

Task Two: Ethics



Overview

An ethical decision is one that upholds principles of action or ethical principles.

Some Key Terms from class:

1. **Ethics** is a discipline that involves arriving at moral standards that regulate 'right' and 'wrong' conduct.
2. **Ethical** principles are guidelines or moral standards that serve to guide individual and collective action by incorporating commonly-held morals, values, and beliefs.
3. **Morals** refer to rules that prescribe what an individual or society feels is 'right' and 'wrong' action.
4. **Values** refer to ideas about what a society believes to be good, desirable, or attractive.
5. **Beliefs** are the collection of convictions one accepts as true, actual, or valid.
6. **Negative duties, obligations, or rights** describe action from which we must refrain. Most ethical duties are negative duties. For example, the obligation not to steal.
7. **Positive duties, obligations, or rights** describe duties or actions that we are obliged to perform. There are far fewer positive duties. For example, a policeman is bound by oath to 'protect and serve'. Another example is business's responsibility to its stakeholders, discussed below.

What is Ethics?

Consider this: Again, you find yourself living in a cave in prehistoric times, collecting berries and bartering them for the other things you need.

One day, a migrating prehistoric family settles in a nearby cave and decides that it, too, will collect berries. What's more, they brought with them an exciting new invention that has emerged farther along the mountain range where you live: the 'wheel'.

You quickly find out that this new invention revolutionizes berry collection - and soon you find that your neighbors are collecting so many berries, it is becoming harder and harder for you to find your own. Furthermore, you are afraid of what over-picking berries may mean to the local wildlife. With less berries, the hunter will catch fewer and fewer animals, which means that there will be fewer sandals and baskets. Your neighbor's relentless pursuit of berries will spell disaster for everyone. So what do you do? What should you do?

As humans started to organize into bigger and bigger communities, they needed ways to ensure that people treated each other, and their environment, in a certain way. They needed a way to let everyone know what 'right' and 'wrong' were in any number of situations. They formed mechanisms to ensure that people in society treated each other in a way everyone agreed was acceptable.

People started to codify rules for how people are to treat one another into laws. But sometimes, laws aren't enough. For example, what if you have the opportunity to do something you know is wrong, but it's not against the law?

Today, we have sets of guidelines and standards that help people know how to behave or act in certain situations. These guidelines and standards about how to behave in one's 'place of living' have evolved for thousands of years - and were given its current name, 'ethics', by ancient Greek theorists.

The work of ethicists through the centuries can in many ways be distilled into the few simple rules presented below. These rules, considered together, can help anyone make decisions about the 'right' thing to do in life - and in business:

The moral rights principle: This is the principle that states people should be treated as 'autonomous' free humans with basic rights. People's rights and freedom to decide for themselves on decisions affecting their own lives should always be respected.

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The practical principle: This is the principle that states that people should be comfortable if their actions or behavior guided all future action, or became some sort of universal law. 'Right' decisions are those that one would want others in the same situation to always make.

The utilitarian principle: This principle states that people should act in a way that maximizes the positive impact of decisions, and minimizes the harmful impact, for all parties affected by their behavior or decisions.

Decision-making in Your World, Today

Take notes below on the optional teacher-led, in-class exercises:

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Ethics in New City

You will face ethical issues in the Virtual Team Challenge business simulation that are reminiscent of the ones you might encounter in real life, and the business world. In VTC: Spill!, you can be assured that if you follow the three ethical principles outlined above (the moral rights rule, the practical rule, and the utilitarian rule) you will always make the right decision when faced with an ethical dilemma. It is crucial that you remember these guidelines and make your decisions in New City - and in life -- accordingly.

