

COM6655 Professional Issues

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Introduction to Ethics (Part 3)

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Overview

- Introduction
- Definitions
- Western Ethical Thought
 - Utilitarianism, Intuitionism, Duty ethics, Rights ethics, Virtue ethics
- Ethical Problem Solving
- Summary and Conclusions

Comparison of ethical theories

Comparison of ethical theories

- **Intuitionism** is a good model of everyday moral judgement, but principles not always self-evident.
- **Kantian ethics** involves a concept of democratic justice; this protects the innocent against arguments of social utility, a flaw of **utilitarianism**.
- **Kantian ethics** tells us to treat all human beings as ends; so it cannot explain why moral obligations to relations and friends are stronger than to other people.

Comparison: continued

- **Duty ethics** and **rights ethics** have general problems; what if the basic rights of one person (or group) conflict with those of another?
- Resolution of conflict is a problem for all of the above.
- **Virtue ethics** is harder to apply in professional context but still raises relevant questions (e.g., is this action honest? responsible? loyal to my employer?).
- A strength of both the consequential (**utilitarian**) approach, and the **deontological** (**Kantian**) approach is their apparent simplicity.
- In summary, no ethical theory is perfect - but all provide an interesting perspective on ethical dilemmas.

Ethical problem solving

Ethical problem solving

- There is no 'algorithm', but following the steps below may be useful.
- Identify the major role players and stakeholders.
 - Individuals, corporations. Stakeholders are those that have something to lose (or win).
- Identify the factual issues
 - What was done, and by whom?
- Identify the conceptual issues
 - Conceptual issues relate to the application of ideas e.g. what distinguishes a bribe from an acceptable gift?
- Identify the moral issues
 - Different moral philosophical theories provide different perspectives on ethical dilemmas.

Summary and conclusions

- **Moral philosophy** is philosophical inquiry about norms or values, ideas of right and wrong, good and bad, what should be done and what should not be done.
- **Ethics** is the philosophical discussion of assumptions about right and wrong, good and bad, considered as general ideas and applied in the life of individuals.
- Ethical dilemmas occur when one or more moral principles are in conflict.

Summary (cont'd)

- We have considered different philosophical theories of moral standards: utilitarianism, intuitionism, duty ethics, rights ethics, virtue ethics.
- They offer different perspectives of ethical problems.
- Moral philosophy will not solve practical problems by telling you 'what to do'.
- But it can show up some confusions, and help you to think more clearly about the issues.