ETHICAL THEORIES

OUTLINE

- Authority Theories
- Ethical Relativism
- Egoism
- Descriptive ethics and Normative ethics
- Types of Normative Ethics
  - Virtue Ethics
  - Utilitarianism
  - Deontology
- The Right Model
- IEEE Code of Ethics

AUTHORITY THEORIES

- Authority theories are typically held in a religious context where ethics are based on a set of scriptures, theological interpretation of the scriptures, or a priesthood/scholars who are regarded as competent in interpreting the scriptures.

- The idea is that what is good is what God says is good. In practice, however, we depend on a representative of God to tell us what is good or consult from the scriptures

- Authority would not tell us to do bad things, then it is clear that we have a criterion of good and bad

ETHICAL RELATIVISM

- Cultures differ widely in their moral practices.

- Ethical relativism is the theory that holds that morality is relative to the norms of one's culture. That is, whether an action is right or wrong depends on the moral norms of the society in which it is practiced.

- The same action may be morally right in one society but be morally wrong in another.

- For the ethical relativist, there are no universal moral standards -- standards that can be universally applied to all peoples at all times. The only moral standards against which a society's practices can be judged are its own.

- If ethical relativism is correct, there can be no common framework for resolving moral disputes or for reaching agreement on ethical matters among members of different societies.

ETHICAL RELATIVISM

- Most ethicists reject the theory of ethical relativism.

- It may be the case that some moral beliefs are culturally relative whereas others are not. Certain practices, such as customs regarding dress and decency, may depend on local custom whereas other practices, such as slavery, torture, or political repression, may be governed by universal moral standards and judged wrong despite the many other differences that exist among cultures. Simply because some practices are relative does not mean that all practices are relative.

EGOISM

- Egoist theories hold that what is morally right derives from our own self-interest.

- Ethical egoism introduces the prescriptive force, the ought, into egoism.

- One version is based on two credible premises:

    - It is rational to act in our own self-interest,

    - We ought to act rationally.

    - If we accept the two premises, then we ought to act in our own self-interest.

PROBLEMS WITH EGOIST THEORIES

- There are two main problems with egoist theories.

- First they do not allow for conflict resolution

- Second they do not take into account our fellow feelings, our feelings of sympathy and commiseration.

NORMATIVE VS. DESCRIPTIVE ETHICS

- Descriptive ethics: Seeks to describe how people Behave and/or what sorts of moral standards they Claim to follow.

- Non-evaluative

- Normative ethics: Seeks to create or evaluate moral Standards.

- It is an attempt to figure out what People should do or whether their current moral Behavior is reasonable.

THREE TYPES OF NORMATIVE ETHICS

- **Consequentialism** -- look at "ends" or consequences of what we do

- **Deontological** – adheres to independent moral rules or duties; motives behind certain actions are right or wrong instead of focusing on the results (Duty-base)

- **Virtue ethics-** is person's character based rather than action based: it looks at the **virtue** or moral character of the person carrying out an action, rather than at **ethical** duties and rules, or the consequences of particular actions

VIRTUE THEORY (ETHICS OF CHARACTER)

- **Virtue ethics** emphasizes the role of one's character and the virtues that one's character embodies for determining or evaluating ethical behavior.

- In virtue ethics, morality stems from the identity and/or character of the individual, rather than being a reflection of the actions (or consequences) of the individual.

- Possessing the virtue in virtues ethics, is what makes one moral, and one's actions are a mere reflection of one's inner morality

DEONTOLOGY

- **Deontology** is the philosophical practice of defining and adhering to an absolute set of standards by which ethical behavior can be measured. It tries to define universal duties.

- It places the emphasis on adhering to ethical principles or duties and fulfilling obligations

- In deontology, a person fulfills absolute moral duties regardless of whether good comes from the actions.

- A person decides upon actions by asking if a particular action is morally right or wrong.

- <u>The act of carrying out that duty is important rather than the consequences of the act</u>.

CONSEQUENTIALISM

- Consequentialism bases the morality of an action upon the consequences of the outcome

- Instead of saying that one has a moral duty to abstain from murder, a consequentialist would say that we should abstain from murder because it causes undesirable effects.

UTILITARIANISM

- **Utilitarianism** is an approach to establishing ethical standards based on the **consequences of an action**.

- In an ethical dilemma, a person selects the action that brings about the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people.

- Utilitarianism is one form of consequentialism which has as its main tenet that we should seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

- Our determinant of the desirability of an action is the net amount of happiness it brings, the number of people it brings it to, and the duration of the happiness.

GREATEST HAPPINESS PRINCIPLE OF JOHN STUART MILL

- Utilitarian theory was given by John Stuart Mill and it accepts the principle of utility as the standard for determining the rightness of actions. According to this theory, our actions are right in **proportion** as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.

- SEEKING UTILITY CAN BE PROBLEMATIC

- EXAMPLE: THE TROLLEY PROBLEM
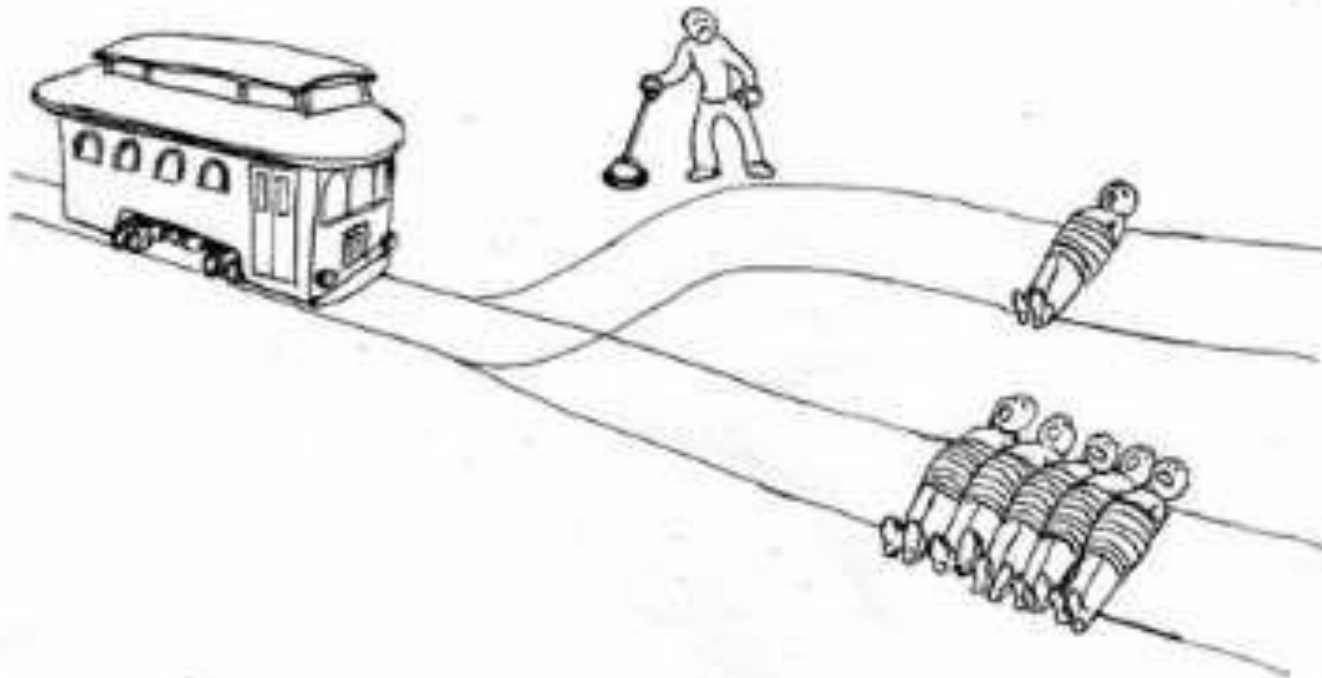
COMPARING THE THREE ETHICAL APPROACHES

- A consequentialist may argue that lying is wrong because of the negative consequences produced by lying—though a consequentialist may allow that certain foreseeable consequences might make lying acceptable.

- A deontologist might argue that lying is *always* wrong, regardless of any potential "good" that might come from lying.

- A virtue ethicist would focus less on lying in any particular instance and instead consider what a decision to tell a lie or not tell a lie said about one's character and moral behavior. Therefore, the decision to lie would be made in a case-by-case basis that weigh personal benefit, group benefit, and intentions.

THE RIGHTS MODEL

- The rights model analyzes ethical issues by focusing on an action's impact on human rights. Under this model, human rights are the rights all people have

- An action that maximizes respect for human rights and minimizes their violation is morally correct

- The two necessities for humans are freedom and well-being. Thus, two basic categories of human rights exist within the model:

  - Rights of liberty

  - Rights of well-being

- Under the rights model, each person possesses certain fundamental human rights because of the fact that they are a human being. Each person's life has an infinite value

APPLYING THE RIGHTS MODEL

- Identify the facts.

- Identify the ethical issues.

- Identify the alternative courses of action.

- Identify the stakeholders.

- Determine to which extent each alternative respects the **dignity and fundamental rights** of stakeholders or **violates their rights**.

- Choose the alternative that maximizes the dignity of stakeholders and minimizes the violation of their rights.

APPLYING UTILITARIANISM

- Identify the facts

- Identify the ethical issues

- Identify the alternative courses of action

- Identify the stakeholders

- For each alternative,identify who would be harmed and who would benefit

- Choose that alternative which results in the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of stakeholders

- ABET
- IEEE
- ACM

IEEE CODE OF ETHICS

- Act in public interest
- Act in interest of clients and employers
- Produce quality products
- Maintain independent judgment
- Manage ethically
- Protect integrity of profession
- Support colleagues
- Pursue lifelong learning

IEEE CODE OF ETHICS: ACTIONS

- PUBLIC - Software engineers shall <u>act</u> consistently with the <u>public interest</u>.

- CLIENT AND EMPLOYER - Software engineers shall <u>act</u> in a manner that is in the best interests of their <u>client and employer</u> consistent with the public interest.

IEEE CODE OF ETHICS: PRODUCTS

- PRODUCT - Software engineers shall ensure that their <u>products</u> and related modifications meet the <u>highest professional standards</u> possible

IEEE CODE OF ETHICS: HIERARCHY

- JUDGMENT - Software engineers shall <u>maintain integrity and independence</u> in their professional <u>judgment</u>.

- MANAGEMENT - Software engineering managers and leaders shall subscribe to and promote an <u>ethical approach</u> to the <u>management</u> of software development and maintenance

IEEE CODE OF ETHICS: PEERS

- PROFESSION - Software engineers shall advance the <u>integrity and reputation</u> of the profession consistent with the public interest.

- COLLEAGUES - Software engineers shall be <u>fair to and supportive</u> of their colleagues.

IEEE CODE OF ETHICS: SELF

- 8. SELF - Software engineers shall participate in <u>lifelong learning</u> regarding the practice of their profession and shall promote an ethical approach to the practice of the profession.