UNDERSTANDING ETHICAL PROBLEMS

Lecture 3

INTRODUCTION

Develop moral theories that can be applied to the ethical problems confronted by engineers

Approach to ethical problem solving will be similar to problem-solving strategies in other engineering classes

BRIEF HISTORY OF ETHICAL THOUGHT

Continually refined during the course of history

Many great thinkers have turned their attention to ethics and morals and have tried to provide insight into these issues through their writings.

Moral principles codified and handed down through the law

Large body of thinking—philosophical, legal, and religious—to draw from

Ethical conduct is fundamentally grounded in a concern for other people.

It is not just about law or religion.

ETHICAL THEORIES

Several theories of ethics to consider in decision making

- Doesn't indicate a weakness in theoretical understanding of ethics or a "fuzziness" of ethical thinking

- Reflects the complexity of ethical problems and the diversity of approaches to ethical problem solving

- Allows problems to be looked at from different angles

MORAL THEORY

- **A moral theory defines terms in uniform ways and links ideas and problems together in consistent ways**

- **Exactly how the scientific theories used in other engineering classes function**

- **we will use moral theories in exactly the same way that engineering theories are used in other classes**

FOUR ETHICAL THEORIES

Utilitarianism

Emphasis not on maximizing the well-being of the individual, but rather on maximizing the well-being of society as a whole

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is interested in determining what kind of people we should be. Virtue is often defined as moral distinction and goodness.

Duty Ethics

Ethical actions are those actions that could be written down on a list of duties: be honest, don't cause suffering to other people, be fair to others,

Rights Ethics

Rights ethics holds that people have fundamental rights that other people have a duty to respect.

UTILITARIANISM

- Focuses on on maximizing the well-being of society as a whole

- Seem to ignore the needs of individuals

- Frequently, it is impossible to know exactly what the consequences of an action are. So, maximizing the benefit to society involves guesswork and the risk that the best guess might be wrong

UTILITARIANISM

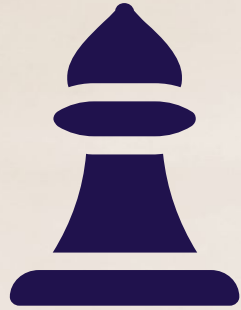**Flavors of Utilitarianism**

01 **Act Utilitarianism**

Act utilitarianism focuses on individual actions rather than on rules.

02 **Rule Utilitarianism**

Holds that moral rules are most important

DUTY ETHICS AND RIGHTS ETHICS

Hold that those actions are good that respect the rights of the individual. Good consequences for society as a whole are not the only moral consideration.

Duty Ethics: In this formulation, ethical acts are a result of proper performance of one's duties (be honest, don't cause suffering to other people, be fair to others etc.)

Rights Ethics: People have fundamental rights that other people have a duty to respect.

VIRTUE ETHICS

- In virtue ethics, actions are considered right if they support good character traits (virtues) and wrong if they support bad character traits (vices)

- Focuses on words such as responsibility, honesty, competence, and loyalty, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, citizenship, and respect.

- Vices could include dishonesty, disloyalty, irresponsibility, or incompetence.

- Virtue ethics is closely tied to personal character but can be applied in engineering career

Personal vs. Corporate Morality

Questions to ask

Question 1

Is there a distinction between the ethics practiced by an individual and the ethics practiced by a corporation?

Question 2

Can a company truly be expected to display honesty or loyalty? These are strictly human traits. Can they be applied to corporations
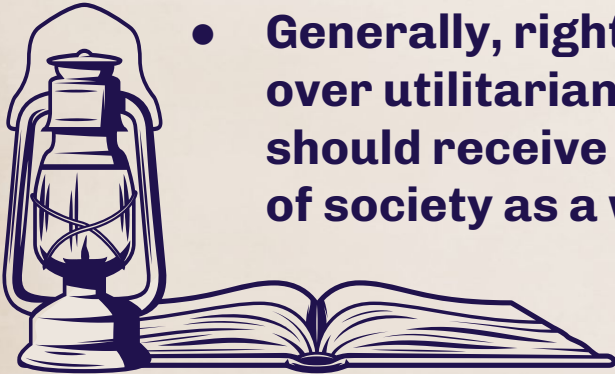
How to resolve this problem?

In their capacity to deal with individuals, corporations should be considered pseudo-moral agents and should be held accountable in the same way that individuals are, even if the ability to do this within the legal system is limited

Which theory to use?

- Use all of them to analyze a problem from different angles and see what result each of the theories gives.

- Frequently, the result will be the same even though the theories are very different.

- Generally, rights and duty ethics should take precedence over utilitarian considerations. Rights of individuals should receive relatively stronger weight than the needs of society as a whole.

Task!

- What are the disadvantages of Utilitarianism?
- What are the disadvantages of duty ethics and rights ethics?
- Read the cases from "Engineering Ethics (Charles B. Fleddermen)" – page 50

Thank you

Any Question?