**Module 5: Ethical Egoism**

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**Ethical Egoism**

Ethical egoism is the moral theory that individuals should act in their own self-interest, meaning decisions are made based on personal benefit rather than the greater good (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023, January 9). While this can sometimes result in morally acceptable outcomes, it can also justify harmful behaviors for personal gain at the expense of others.

In software development, ethical egoism can influence product decisions. Software engineers following this framework may write code that benefits themselves rather than the end-users or their team. Two examples of this are data privacy and product development choices.

**Data Privacy**

Data privacy has long been a significant ethical concern as software continues to evolve, especially with increasing volumes of sensitive information being processed and stored. Software engineers are responsible for following strict ethical guidelines to ensure user data is protected and not exploited for unethical purposes (Zhao, H., 2024).

From the perspective of ethical egoism, a software engineer might not genuinely prioritize user privacy, but they may still comply with these ethical standards to protect their career and reputation. In this case, the motivation stems from self-interest—avoiding legal or professional consequences—rather than a genuine concern for the users’ well-being.

While the end result is positive, as user data remains secure, the underlying motivation is personal gain rather than a commitment to ethical principles. This raises questions about the sustainability of ethical practices if personal incentives change.

**Product Development Decisions**

Product development involves collaboration across various departments, all working together to create a product that balances user needs with the company’s objectives. The challenge is to align these interests in a way that satisfies both end-users and the organization.

An ethical egoist software engineer, however, might prioritize developing features that enhance their personal bonuses or career advancement, rather than focusing on what benefits the company or the end-users (Mahmoud, M., 2022, July). Their decisions may be driven by short-term financial gains, which could result in immediate success for both the engineer and potentially even the company.

However, this self-serving approach can lead to long-term negative consequences. Features developed primarily for personal benefit may neglect user needs, eventually leading to decreased user satisfaction. As users become dissatisfied, the product's success diminishes, causing harm to the company’s reputation and long-term profitability. What seemed like short-term gains ultimately undermines the company’s future success, highlighting the risks of prioritizing personal interest over ethical responsibility.

**My Opinion**

In my option, there are situations where acting in self-interest benefit the engineer while aligning with ethical goals. An example of this would be writing high quality code. An engineer who writes quality code in hopes of enhancing their reputation and getting a promotion could also benefit team members as it will make the code more readable and easier to understand.

I think that engineers can use ethical egoism after considering the out come. If personal gain also benefits the end user then there is no harm done. However, if there are ethical concerns or potential harm, then engineers must go beyond personal interest and consider a more utilitarianism approach.

**Conclusion**

Although ethical egoism can sometimes result in ethical behavior, its focus on self-interest often clashes with the ethical standards expected in software engineering. While it can produce positive outcomes, ethical egoism does not place priority on the well-being of end users and society. As a result, other ethical frameworks are more closely aligned with the responsibilities of software engineers and should be practiced instead.

**References**

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