# HUM 4441

# Engineering Ethics

## UNDERSTANDING ETHICAL PROBLEMS

# FOUR  Ethical Theories

Utilitarianism

Duty Ethics

Virtue Ethics

Rights Ethics

# Duty Ethics

Most people believe that **all human beings have some duties to other human beings.** Duties can be positive, such as the duty to look after one's children, or negative, such as the duty not to murder another human being.

These actions are our duties because they express **respect for persons**

Duty ethics contends that there are duties that should be performed (for example, the duty to treat others fairly or the duty not to injure others) **regardless of whether these acts lead to the most good.**

# Right Ethics

A decision is *ethically correct* if it **respects the right of other people**. So, respect is the keyword in explaining the right theory i.e. upholding the rights of others is the foundation of right theory.

Another important elements in right theory are Rights. There are several rights such as:

- Legal Rights
- Human rights
- Contractual rights

# Examples?

# Duty & Right Ethics - Relation

A Right is something as a human being or **something we are entitled to**.

A duty is something we are **obligated to do**.

# Criticism of Duty & Right Ethics

- First the basic rights of one person (or group) may conflict with the basic rights of **another group**.

- How do we decide whose rights have **priority**?

- They don't always account for the **overall good of society** very well.

# 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.

Concerned with the **whole of a person's life**, rather than particular episodes or actions.

Closely tied to personal character but can be **applied in engineering career**

# Criticism of Virtue Ethics

- Problems can arise with words that on the face **seem to be virtues**, but can actually lead to **vices**.

- Example: **Honor**

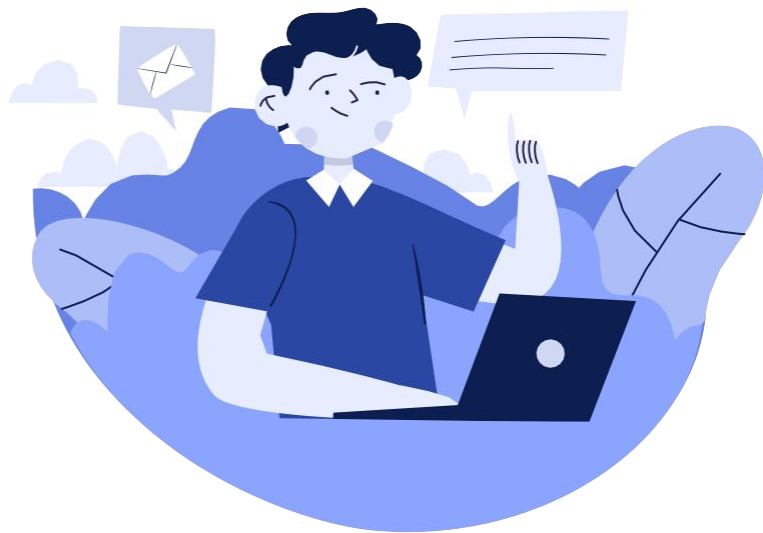# Personal vs. Corporate Morality

Questions??

- Is there a distinction between the ethics practiced by an individual and the ethics practiced by a corporation?
- Can a company truly be expected to display honesty or loyalty?

**Resolve:**
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?

# Thanks!

**Do you have any questions?**