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## My Journey in Ethics

I want to work in cyber security because I have the drive to protect people. I want to do something that will protect the people around me and our way of life, as well as something I find interesting. There are a lot of things one could do to meet such a desire, but for me, the answer appears to be cyber security.

In many ways, this drive comes from my code of ethics. I described it in my paper *My Personal Virtues in Cyber Security*. It is essentially a system of three primary values that are purposefully chosen because, in certain circumstances, a conflict between them is inevitable. These virtues are liberty, responsibility, and empathy. In my initial evaluation of these virtues, I explored how they would work together to help guide me through the hypothetical situation of updating the security software on a banking system that would potentially harm some users. I evaluated the short and long-term effects of two decisions (update now or postpone). The paper goes into a lot more detail about how the three

virtues mentioned above in my personal ethical system can be used to analyze decisions on an ethical basis. I'll be referencing it a lot in this paper.

After re-reading some of that paper, it occurred to me that my final decision was contingent on at least one other factor that I did not realize at the time. I neglected to consider that after evaluating the effects on the three virtues, I was required to select one or two virtues in priority over the others to make a final decision. It bears asking, what criteria am I using to "value" one value over another?

The phrase "Based on my analysis of negative consequences..." that I used indicates that I had made my final decision with a consequentialist system. One that analyzed general social effects along specified criteria and valued the choice which harmed the least amount of people in the long term. This evaluation of my ethical system shows that it functions on the principle of least harm, defining harm as things that reduce people's liberty, inhibit the ability to fulfill responsibilities, or cause an empathetic "feeling of harm."

The fundamental principle of least harm comes from my drive to protect people. This value was acquired because of my upbringing and

reinforced throughout my life experiences. I generally consider myself to have been raised with very typical Judeo-Christian values. I was raised in a close-knit family with a strong parental presence, and I played a major role in raising my younger siblings. My beliefs and life experiences have certainly impacted the development of my ethical system towards what it is today. Especially being highly involved in raising my siblings, which I think had a major effect on my feeling a need to protect people from harm. This feeling of protective responsibility evolved into the subconscious ethical principle of least harm at an early age. The other values, such as valuing personal liberty tempered with personal responsibility and a strong sense of empathy, grew from my parent's influence and continued throughout my life.

Now to move away from my distant childhood and into more recent years. I've been pursuing a career in the Army National Guard for close to 4 and a half years now. This pursuit has also had a big impact on my more mature ethical development. The nature of the military is such that it is constantly under ethical scrutiny. Because of this, it has necessarily evolved to uphold a very strict ethical code. They go to great lengths to ensure that their members are aware of this ethic and willing

to conform to it. The Army Values quickly summarize the Army ethic: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage (Army.mil.). These things actually align well with my virtue of responsibility, so it wasn't that much of a stretch to move them into my value system; I've been making every effort to live up to and uphold this standard, but it still does not have the same impact on me as the things I learned as a child.

My experience in the military so far has taught me certain soft skills that I will need when tackling ethical issues in security. The first of these is a strong sense of responsibility. This feeling will be important because it will drive me to take action when facing ethical issues. If I neglect to address issues promptly, it will potentially lead to conflicts of interest and certainly, lead to a continuation of unethical activity. For example, in class, we discussed the hypothetical case where we were required to investigate another employee with whom we had a good friendly relationship. In this case, a sense of responsibility will help with ensuring that a potential conflict of interest could not arise.

Another area of soft skill that will be useful is communication. As important as my willingness to confront ethical issues is my ability to

communicate those issues well. I'll need to articulate to my peers and supervisors why I see an issue as unethical; I'll need to argue its nuances and understand the points that others make. I actually can't think up a scenario where good communication skills wouldn't be useful in solving ethical issues, but I can see one where they would be critically useful. In the class, discussion *Did I Just Do a Hack?*. There will certainly be cases where I or another will need to justify our actions ethically. Being able to communicate and understand others will be necessary in any case like that.

Conflict resolution is a third soft skill closely related to the two examples I provided for the previous ones. In the same way that I need communication skills to express ideas when addressing ethical questions, I will need conflict resolution skills to handle the disagreements I will have with others when we assess behavior and situations according to our different understanding of ethics.

The ethics system I used existed before I started attending this class. But some of the class content has made me aware of it in new ways and made me aware of some areas where I struggle to uphold my values. I've learned that I am the kind of person that tends to value the

opinions of the people around me quite a lot. Because of this, I worry that a desire for approval may cause me to struggle with neglecting to address issues. I think what is happening here is that I'm empathizing too much; caring about how others feel can occasionally cause me to sacrifice my sense of duty in exchange for their approval.

In an alternative case, there are times when I think I could value V empathy more and that I'm being stubborn in upholding a sense for my values of liberty and Responsibility. For example, I feel strongly that copyright law has been severely abused for several decades. I have never had any copyright issues, but I still think this way. The answer for why I feel this when it's not due to my own experiences is that I'm feeling a sense of empathy for people who have had trouble with it, people who I would say "should be considered" ethically correct in their claims. As I was reading *A Gift of Fire's* chapter 4 on intellectual property, I found myself seriously wondering if I would be willing to submit to this kind of regulation. It was a real chore for me to read that chapter because of my lingering feelings of injustice, but it made me realize that I was falsely stubborn. I am ready and have always been ready to freely admit a legitimate place for copyright law. Yet, it seemed that I was ready to fight

against it at every turn and even sacrifice my sense of responsibility for that cause. After having gone through that process, I believe I'm more willing to look at it from a levelheaded perspective; but it makes me wonder what other issues might I fight without clearly knowing why?

I think there is one more area of growth I should mention. I have had a serious issue with procrastination in the past. This habit has caused me to fail to address some issues before. I worry that it may lead to neglecting to address an ethical issue appropriately. I think what it is- if I continue to explain with the three virtues- is that I am not placing enough weight on responsibility and too much weight on liberty.

In all three of these areas where I need to experience growth, I explained a possible cause for each in terms of the three virtues personal liberty, responsibility, and empathy. I claim that one or more of those virtues may be over or undervalued in each case. But that does not completely answer the question. At the beginning of the paper, I explained how these virtues are the metrics of measuring harm. The real base of my system is that I want to take the action I perceive as causing the least harm to most people in the long term. The issues I described above were because I had failed to uphold those standards. I can begin

to correct each issue by first considering its effects on the three virtues and then the real amount of harm it causes. Am I failing to be responsible? Am I failing to uphold empathy? Am I failing to value personal liberty? What are the effects of my failure? After I realize the root of the problem, I can correct my mentality and then take effective action to fix it.

With the type of ethical dilemmas that cyber security personnel are potentially going to handle, it will be important for me to have a clear ethical rubric to look at when making decisions. It will go a lot better for me and the people working with me if I already know what I believe to be right and have already considered situations with ethical dilemmas that I may be asked to face. This class has been exactly that for me; it's been a catalyst to cause me to begin considering things I have never really considered before. It's done a very good job of introducing me to thinking critically about my ethical system. I've had to compare what I believe with other viewpoints and think rationally about how different ethical systems can come to either very similar conclusions or very different ones. Because of the self-assessments I've done and the various class readings, I've found myself thinking more about how I



would respond to the ethical issues I read about from time to time in a way that I haven't before. I think this class has given me a good start to the ethical side of my Cyber Security career and that I'm more prepared to face future challenges because of it.

Citations:

Army.mil. 2021. Army Values. [online] Available at:  
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