

Essay #3

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Very often when making a decision, one might hear advice such as the following:

- “Go with your heart”
- “Go with your gut”
- “When you need to make a hard decision, flip a coin. Why? Because when that coin is in the air you suddenly know what your hoping for.”

This advice is awful; simply because it forces you to rely one thing: emotion. Emotions should never be considered in decision making. As result, they should not be used in ethical decision making; simply because emotions are subjective, emotions are inconsistent, and there are much better systems and frameworks.

The first problem about including emotions in ethics is incredible subjectivity that goes into it. People just simply feel a certain way, yet they can never explain it. This is a biproduct of so much influence from surroundings (whether it be from people, media, or simply culture). Whether one believes in nature vs. nurture, one cannot deny that certain influences effect the way a person feels.

A famous example of this is the Trolley problem; or, rather, a modified version of it.

Suppose there is a runaway train heading towards an unenviable collisions with five people (who are tied to the tracks). However, there is a switch you, the observed, can pull to save the five people at the cost of one person.

When asked this question, roughly 90% of participants ¹ stated they would pull the lever, holding a utilitarianism viewpoint. However, when posed with a twist:

The one person you must kill to save five is your child, parent, or sibling.

The number shot down to 33%, nearly two-thirds less. The best guess is humans are wired to be emotionally selfish, from an evolutionary standpoint. It made sense in more primitive, hunter-gathered times; but this has an impact on us today.

Applying this to business ethics, humans will worry about self-interest first, and ethical implications will be an afterthought. Take the case of the ²Ford Pinto, ³Enron, or, a more modern scandal, ⁴Samsung's battery recall. Emotion is rarely based on logic or reasoning, which ties to the second reason emotions should never be included in ethical decisions: systematic reasoning.

Emotions are rarely consistent; one might feel a particular way about a subject today, but an event might change their view on the subject later. Some great examples of this are religion, patriotism, and political beliefs. It is quite common to hear of "Born again Christians" or disavowed Christians, those who would die for their country become less steadfast, or people transitions from conservatism to a more liberal viewpoint. Those long-held beliefs usually take years to change; the trouble lies when it is a shorter timespan.

The real danger is emotional inconsistency is not always on a yearly timescale, but often daily or hourly. A simple "bad day" is enough to make one feel less empathy. One friend's remark might sway your feelings one way or another. Simple entanglement of other feelings would be enough to change one's mind about something; all of this is dangerous.

The solutions to all these problems is simple, do not allow emotions into ethical decisions. There are much better systems to use for ethical decision making that are well structured, unambitious, and not subjective.

Emotions are should never be allowed to influence a decisions in regards to ethics. Emotions are incredibly subjective. They do not always reflect what one is thinking at that point in time. The inconsistency of emotions make it difficult to systematize them. In short: they are *much* better alternatives to using emotions in decisions making.

Notes

¹<http://healthland.time.com/2011/12/05/would-you-kill-one-person-to-save-five-new-research-on-a-classic-debate/>

²<https://philosophia.uncg.edu/phi361-metivier/module-2-why-does-business-need-ethics/case-the-ford-pinto/>

³<http://www.investopedia.com/updates/enron-scandal-summary/>

⁴<http://fortune.com/2016/12/28/biggest-corporate-scandals-2016/>