



CSE3PPE / CSE5003

Professional Practices and Entrepreneurship in I.T.

Lecture 7

Summer 1 2023

Lecture 7

Ethics

(Part 1)



What is Ethics?

To begin this week's module, we start by asking some questions.

Have you ever thought about the process you personally go through for making decisions?

How do you work out the right decision to make? What do you base your decisions on?

Consider this

You are walking down the street and notice a wallet lying on the ground. You look around and cannot see who might have dropped it.

You pick it up to see if there might be some contact details of the owner. While looking through the cards, you notice five \$100 notes.

As you cannot find an address, you decide to take it to the local police station. Along the way, you consider removing one or all of the notes.

You are desperately short of the cash needed to pay rent this month. This would really help.

You could report the wallet as empty when you found it. No one would know.

What do you do?

Your ability to make a decision here might be a simple one. You hand it in as is.

Perhaps you are facing difficult circumstances, and this requires you to reconsider this option. If you are short of cash, perhaps you take one or all of the notes.

What internal processes are guiding your decision-making process here?

Consider this (2)

You are a software developer who has been working on developing a program for the company you work for. You are under a tight deadline to get the product finalised for launching.

Your manager has been putting you under enormous pressure to complete the required work. Along the way, you notice a major flaw in the security framework of the new program.

This was not in scope, and you were not required to address this. However not addressing this might risk the security of users' personal information.

Your manager will oversee a security review of the system before release, so you decide not to do anything and continue completing your work.

The product is finished and released. It is only then that you realise the flaw remains in the program.

Big

Decisions



The Good Place

The Netflix series The Good Place (2016-2020) explores many confronting topics around life, death, and how we live.

Watch the following video, then answer the questions as best you can.
(This video runs for 2 minutes and 5 seconds)

The Good Place



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfldNV22LQM>

The dilemma – what would YOU do?

If you were in control of the trolley, and could redirect the trolley from one track to save five workers, but in doing so, would cause the trolley to run over (and kill) a single worker, would you do it?

Yes,

because by changing tracks my actions will result in one person dying instead of five.
This is the morally right decision here.

No,

because by changing tracks my actions have resulted in killing a person.
This is not a morally right decision and that should never be okay.

The dilemma – what would YOU do?

What about the other scenario that was discussed in this video: would you harness the organs of a healthy person, resulting in their death, in order to save the lives of five others by okay?

Yes,

because by harnessing the organs of a healthy person, my actions will result in one person dying instead of five.
This is the morally right decision here.

No,

because by harnessing the organs of a healthy person to save five will result in killing a person. This is not a morally right decision and that should never be okay.

The dilemma – what would YOU do?

Did your answers change between the two scenarios?

Why did (or didn't) they change?

Why don't you just tell me the answer?

The scenarios from the previous video are sometimes called an 'impossible decision', one where there was no clear right or wrong option.

Thinking about how we make decisions challenges us to think about the many layers that make us human: what are the underlying values and beliefs that help us with our decision making, or the way we approach how we live?

The exploration of this, and the frameworks we use to guide our decision making is called **ethics**.

Why is this important?

Difficult decisions are a part of life.

You will be faced with difficult decisions that impact your family and those you love.

You will also be faced with making decisions in your working life. Some of these decisions may have significant implications to yourself and others.

Many of us around the world are facing difficult decisions around living with the pandemic.

How do I keep my family safe from COVID if I have to work in an environment that might increase my risk of contracting it? How can I earn income to keep my family (and myself) alive?

How do I look after loved ones (particularly those at higher risk such as the elderly) when I might be exposed or COVID positive? Is a life removed from contact with other people worth living?

The Good Place

The following video follows on from the previous dilemma outlined in The Good Place and outlines the challenges of ethical decision making (This video runs for 1 min 20 seconds)



Ethics in conflict

The scenarios outlined in The Good Place videos cover two important moral principles that appear in conflict:

Choosing to do what is likely to produce the best overall outcome for all those affected.

and

Choosing not to perform any action that would violate an individual person's rights.

How can we possibly navigate these questions?

How can we possibly navigate these questions?

One way might be to draw on sets of rules, or moral codes, for guidance.

However, many scenarios we face are not covered in these codes.

Decision making is complex with many factors to take into consideration. Some of these guidelines and moral codes might be in conflict with each other, making the decision process more difficult.

Gotta have faith?

Religious beliefs and religious practices are used by many people to provide guidance to approaching decision making.

These practices are more accurately defined as a **moral guide**.

Ethics seeks to delve deeper into understanding how we wish to live and what approaches can inform our decision making.

The analysis of morals, values, principles and purpose can mean that sometimes **we are at odds with the moral guidance** provided by institutions such as religions.

Ethics, morality and the law

Some people argue that abiding by the law is the most appropriate way of making ethical and morally sound decisions.

But there are many laws, such as the previous Marriage Act in Australia that many people believed was wrong.

Some laws are in conflict with other laws and principles, such as the rights of refugees in Australia. Despite being a signatory to the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 protocol, Australia has been criticised for establishing their own rules which many have argued are in conflict with the protocol and principles of the Convention.

If laws have been, and continue to be, found to be unjust, unethical, or morally wrong, can we use rules and laws as a basis for ethical decision making?

Watch: Ethics, morals, and the law

Laws, policies and procedures can all be in conflict with personal values and ethics.

Is being ethical the same as being moral? Am I acting ethically if I abide by the law?

These are big questions! The Ethics Centre provides a good explanation of the differences between each. This video runs for 5 mins and 13 seconds.

(source The Ethics Centre 2020)

Watch: Ethics, morals, and the law



Navigating

Ethics



Navigating ethics

There are three main theoretical approaches to navigating ethics.

1. Consequentialism
2. Deontology/rights based (and Kant's Categorical Imperative)
3. Virtue ethics

Consequentialism

This is a viewpoint that regardless of how a decision is made, it is the **impact** of the decision that is most important.

Applying this principle means you do whatever you can to ensure you get the best outcome. Sometimes this can be referred to as acting to maximise happiness.

Almost all action movies have a hero that applies a level of consequentialism – it doesn't matter how many 'baddies' might die/get injured, as long as you rescue the lost kitten/save the damsel.

Deontology/rights based

This viewpoint prioritises the rights of each human, even if this might not produce the best outcome.

The movie action hero would need to rescue the kitten/save the damsel without breaking any laws or hurting anyone, or perhaps from abiding by moral principles such as 'do unto others as you would be done by'.

- Kant's Categorical Imperative

While there are slight variations to each of the three main theoretical approaches, there is one within Deontology that is worthy of discussion: Kant's Categorical Imperative.

Kant's philosophy challenges us to consider ethical dilemmas by placing them in the context of the kind of society we'd like to live in.

To do this, Kant requires you to base your decisions on the concept of you being comfortable with everyone around you making that exact same decision.

For our action movie hero, we might ask, would I want to live in a world where everybody beat up the baddies in order to complete the rescue? Or would I want to live in a world where everybody did not beat up the baddies in the process of rescuing the kitten/damsel? Our own answer to these questions would inform our decision making process.

Virtue Ethics

This viewpoint considers the concept of being virtuous, that is, by embracing concepts such as being charitable, honest, generous, compassionate and patient.

In dealing with the 'baddies', the movie action hero might need to embrace different approaches. Perhaps a trade is negotiated. Decisions are made on the basis of fair play, compassion, and being just.

Watch: Massolit

Consequentialism, Deontology and Virtue Ethics

Watch the following video from Professor Adrian Moore (University of Oxford) talk about the differences in consequentialism, deontology and virtue ethics.

The video runs for 4 minutes and 1 second.

Watch: Professor Adrian Moore



Source YouTube Massolit (2020)

Which one is best?

Instead of debating which approach is best, consider how each approach challenges us to **think**.

Ethics and moral dilemmas

When considering a moral dilemma, applying each of the approaches may lead us to the decision.

In other circumstances, each approach might provide us with competing recommended decisions.

General principles for progressing through a moral dilemma are:

1. Awareness of the relevant facts
2. Knowledge of the moral principles/rules of thumb (eg it is wrong to lie/steal/cheat)
3. Correct deliberation and decision

The Doing Ethics Technique

Acting ethically might seem to be a simple premise, but this is difficult to clearly determine. McDermid (2015) suggests it is more important to apply and engage in ethical thinking.

The Doing Ethics Technique is one approach to help provide structure to the practice of engaging in ethical thinking.

The Doing Ethics Technique

The Doing Ethics Technique provides a framework for identifying, assessing and coming to a decision on an ethical dilemma.

There are clear steps to follow, in order:

1. What is going on?
2. What are the facts?
3. What are the issues?
4. Who is affected?

(Simpson, Nevile and Burmeister (2003) in McDermid (2015) p12)

The Doing Ethics Technique (cont)

With this stage completed, the following steps help to identify ethical issues, implications, and options:

1. What are the ethical issues and implications?
2. What can be done about it?
3. What options are there?
4. Which option is best – and why?

(Simpson, Nevile and Burmeister (2003) in McDermid (2015) p12)

Ethical missteps

Ethical decision making is a tough process, and there are examples where well-intentioned efforts at being ethical have gone awry.

Efforts can be derailed by

- Ignorance of the relevant facts
- Moral delusion
- Poor judgement / deliberation
- Thoughtlessness
- Lack of opportunity/constraint
- Lack of motivation/weakness of will

Additional Reading/Viewing

The Good Place

Interested in more insights from The Good Place? Check these out.

Mother Forkin' Morals with Dr. Todd May

Part 1: Existentialism (4 mins 11 seconds) https://youtu.be/fvfLU4kY_8A

Part 2: Utilitarianism (4 mins 34 seconds) <https://youtu.be/YuVreCbQOwc>

Part 3: Psychological Egoism (4 mins 55 seconds) <https://youtu.be/wtplsRk8tzg>

Part 4: Deontology (4 mins) https://youtu.be/2S_XuJTOEJY

Ethical Decision Making

The Ethics Centre (3 minutes and 29 seconds) <https://youtu.be/n0uwTBrgqxl>

The Milgram Experiment

The downside from not given full consideration to ethical decision making: The Milgram Experiment.

This is a confronting replication of a 1960s thought experiment around our willingness to go along with the status quo, just because we have been told to.

This video runs for 10 minutes and 29 seconds. <https://youtu.be/Xxq4QtK3j0Y>

Thank you