



Project Management & Engineering Practice (GENG5505)

Moral frameworks: Ethical theories & how to use them continues.....
(Week 10a) - Lecture 16th – 7 May, 2024



Virtue ethics

- Resurrected in 1970's as a reaction against a legalistic approach to ethics;
 - A number of philosophers in recent years have argued for a virtue-based moral theory, in addition to or instead of the deontological and utilitarian approaches;
- Why?
- The art of making good or sound decisions involves the exercise of *judgment*;
 - Those who emphasize virtue, argue that moral rules do not solve real moral problems because they must always be applied, and any application requires judgment, which cannot be automatic, and which requires a virtuous person to make the judgment correctly.



Virtue ethics ...continues

- Consistent with Aristotelian (classical Greek) approach that guiding purpose of life should be the quest for goodness and virtue;
- Aristotle divided virtues into two basic kinds:
 - The intellectual virtues: The highest of which is wisdom, result from the proper functioning of the higher or intellectual aspects of human beings.
 - The moral virtues: Derive from the proper control by reason of the bodily appetites and inclinations. We are not born virtuous. We become virtuous by practice.
- For Aristotle, "virtuous professional is the successful professional, just as the virtuous life is the happy life" (Stovall P., 2011).



Virtue ethics.....continues

- 'Man is the measure of all things' - Anthropocentric view
- Whereas consequentialism and deontology determine what makes a right act right, virtue ethics takes a normative stance on how to go about achieving something of moral worth;
- What is right is that that would be carried out by virtuous person.
Or, what a virtuous organisation or marketer would do!!



5

Virtue ethics.....continues

- "Your intellect is the seat of knowledge; your will the seat of virtue: Your intellect sets up targets; your will shoots the arrow of your choices and acts";
- Ethics can be taught, but ethical conduct cannot, it must be practiced;
- All the theoretical knowledge in the world about ethics will not make you a virtuous person/manager/marketer unless you practice".

William Oleksak, New York Times (February 26, 1989), E6.



6

Virtue theory in summary

- Concentrates on the person who performs the act;
- Particularly, focuses on the character traits of the person or the character development of the person;
- The possession and development of a good character of the moral virtues will lead a person to do the right thing.



7

Egoism (Max Stirner 1806 – 1856)

- Individualistic, self-centred
- Strong sense of self to exclusion of others
- Strong notion of independence
- All activities directed toward self-satisfaction, not God, nor anyone else
- Environment - The earth belongs to those who know how to use it
- Others exist for common use of the 'other'
- Often referred to as 'individualistic anarchism'



8

Humanism: (16th – 19th Centuries)

- Montaigne, Descartes, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Constant, Tocqueville etc.
- Three principal theses:
 - Recognition of the equal dignity of everyone
 - Altruism (elevation of the particular human being other than me)
 - Preference for freedom of action
- Humanism created based on the interaction of these three
 - My freedom cannot be enjoyed at expense of your freedom or dignity
 - My autonomy is limited by equality in the community in which I belong etc.
- Humanism provides for the promotion of humanity (often above animals and environment)

Relativism (Moral)

- Moral values are relative to a particular environment, i.e. they are not universal and they are not absolute;
- Builds upon notion, 'When in Rome do as the Romans do' (the Romans are the correct moral judges of behaviour in Rome!);
- A view about the domain over which any moral position ranges (i.e., in this culture this should be done or this is accepted (consider rights of females and children in some cultures, the norm of bribery, acceptance of the death penalty etc.);
- Relativism stands in opposition to 'absolutism', the view that there is a universally correct moral position the domain of which is not relative to anything;
- Also doesn't negate 'moral pluralism' – multiple views.

Eastern Philosophy visited

| Confucianism (551 - 479 BCE) | Buddhism (563 - 483 BCE) | Islam |
|---|---|--|
| Similar to Kant's deontology | Four noble truths: suffering (ageing, decay, death), cause of suffering (craving, hatred, delusion), release from suffering, 'the path'. | Theistic |
| Blended with taoist connection with nature and buddhist thoughts on after-life | Noble eightfold path: right view, right thought, right action, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration | Metaphysics - God, the world, the individual soul, interrelations of these, good and evil, free-will and life after death |
| Strong emphasis on developing character, purity of heart, good conduct, practical wisdom & proper social relationships | What determines 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad' are mental factors associated with action and impact on well-being of others. | Concepts of interest: appearance and reality, human origin and destiny, truth and error, space and time, permanence and change, eternity and immortality |
| If one possesses following values one becomes a gentleman/woman (Chuen-Tzu): Li (etiquette), Hsia (love within the family), Yi (righteousness), Xin (honesty), Jen (love, goodness and humanity), Chung (loyalty), Shu (altruism) | Protection of environment also protects the mind. Not because of sentience. | Highest ideals: Life, eternity, unity, power, truth, beauty, justice, love and goodness |
| | | God has implanted these ideals in our being |
| | | Life is about pursuit of that that is in harmony with the essence of God |

How (1)?

- Develop a list of questions that reflect various ethical theories that can aid managers in determining whether a particular contemplated action is ethical or not;
- Recognise that there are sometimes conflicts among various ethical principles that imply different and sometimes competing positions. Number of conflicts increases as number of stakeholders increases.

How (2)?

- Q1. Does action violate the law? (Legal test)
- Q2. Is action contrary to widely accept moral obligations (duties of fidelity, gratitude, justice, non-maleficence, beneficence? (Duties test)
- Q3. Is it likely that any major damages to people or organisations will result from the contemplated action? (Consequences test)
- Q4. Is there a satisfactory alternative action that produces equal or greater benefits to the parties affected than the proposed action? (Utilitarian test)
- Q5. Does action violate any other special duties i.e., protect consumers and provide safe products? (Special obligations test)
- Q6. Is the intent of the contemplated action harmful? (Motives test)

Murphy et al., 2006, Ethical Reasoning and Marketing Decisions



13

How (3)?

- Q7. Does contemplated action infringe upon rights of consumer (& other stakeholders) in any way? (Rights test)
- Q8. Does the contemplated action leave another person (or sentient being less well-off? (Justice test)
- Q9. Can the contemplated action be considered sustainable in that it does not negatively impact upon future generations? (Sustainable test)

Murphy et al., 2006, Ethical Reasoning and Marketing Decisions



14

Reading week 10a

Stovall P., 2011, Professional Virtue and Professional Self-Awareness: A case study in Engineering Ethics, *Sci Eng Ethics*, 17:109–132



15