

Essay on Ethics:

Ethics are a tricky thing to navigate when dealing with engineering problems. Whether for better or for worse, most people honestly believe they're doing what's best. However, we start to run into issues when you're asking whose definition of what's best should be used, and what happens when disagreements occur. To solve this issue, companies create a code of ethics, which guides their decisions and makes sure employees are held to the same standards, with a shared set of values. In other words, a code of ethics exists to hold employees to the same standards and show the values that employees are supposed to uphold and defer towards. When making decisions, it's important to take into consideration how closely they align with your values and what you uphold to be ethical. While ideally, all codes of ethics align towards an overarching guide that leads to the "good" path, we all know that this is not realistic. Because of this, when a conflict occurs, one needs to consider personal ethics too. When in an ethical dilemma, it's important to consider what conflicts. If a personal ethical guideline conflicts with an employer's policy, careful consideration is needed before deciding. There's quite a few factors to consider when making any ethical decisions. From internal conflicts to federal laws, there's always something that needs to be considered when making ethical decisions. For an extreme example, vigilante justice is always something studied for its ethical implications. On one hand, personal ethics of "doing the right thing" and "holding people accountable" are fulfilled, but most times, some sort of law is broken. These are factors that need to be considered.

In class, we talked about profit ethics. Employees of a company have a responsibility to the shareholders and an expectation to make a profit, but ethics need to be considered at every turn. For example, when a product can be made more cheaply but will infringe upon environmental or labor ethics, there exists a decision to be made. Obviously, not all companies value profits the same, and as such, these ethics need to be individually considered. An example case of this is when Apple outsources to Foxconn in China. While this allows for cheaper and faster production than US based methods, Apple has gotten into some trouble because of Foxconn's perceived labor violations and workers rights issues. This is a classic example of how a company has expanded profits in questionably ethical ways. This led to an ethical investigation, if Apple was putting profits over workers rights and laws. Ethically speaking, according to most ethical frameworks, human life is more important. Using IEEE ethics as an example, it cites "to hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public, to strive to comply with ethical design and sustainable development practices, and to disclose promptly factors that might endanger the public or the environment." Apple ignored this completely if the news is to be trusted, and as such, face investigation and possible disciplinary action.

Let's take a look at an example of ethics being applied to a situation. Imagine if you will, a project that's slightly behind schedule. We know there's a major bug in the code that affects a small subset of users, but most will go unaffected. Do we push out the code with the bug to meet deadlines, or do we risk profits and timelines to fix the bug? This is tricky, because it's

actually a fairly common situation in the software industry. First, we must consider the implications of the bug. If it poses serious risk to individuals or safety, the IEEE ethical code tells us to reject pushing entirely, since unnecessary risk is to be avoided. What if it only causes frustration with the user? Then we can turn to the 5 Ps of ethical power, namely perspective. We need to understand what is more important. Yes, there will be cases where the timeline is more important than the bug, such as if an additional fix or a temporary fix can be applied, or the error is insignificant to a very large majority of users. So, as for recommending a course of action, there are cases to push the flawed code, and normally, it is more important to have pride in one's work, and to not release flawed code, but ethically speaking, one must consider if one can do it safely, and if it is the best course of action. Then, it would be allowed.

The ethics discussed in our class were much more business oriented than my personal ethics. I was raised to try and do the right thing, and beyond that, I've not considered much more. It matches more of the 5 Ps of ethics, as it focuses on more human traits, and unconscious mannerisms. Compare this to IEEE ethics which are almost entirely focused on business and industry ethics. There are different ethics for different situations and different people. They're alike in sharing similar values but differ in specificity and scope. A consensus is possible, if the overall values are shared.

Three ethics selected from the virtue of ethics (as defined by the Greeks), are kindness, patience and humility. Kindness is to show compassion to others, simply put. This can be anything from making sure others are considered to going out of one's way to help people. Patience is taking time to wait and to consider before doing. It's using time to better approach decisions. Humility is to recognize others and to make sure that you're not taking full credit or having an inflated ego. These 3 virtues were chosen to apply to business ethics, because they're not traditional values one thinks when in corporate America. When taking into consideration business decisions such as finances, profits, and other more traditional business values, one can sometimes forget the simpler aspects of human decisions. Remembering to keep these 3 virtues in decisions can lead to better, more ethical decisions that take people into account instead of just organizations. There might exist other ethical virtues to apply to business problems, but because of the vague nature of the virtues, it's hard to narrow down specific ones. So long as one considers humanistic implications, one is considering ethical virtues in the decisions.