

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 one million pounds 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 they 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 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 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 going public will be postponed at least a year so she won't receive dividends nor will all the other employees and shareholders.

1. Using consequentialism, how should Anna decide what to do? Work out the positives and negatives of each choice and decide on the balance.
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses 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 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 on the basis of their consequences

So individual should apply rules to make moral choice. The rules are those that would produce the best results if adopted by most people.

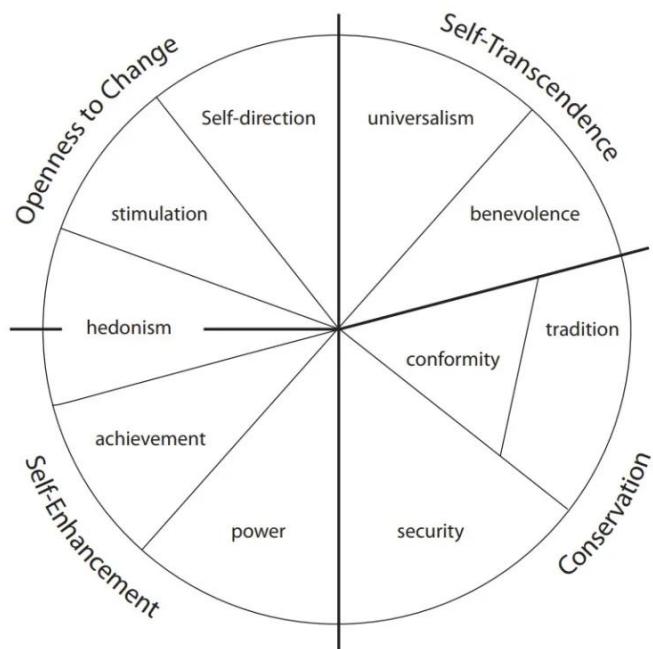
Deontology

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



Comments

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?

The decision here is whether to do something illegal or not in order to help the company. Using act consequentialism you would have to assess the negatives and positives of each choice and weigh them up against each other. If **Anna falsifies the paperwork** the *negatives* are that it is illegal and Anna, her manager & the company may have to go to court. They could be fined, Anna and her manager could lose their jobs and the company's reputation would be tarnished. The *positives* are that the company would go public and all the staff and shareholders would get dividends, the company's reputation would be enhanced. If **Anna does not falsify the paperwork** the *negatives* are that the company doesn't go public and has to wait another year. All the staff and shareholders won't get dividends for the year, and Anna may lose her job. The *positives* are that they have been honest, and the company has not yet met the conditions for becoming a PLC which might mean it's not the right time anyhow.

The right decision using consequentialism may well be to falsify the paperwork. It would depend on how highly the company would be valued on going public and what the likely dividends would be. The decision also depends on how big a fine would be for falsifying paperwork and how bad the reputational damage would be.

This doesn't feel like the morally right decision because it involves lying.

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses consequentialist ethical decision making?

Strengths of consequentialism

- A flexible system – can take account of any set of circumstances
- It's what people do – when they have to make a serious moral choice
- Practical and efficient – rule consequentialism is more practical

Weaknesses of consequentialism

- Act consequentialism is difficult to apply to real life, slow and difficult decision -making
- Future consequences are hard to predict
- Measuring and comparing the 'goodness' of consequences is very difficult
- It's easy to bias in favour of particular groups
- It ignores things we regard as ethically relevant (i.e. in the case above the importance of being told the truth)
- It doesn't take account of fairness of the result
- It can be inconsistent with human rights

3. Using deontology, write a moral rule that would be appropriate for releasing worms.

To analyse this moral problem from a deontological point of view we must think of an appropriate moral rule that treats everyone the same and that treats everyone as 'an end in themselves' i.e. a person's inherent value is not dependent on anything else. In this case the rule might be:

'Releasing harmful computer worms is always bad, but if a harmful computer worm is infecting the Internet and I can write a helpful worm that removes the harmful worm from

infected computers and shield them from future attacks, then I should write and release that worm, as long as recipients of the worm can choose whether or not it runs on their computer'

4. Was the action of person who released the Nachi worm morally right or wrong?
Using the above rule, it was wrong.

5. List the strengths and weaknesses of deontology

Strengths

- It is rule-based so it is easier to make decisions
- You don't have to predict future 'worth'/'happiness'
- It takes account of 'values' that are important and are not related to 'worth'/'happiness'
- It treats everyone as having value and treats everyone the same
- It gives credit for intentions and motivations

Weaknesses

- It is inflexible in that it treats everyone the same, sometimes might be considered unfair
- You have to write complex rules that take into account lots of different situations (like the law)
- You can't always imagine all the possible complex situations that might arise
- Treating everyone as an end in themselves means that you might not be able to make decisions in some situations, for instance drafting soldiers to go to war.
- It's difficult to make a decision when 2 rules conflict