Jackson Hafele

EE 394

December 12, 2021

Ethics Essay

By following a code of ethics, it gives me a standard that I can always hold myself to. Without this, it would be easier for me to bend rules and ethics if I didn’t have a standard to compare issues with when they arise. By following a code of ethics, you also help to enable the people around you to follow a similar code. While some of their ethics and principles may vary, there is lots of value in discussing and establishing a code of ethics.

When I am faced when an ethical situation, the first thing I normally do is assess the problem and who is involved. By asking myself questions related to these two factors, I normally am able to come to a steady decision. For example, in the workplace with an ethical issue, there may be someone more capable of handling the issue or giving me advice, like a mentor or boss I work for. Instead of jumping to a conclusion quickly, I think there is a lot of benefit from stopping to ask basic questions like this. For the specific problem, this can vary more case to case. When considering how to handle ethical issues normally I fall back on my code of ethics and what I have learned in past experiences.

In class, we covered multiple ethical issues and held discussions on how they should be handled. One issue that I looked into for these discussions was an ethical problem surrounding the Amazon Echo and other smart home devices. This issue surrounded an accusation of a murder, where the police wanted to take evidence from the Amazon Echo based off of when music was playing in the house. Based on what time the music started, the police could counter the defendants claims on when he was at the house of the murder. Amazon declined to give up this information, so the police ended up turning to other smart home devices to find activity in the house. Another issue we discussed was surrounding Volkswagen’s fake emission tests. Volkswagen uploaded software to over 10 million cars to fake having a lower emission output than they actually had for their vehicles. This caused damage both to the environment and ended up giving people headaches due to the large output. Volkswagen ended up feigning ignorant and instead pushed the blame on to the factory workers.

Overall, most of the class had similar opinions on both of the ethical problems I was discussing. For the Amazon Echo issue, I believed that surrounding a murder trial, Amazon should have handed over the sensitive data if it meant protecting more lives by putting a wanted man in jail. I noted that it was hard to find where that line would be to start handing over data when requested, which was my main dilemma. Some classmates argued that to stay from this point and protect users to not hand over data at all. This would have been okay for the case since they found the data anyways through another device. This was one of the more divided issues that I saw covered. The Volkswagen problem was easier to agree upon though, since most classmates agreed Volkswagen was at fault. I proposed to fix this solution they could add stricter emission tests and watch out for these faults in the future. Still though, Volkswagen should have admitted faulty and been honest upfront, since there are large consequences to their actions. The other replies I read to this issue also agreed, since the factory workers were not to blame.

Based on the virtue of ethics we discussed in class, I think that the three most related to the Amazon Echo case were integrity, responsibility, and honesty. I believe that each of these virtues tie very closely to the sensitive subject of a murder trial and ethics. Both the police and Amazon have responsibility and integrity that they should follow to help deliver the guilty a sentence. I think that this is easier for the police to follow since they were already doing their job, so I think Amazon struggled to hold this up on their end. If they wanted to truly be honest and have integrity, I believe they would have released the users Amazon Echo data to be used as evidence in the case. While charity and fidelity help with holding up morals on something basic to follow like avoiding murder, I don’t think this issue of ethics is about that. Instead, I think it is focused on how smart devices can affect ethics and the situations that surround them. So, that is why I picked the three initial virtues of ethics that I did. I can not think of any other virtues that would apply to this case. This is mainly because the initial three encompass all of the values that I thought about when handling this issue.