PHI334 : Sep 25 – Exploring the Application of Ethical Theories

Today we are going to discuss how the moral theories we learned, deontology and utilitarianism and virtue ethics, can be applied to real world, though imagined, ethical dilemmas. This is basically a chance for you to practice your ethical thinking using the theories we learned. A part of the exam will present you with an ethical dilemma and then ask you to pick the best theory to analyze it through and then perform the analysis. As such today is a good chance to practice that.

Ethical Dilemmas

Here are the ethical dilemmas I have. #### 1. Utilitarianism Dilemmas:

- **Dilemma 1: Autonomous Vehicles Decision Making:** Autonomous vehicles are programmed to avoid collisions and minimize harm. In a scenario where an unavoidable collision is imminent, should the vehicle prioritize the safety of its passengers or pedestrians? Utilitarianism might argue for a solution that minimizes the overall harm, possibly weighing the number of individuals involved, their ages, and other factors to calculate the greatest happiness or least pain.

- **Dilemma 2: Resource Allocation in Healthcare:** When resources are scarce, such as life-saving medical equipment or interventions, how should they be allocated? Should priority be given to those with the greatest chance of survival or to those who are most in need? Utilitarianism would evaluate which allocation method would result in the highest overall wellbeing, perhaps favoring saving more lives or improving overall quality of life.

- **Dilemma 3: Privacy vs. Security:** To what extent should individual privacy be compromised to ensure collective security? Utilitarianism might argue for the compromise of individual privacy if it significantly enhances the overall security and wellbeing of the majority, such as through surveillance programs aimed at preventing terrorist attacks.

- **Dilemma 4: Animal Testing for Medical Research:** Is it ethically acceptable to use animals for testing to develop life-saving medications for humans? A utilitarian approach might argue that if animal testing leads to the development of medications that alleviate significant suffering or save many human lives, it is ethically justified.

2. Kantianism Dilemmas:

- **Dilemma 5: Lying to Protect Others:** Is it morally acceptable to tell a lie to protect someone else from harm? Kantian ethics, emphasizing duty and absolute moral rules, would typically argue that lying is inherently wrong, regardless of the consequences, and one should uphold the duty of truthfulness.

- **Dilemma 6: Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide:** Is it morally permissible to assist someone in ending their life if they are suffering from a painful and incurable disease? Kantian ethics would likely argue against euthanasia and assisted suicide as it involves treating a person merely as a means to an end (the end being the cessation of suffering) and not as an end in themselves.

- **Dilemma 7: Intellectual Property and Access to Medications:** Should intellectual property rights be upheld even if it means limiting access to life-saving medications in impoverished countries? Kantianism might argue for respecting intellectual property rights as a matter of duty, emphasizing the rights of creators and the importance of law and order.

- **Dilemma 8: Civil Disobedience:** Is it morally acceptable to break the law to protest unjust policies or to bring about social change? Kantian ethics generally maintains that one has a moral duty to obey just laws, and breaking the law is inherently wrong, even for a just cause.

3. **Virtue Ethics Dilemmas:**

- **Dilemma 9: Whistleblowing:** Is it morally right to expose organizational wrongdoings, risking one's career and personal relationships? Virtue ethics might focus on the character traits exhibited by the whistleblower, such as courage and honesty, and whether the act of whistleblowing is consistent with leading a virtuous life.

- **Dilemma 10: Charitable Giving:** How much should one give to charity, and should one publicize their charitable donations? Virtue ethics might emphasize the development of generous and compassionate character traits and might consider publicizing donations if it encourages others to give but would caution against doing so for self-aggrandizement.

- **Dilemma 11: Fair Trade and Ethical Consumption:** Should consumers prioritize buying fair trade and ethically produced products even if they are more expensive? Virtue ethics would consider the moral character of the consumer, promoting virtues like fairness and compassion, and encouraging ethical consumption as a way to cultivate moral character.

- **Dilemma 12: Professional and Personal Boundary in Care Professions:** To what extent should care professionals, like doctors or social workers, maintain professional boundaries, and is it ever acceptable to form personal relationships with clients or patients? Virtue ethics would focus on the virtues associated with care professions, such as empathy and kindness, and would weigh these against the virtues associated with maintaining professional integrity and objectivity.

Discussion:

Utilitarianism, Kantianism, and Virtue Ethics provide different perspectives on ethical dilemmas. Utilitarianism emphasizes the consequences of actions and seeks to maximize overall happiness or minimize suffering. Therefore, dilemmas suited for utilitarianism often involve complex scenarios where the outcomes

impact a large number of individuals, and where calculating overall happiness or suffering is challenging.

Kantianism, on the other hand, is deontological, focusing on duties, rules, and intentions, and holds that some actions are inherently right or wrong, regardless of their consequences. Thus, dilemmas that are best suited for Kantianism often involve conflicts between duties and the potential benefits of violating them, emphasizing the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions and the importance of moral laws and duties.

Virtue Ethics, diverging from both consequentialism and deontology, emphasizes moral character and virtues. It considers what a virtuous person, someone who has developed good moral character, would do in a given situation. Dilemmas appropriate for Virtue Ethics typically involve questions about moral character, the development of virtues, and the role of moral exemplars.

When applying these ethical frameworks to the dilemmas mentioned, it is important to delve into the nuances and complexities of each dilemma and explore the reasons, justifications, and implications of different ethical choices, considering the broader societal, individual, and contextual factors involved. This approach will allow for a rich, multifaceted discussion on ethics, illuminating the strengths and limitations of each ethical framework in addressing real-world moral problems.

Conclusion:

In the modern world, ethical dilemmas are omnipresent, and the diversity of such dilemmas requires a comprehensive understanding of various ethical frameworks. Utilitarianism, Kantianism, and Virtue Ethics offer distinct lenses to evaluate and navigate moral problems, each with its unique insights, principles, and challenges. By exploring a variety of dilemmas through these frameworks, one can gain a deeper appreciation for the multifaceted nature of ethics and the ongoing quest for moral clarity in an ever-evolving world.

This exploration facilitates not only academic understanding but also practical wisdom, aiding individuals in making informed, thoughtful, and moral decisions in their daily lives. The contemplation of these dilemmas contributes to the ongoing dialogue on ethics, fostering ethical awareness, reflection, and discourse in an increasingly interconnected and complex world.