

Tutorial 3 - Values & Virtue: Ethics in action

Scenario A: Going public

As a technical sales engineer, Anna is responsible for selling her company's integrated circuit test systems. Each of these systems costs approximately £1 million, and Anna's sales goals are to sell at least ten of these systems per quarter. The company is about to become a public limited company (PLC), and to do so, it must be profitable for five quarters in a row.

As the end of the fifth quarter approaches, Anna is one sale short of reaching her goal, so she tells her manager. He tells her that when he was a sales engineer, he would tell customers who he knew would soon be purchasing a system that they would receive a discount if they came to the factory, were shown the empty shell of a system that was not yet built, and signed paperwork documenting their acceptance of the unbuilt system as if it was already built. The order would then count as part of this quarter's profits, but the customer would not pay until next quarter.

Anna's manager explains that this practice of falsifying paperwork is now illegal, but it's a good way of meeting sales goals. He says he would look the other way if she did this to get a customer acceptance report. If she fails to meet her goal, the company's going public will be postponed at least for a year, so she won't receive dividends, nor will the other employees and shareholders.

1. Using consequentialism, how should Anna decide what to do? Work out the positives and negatives of each choice. What would the decision be? Do you agree with the decision?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of consequentialist ethical decision-making?

Scenario B – The Worm

A worm is a self-contained program that spreads through a computer network by taking advantage of security holes. In August 2003, the Blaster worm infected many Windows computers, causing them to reboot every few minutes.

Soon, another worm was exploiting the same security hole in Windows – called Nachi. But it was a benevolent worm – it located and destroyed copies of the Blaster worm. It also automatically downloaded from Microsoft a patch that would fix the security problem. Finally, it used the computer as a launching pad to seek out other Windows PCs with the security hole.

3. Using deontology, write a moral rule that you think would be appropriate for releasing worms.
4. Using your rule, was the action of the person who released Nachi morally right or wrong? Might there be another valid view about the situation, and what would that be?
5. List the strengths and weaknesses of deontology

Scenario C – Schwarz's theory of basic human values

6. Which side of the quadrant do you think aligns most with your values?
7. Compare with other people in your group. What are the differences?

Consequentialism

Consequentialism is based on two principles:

- Whether an act is right or wrong depends only on the results of that act
- The more good consequences an act produces, the better or more right that act

Act consequentialism looks at every single moral choice anew. So,

- A particular action is morally good only if it produces more overall good than any alternative action.

Rule consequentialism bases moral rules on their consequences. So,

- Whether acts are good or bad depends on moral rules
- Moral rules are chosen solely based on their consequences

So individuals should apply moral rules when making moral choices. The rules identify actions that would produce the best results if adopted by most people.

Deontology

Most of us have had experience when we're torn between what we want to do and what we ought to do. According to Kant, our focus should be on what we ought to do. Our sense of 'ought' is called *dutifulness* (deontology). A dutiful person feels compelled to act out of respect for a moral rule. What makes a moral rule appropriate? To answer this, Kant proposes the Categorical Imperative:

Categorical Imperative

- Act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to be universal moral laws
- Act so that you always treat both yourself and other people as ends in themselves, and never only as a means to an end.

Schwarz's theory of basic human values

