

Engineering Ethics

Lec – 4: *Moral Framework* – Utilitarianism, Rights Ethics
& Duty Ethics

Moral Framework

- An ethical theory seeks to provide a comprehensive perspective on morality that clarifies, organizes, and guides moral reflection.
- If successful, it provides a framework for making reasonable moral choices and resolving moral dilemmas.



Ethical Theories

- We discuss five types of ethical theories (and traditions) that have been especially influential:
 - ❖ utilitarianism,
 - ❖ rights ethics,
 - ❖ duty ethics,
 - ❖ virtue ethics, and
 - ❖ self-realization ethics.



- *Utilitarianism* says that we ought to maximize the overall good, taking into equal account all those affected by our actions.
- *Rights ethics* says we ought to respect human rights, and *duty ethics* says we ought to respect individuals' rational autonomy.



- *Virtue ethics* says that good character is central to morality.
- *Self-realization ethics* emphasizes the moral significance of self-fulfillment.
- None of these theories has won a consensus, although each has proven attractive to many people.
- At least in some of their versions, they widely agree in their practical implications.



Utilitarianism

- *Mill: Act-Utilitarianism and Happiness*
- Utilitarianism is the view that we ought to produce the good for the most people, giving equal consideration to everyone affected.
- The standardization of right conduct is the maximization of goodness.



- How to assess the “production” of goodness: with respect to each action or with respect to the consequences of general rules about actions.
- Depending on how these questions are answered, utilitarianism can be developed in different directions.



Act – Utilitarianism

- We should focus on individual actions, rather than general rules.
- An act is right if it is likely to produce the most good for the most people involved in the particular situation.
- Everyday maxims like “Keep your promises,” “Don’t deceive,” and “Don’t bribe” are only rough guidelines.



- According to John Stuart Mill, these rules should be broken when doing so will produce the most good in a specific situation.
- Also, in Mill's view, pleasure is qualitative and can be categorized as *high* and *low pleasure*.



Brandt: Rule – Utilitarianism

- Rule – utilitarianism, which is the second main version of utilitarianism, regards, moral rules as primary.
- According to it, we should always act on those rules that if generally followed would produce the most good for the most people.



- Thus, we ought to keep promises and avoid bribes, even when those acts do not have the best consequences in a particular situation, because the general practices of promising and not bribing produce the most overall good.



- Brandt believes that rules should be considered in sets which he calls *moral codes*.
- A moral code is justified when it is the *optimal code* that, if adopted and followed, would maximize the public good more than the alternative codes would.
- The codes may be society – wide standards or special codes for a profession like engineering.



Duty Ethics

- *Kant: Respect for Persons*
- Kant regard duties, rather than good consequences, as fundamental.



Duty Ethics (Contd.)

• *In his view, right actions are those required by a list of duties such as:*

- ✓ be honest
- ✓ keep your promise
- ✓ don't inflict suffering on other people
- ✓ be fair
- ✓ make reparation when you have been unfair
- ✓ show gratitude for kindness extended by others



Duties to Ourselves

- *There are also duties to ourselves:*
 - ✓ *Seek to improve one's own intelligence and character*
 - ✓ *Develop one's talents*
 - ✓ *Don't commit suicide*



- Why are these our duties?
- According to Kant, it is because they meet three interwoven conditions:
 - ✓ each expresses respect for persons
 - ✓ each is a universal principle
 - ✓ each expresses an unqualified command for autonomous moral agents



Prima Facie Duties

- One difficulty with Kant's view is that he thought principles of duty were *absolute* in the sense of never having justifiable exceptions.
- He failed to be sensitive to how principles of duty can conflict with each other, thereby creating moral dilemmas.
- Principles of duties that have exceptions are called *prima facie duties*.



Rights Ethics

- ***Locke: Liberty Rights*** – John Locke argued that to be a person entails having rights – human rights – to life, liberty, and the property generated by one's labor.
- These are referred to as *liberty rights* or *negative rights* that place duties on other people *not* to interfere with one's life.



- ***Melden: Liberty and Welfare Rights*** – this second version of rights ethics conceived of human rights as intimately related to communities of people.
- A. I. Melden argued that having moral rights presupposes the capacity to show concern for others and to be accountable within a moral community.



- Melden's account allows for more “positive” *welfare rights*, which he defined as rights to community benefits needed for living a minimally decent human life.



Virtue Ethics, Self-Realization Ethics



Character, Virtues & Vices

- Character is the pattern of virtues (morally desirable features) in persons.
- Virtues are desirable habits or tendencies in action, commitment, motive, attitude, emotion, ways of reasoning, and ways of relating to others.
- Vices are morally undesirable habits or tendencies.



Virtue & Vice

- Words for specific *virtues*, both in engineering and in everyday life, include — for example, competence, honesty, courage, fairness, loyalty, and humility.
- Words for specific *vices* include: incompetence, dishonesty, cowardice, unfairness, disloyalty, and arrogance.



Aristotle's View

- Aristotle suggested that the moral virtues are habits of reaching a proper balance between extremes, whether in conduct, emotion, or desire.
- Virtues are tendencies to find the reasonable (golden) mean between the extremes of too much (excess) and too little (deficiency) with regard to particular aspects of our lives.



Aristotle's View (Example)

- Thus, **generosity** is the virtue lying between wasting one's resources (excess) and being miserly (deficiency).
- Again, **courage** is the mean between foolhardiness (the excess of rashness) and cowardice (the deficiency of self-control) in confronting dangers.



- The most important virtue is practical wisdom, that is, morally good judgment, which enables us to discern the mean for all the other virtues.



Virtue of Engineers

- The most comprehensive virtue of engineers is responsible professionalism.
- This umbrella virtue implies four (overlapping) categories of virtues:
 - ❖ public well-being,
 - ❖ professional competence,
 - ❖ cooperative practices, and
 - ❖ personal integrity.



1. Public-Spirited Virtues

- Public-spirited virtues are focused on the good of clients and the wider public.
- The minimum virtue is non-maleficence, that is, the tendency not to harm others intentionally.
- Engineering codes of professional conduct also call for beneficence, which is preventing or removing harm to others and, more positively, promoting the public safety, health, and welfare.



1. Public-Spirited Virtues (Contd.)

- Also important is a *sense of community* in the prospects for meaningful life within professional and public communities.
- **Generosity**, which means going beyond the minimum requirements in helping others, is shown by engineers who voluntarily give their time, talent, and money to their professional societies and local communities.
- Finally, **justice** within corporations, government, and economic practices is an essential virtue in the profession of engineering.



2. Proficiency Virtues

- Proficiency virtues are the virtues of mastery of one's profession, in particular mastery of the technical skills that characterize good engineering practice.



2. *Proficiency Virtues (Contd.)*

- The most general proficiency virtue is ***competence***: being well prepared for the jobs one undertakes.
- Another is ***diligence***: alertness to dangers and careful attention to detail in performing tasks.
- ***Creativity*** is especially desirable within a rapidly changing technological society.



3. Teamwork Virtues

- Teamwork virtues are those that are especially important in enabling professionals to work successfully with other people.



3. *Teamwork Virtues (Contd.)*

- They include *collegiality*, *cooperativeness*, *loyalty*, and *respect for legitimate authority*.
- Also important are *leadership* qualities that play key roles within authority-structured corporations, such as the responsible exercise of authority and the ability to motivate others to meet valuable goals.



4. Self-Governance

- Finally, self-governance virtues are those necessary in exercising moral responsibility



4. *Self-Governance (Contd.)*

- Some of them center on moral understanding and perception: for example, *self-understanding* and *good moral judgment*—what Aristotle calls practical wisdom.
- Other self-governance virtues center on commitment and on putting understanding into action: for example, *courage*, *self-discipline*, *self-respect*, and *integrity*.



Self – Realization Ethics

- Each of the preceding ethical theories leaves considerable room for self-interest, that is, for pursuing what is good for oneself.
- Thus, *utilitarianism* says that self-interest should enter into our calculations of the overall good;
- *rights ethics* says we have rights to pursue our legitimate interests;
- *duty ethics* says we have duties to ourselves;
- and *virtue ethics* links our personal good with participating in communities and social practices.



Self – Realization Ethics (Contd.)

- Self-realization ethics, however, gives greater prominence to *self-interest* and to *personal commitments* that individuals develop in pursuing self-fulfillment.
- As with the other ethical theories, we will consider two versions, depending on how the self (the person) is conceived:
 - ✓ community-oriented version,
 - ✓ ethical egoism



Community – Oriented Version

- The community-oriented version of self-realization ethics says that each individual ought to pursue self-realization, but it emphasizes the importance of caring relationships and communities in understanding self-realization.
- It emphasizes that we are social beings whose identities and meaning are linked to the communities in which we participate.



Community – Oriented Version (Contd.)

- This theme is expressed by F. H. Bradley (1826–1924): “The ‘individual’ apart from the community is an abstraction. It is not anything real, and hence not anything that we can realize. . . . I am myself by sharing with others.



Ethical Egoism

- Ethical egoism is a more *individualistic* version of self-realization ethics that says each of us ought always and only to promote our self-interest.
- The theory is ethical in that it is a theory about morality, and it is egoistic because it says the sole duty of each of us is to maximize our well-being.

