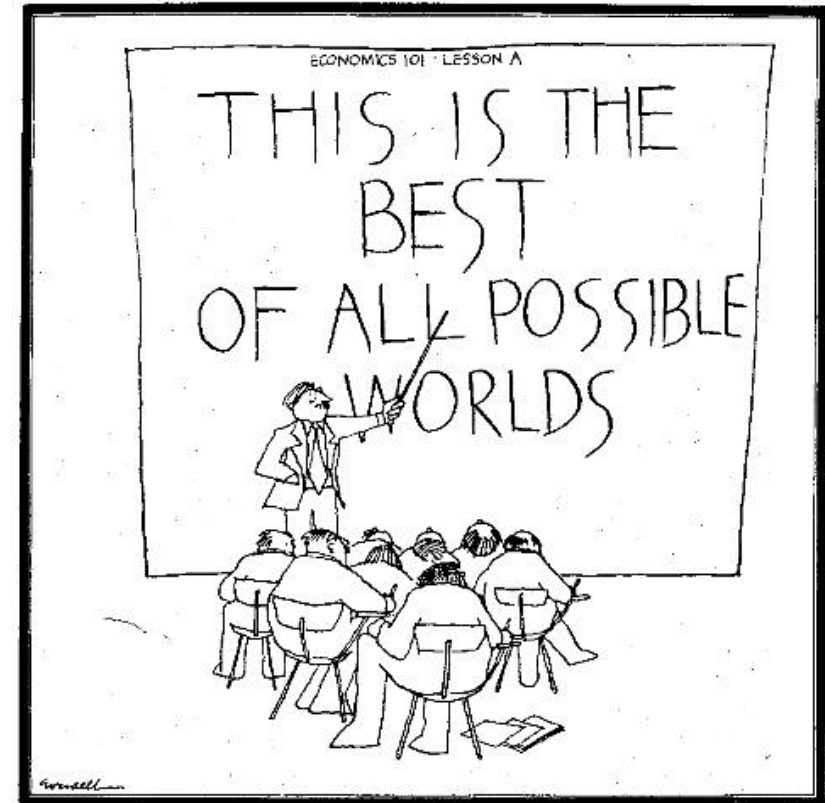
Drew, 2016: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsta.2016.0119

The Best of…

- As Voltaire's Candide might have reflected, we are faced with the imperative to seek out the 'best of all possible worlds' (Kay, D., Korn, N. & Oppenheim, C., 2012)

- Is *this* the best of all possible worlds?

https://independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/capitalism-the-best-of-all-possible-worlds,4303

Candide summary: https://theconversation.com/guide-to-the-classics-voltaires-candide-a-darkly-satirical-tale-of-human-folly-in-times-of-crisis-157131

Approaches to Ethics

Story of Gilgamesh and Aga

Story of *Gilgamesh and Agga*. Old Babylonian period, from southern Iraq. Sulaymaniyah Museum, Iraq

Human interest in ethics goes back at least 3,000 years and probably further

- "such as the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh, Homer's Iliad and the Icelandic Eddas, portray a set of values that suit the strong leader of a small tribe.
- "The Sumerian Farmer's Almanac and the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope both advise farmers to leave some grain for poor gleaners" (Wikipedia)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_ethics

History of Ethics from a very western perspective: https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ethics-history

Approaches to Ethics

Ethics has a long history of association with religious belief, but this is waning

- Miguel Guhlin shares his summary of Greg Epstein's book, Good Without God, and I thought I'd include it here as complexion and nuance for my upcoming MOOC. It follows a path well trodden by people like Kai Nielson and J.L. Mackie.
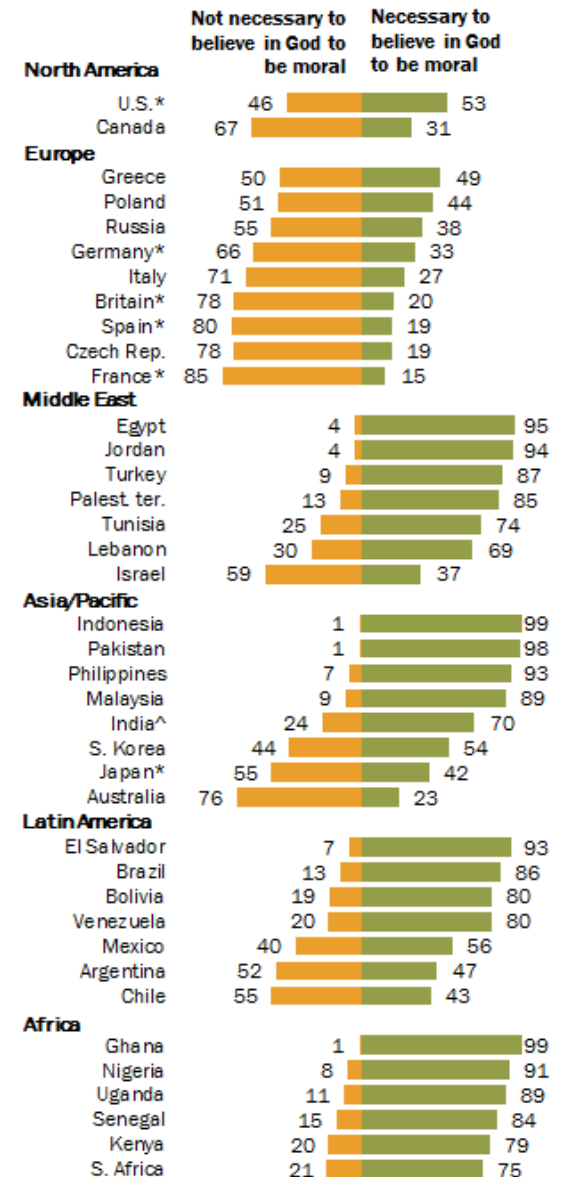https://www.downes.ca/post/72711

https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2014/03/13/worldwide-many-see-belief-in-god-as-essential-to-morality/

History of Ethics from a very western perspective:
https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ethics-history

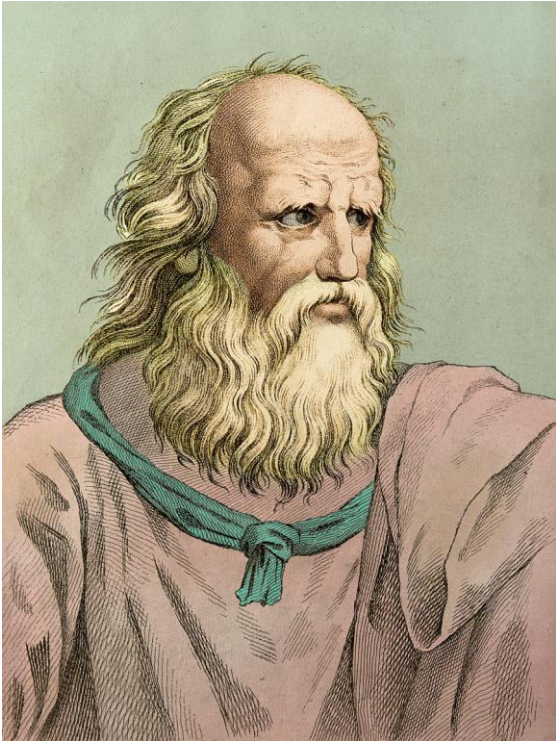## Belief in God Essential to Morality?
% Who believe it is...

	Not necessary to believe in God to be moral	Necessary to believe in God to be moral
North America		
U.S.*	46	53
Canada	67	31
Europe		
Greece	50	49
Poland	51	44
Russia	55	38
Germany*	66	33
Italy	71	27
Britain*	78	20
Spain*	80	19
Czech Rep.	78	19
France*	85	15
Middle East		
Egypt	4	95
Jordan	4	94
Turkey	9	87
Palest. ter.	13	85
Tunisia	25	74
Lebanon	30	69
Israel	59	37
Asia/Pacific		
Indonesia	1	99
Pakistan	1	98
Philippines	7	93
Malaysia	9	89
India^	24	70
S. Korea	44	54
Japan*	55	42
Australia	76	23
Latin America		
El Salvador	7	93
Brazil	13	86
Bolivia	19	80
Venezuela	20	80
Mexico	40	56
Argentina	52	47
Chile	55	43
Africa		
Ghana	1	99
Nigeria	8	91
Uganda	11	89
Senegal	15	84
Kenya	20	79
S. Africa	21	75

*Data from 2011. ^Data from Winter 2013.

Source: Spring 2013 Global Attitudes Survey, Q26.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
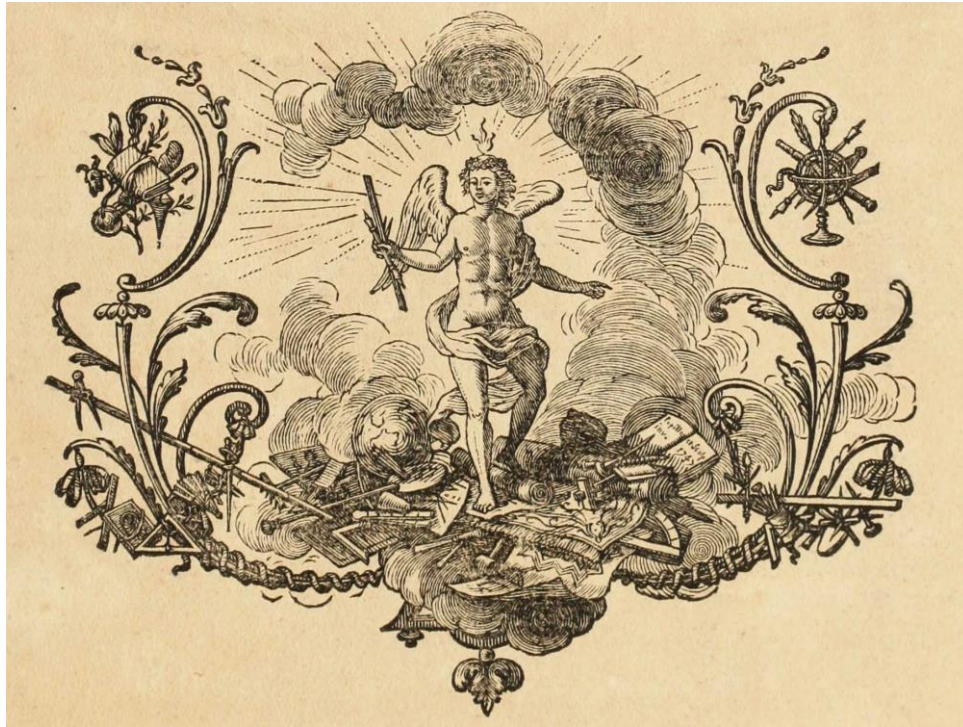
Approaches to Ethics

Ethics as philosophy developed within the Greek tradition

- "Justice is the rule of the stronger" (Thrasymachus) and "Man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras) – Socrates – the difficulties of such theories
- Plato – idealism - the Form of the Good, in relation to which all other objects of knowledge must be defined
- Aristotle - the exercise of natural human faculties in accordance with virtue.

History of Ethics from a very western perspective: https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ethics-history
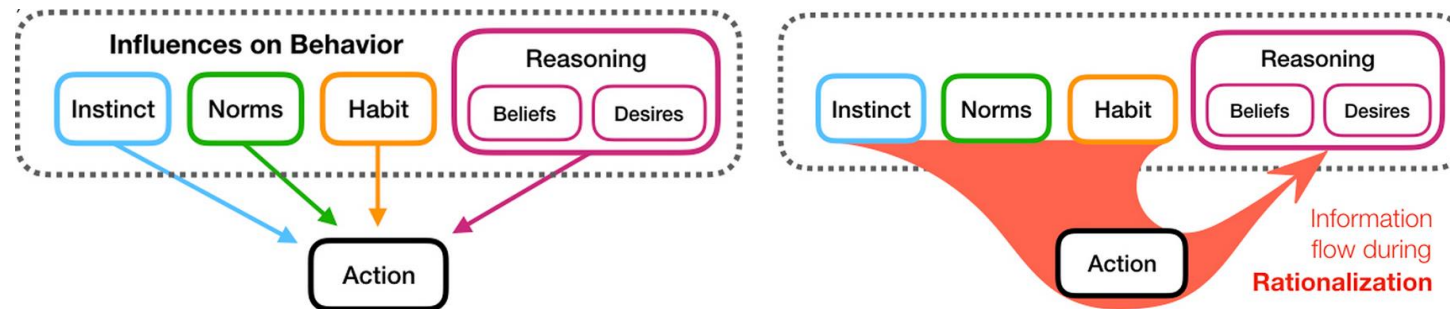
Approaches to Ethics

Since the Enlightenment ethics has also been associated with reason

History of Ethics from a very western perspective: https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ethics-history

Ethics of Belief

- Why we have a moral obligation to believe responsibly:
  - false beliefs about physical or social facts lead us into poor habits of action
  - poor practices of belief-formation turn us into careless, credulous believers.
  - we have the moral responsibility not to pollute the well of collective knowledge. (Clifford 'The Ethics of Belief', 1877)

https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioral-and-brain-sciences/article/abs/rationalization-is-rational/2A13B99ED09BD802C0924D3681FEC55B

Francisco Mejia Uribe. (2018). Believing without evidence is always morally wrong. Aeon (Weblog). November 5, 2018. https://aeon.co/ideas/believing-without-evidence-is-always-morally-wrong

Too Big a Word?

"Compliance, legal risk, corporate values, and moral justice are all sometimes described as 'ethics,' and at times work in parallel to pursue common goals, and at other times come into tension with each other." (Moss & Metcalfe, 2020)
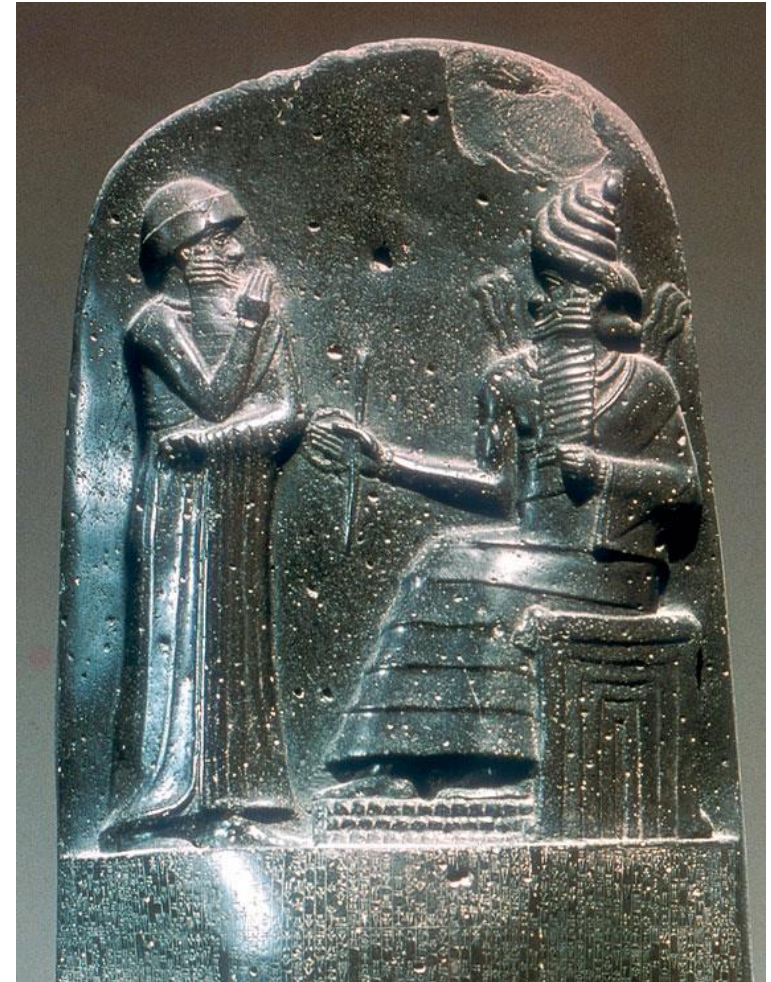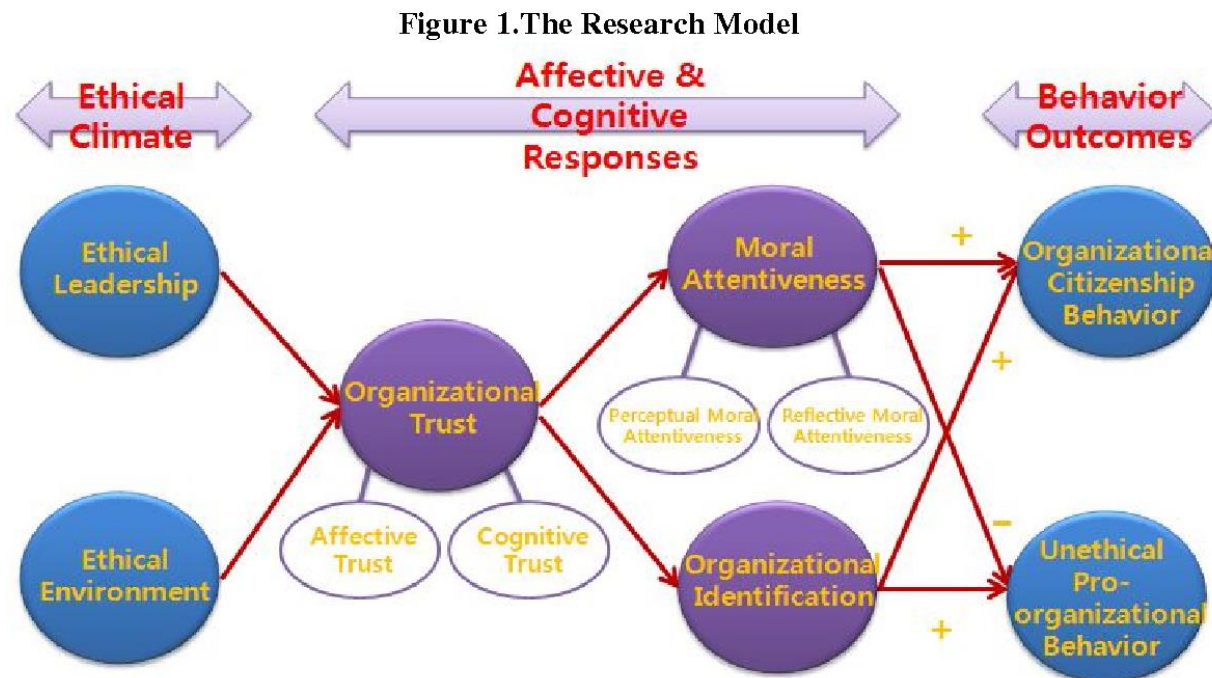

https://points.datasociety.net/too-big-a-word-13e66e62a5bf

Ethical…

"The adjective 'ethical' can describe both an outcome, a process, or a set of values" (Moss & Metcalfe, 2020) or requirements…

https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-philosophy

Ethical Outcomes

An **outcome** might consist of a cloud services company declining a contract with an abusive government or agency, or equalizing error rates across protected classes in an automated hiring system.

Figure 1.The Research Model

https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Exploring-the-Relationship-between-Ethical-Climate-Kim-Miao/a32e4bc35ed4212e5b76a09748126ca635446557

Ethical process

Ethical Decision Making Process

Know the facts
1

Look for the
right people
2

Be objective
in decision
making
6

Ethical
Decision
Making
Process

To know the
applicable
existing laws
3

To note the
Core values
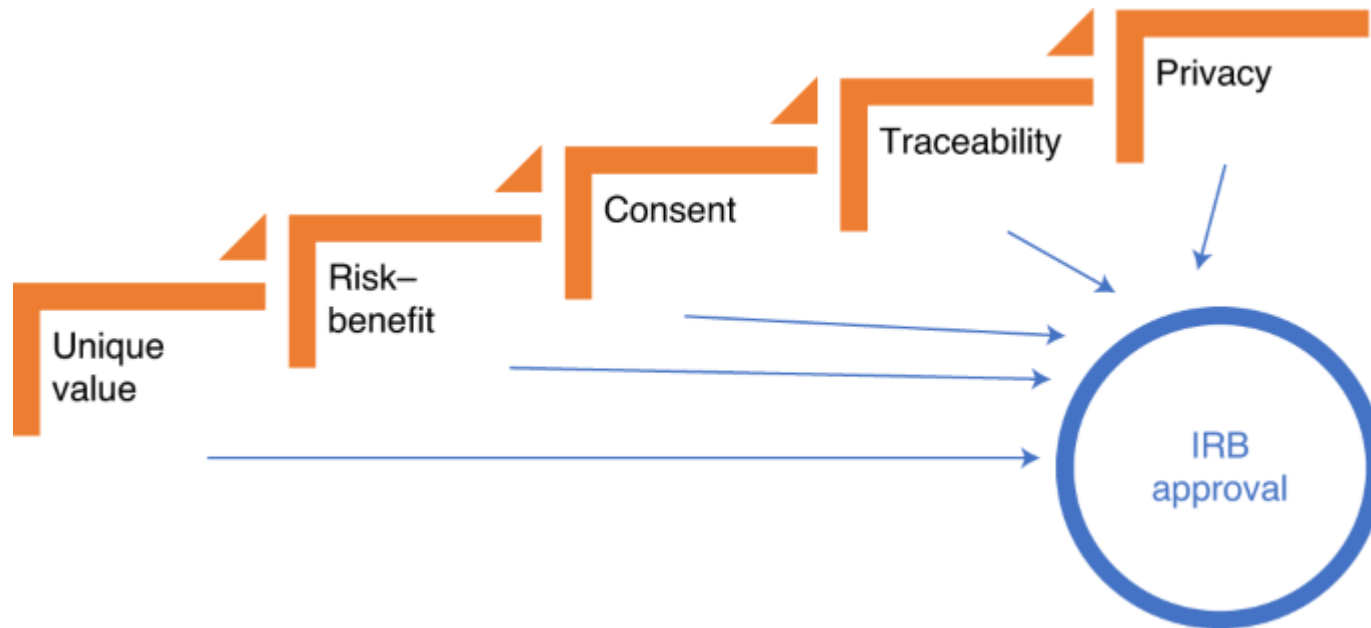of company
5

Accountability
towards
stakeholders
4

A rigorously ethical **process** can look like a committee of stakeholders convening to develop a plan for addressing potential harms of a new product or a review team analyzing an engineering requirements document.

https://www.inhousecommunity.com/article/ethical-decision-making-process-manish-asarkar/

Ethical Values

- **Values** describe states', humans' (or any moral being's) desires, such as beauty, justice, or wealth, and are expressed as ethical principles

Ethical Requirements

- "Ethical **requirements** are requirements for AI systems derived from ethical principles or ethical codes (norms)" (Guizzardi, et.al., 2020)

Five Approaches to Ethics

- The Utilitarian Approach
- The Rights Approach
- The Fairness or Justice Approach
- The Common Good Approach
- The Virtue Approach

Velasquez, et.al., 2009. https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/a-framework-for-ethical-decision-making/

Metaethics

What is the *basis* for ethical reasoning?

- Does might make right?

- Do ethics describe duties?

- Are ethics based in rights?

- Do ethics require agency?

- Relativism vs Universality

https://conscientthoughts.wordpress.com/2019/06/10/lets-get-meta-about-metaethics/