SNS COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

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DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTER APPLICATIONS

ETHICS IN COMPUTING

I YEAR - II SEM

UNIT – I COMPUTER ETHICS AND HACKING

TOPIC – 6: A FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

FRAMEWORKS FOR ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING:

Making good ethical decisions requires a trained sensitivity to ethical issues and a practiced method for exploring the ethical aspects of a decision and weighing the considerations that should impact our choice of a course of action. Having a method for ethical decision making is essential. When practiced regularly, the method becomes so familiar that we work through it automatically without consulting the specific steps. This is one reason why we can sometimes say that we have a "moral intuition" about a certain situation, even when we have not consciously thought through the issue. We are practiced at making ethical judgments, just as we can be practiced at playing the piano, and can sit and play well "without thinking." Nevertheless, it is not always advisable to follow our immediate intuitions, especially in particularly complicated or unfamiliar situations. Here our method for ethical decision making should enable us to recognize these new and unfamiliar situations and to act accordingly.

The more novel and difficult the ethical choice we face, the more we need to rely on discussion and dialogue with others about the dilemma. Only by careful exploration of the problem, aided by the insights and different perspectives of others, can we make good ethical choices in such situations.

Three Frameworks

Based upon the three-part division of traditional normative ethical theories discussed above, it makes sense to suggest three broad frameworks to guide ethical decision making: The Consequentialist Framework; The Duty Framework; and the Virtue Framework.

While each of the three frameworks is useful for making ethical decisions, none is perfect—otherwise the perfect theory would have driven the other imperfect theories from the field long ago. Knowing the advantages and disadvantages of the frameworks

The Consequentialist Framework

In the Consequentialist framework, we focus on the future effects of the possible courses of action, considering the people who will be directly or indirectly affected. We ask about what outcomes are desirable in a given situation, and consider ethical conduct to be whatever will achieve the best consequences. The person using the Consequences framework desires to produce the most good.

Among the advantages of this ethical framework is that focusing on the results of an action is a pragmatic approach. It helps in situations involving many people, some of whom may benefit from the action, while others may not. On the other hand, it is not always possible to predict the consequences of an action, so some actions that are expected to produce good consequences might actually end up harming people. Additionally, people sometimes react negatively to the use of compromise which is an inherent part of this approach, and they recoil from the implication that the end justifies the means. It also does not include a pronouncement that certain things are always wrong, as even the most heinous actions may result in a good outcome for some people, and this framework allows for these actions to then be ethical.

The Duty Framework

In the Duty framework, we focus on the duties and obligations that we have in a given situation, and consider what ethical obligations we have and what things we should never do. Ethical conduct is defined by doing one's duties and doing the right thing, and the goal is performing the correct action.

This framework has the advantage of creating a system of rules that has consistent expectations of all people; if an action is ethically correct or a duty is required, it would apply to every person in a given situation. This even-handedness encourages treating everyone with equal dignity and respect.

This framework also focuses on following moral rules or duty regardless of outcome, so it allows for the possibility that one might have acted ethically, even if there is a bad result. Therefore, this framework works best in situations where there is a sense of obligation or in those in which we need to consider why duty or obligation mandates or forbids certain courses of action.

However, this framework also has its limitations. First, it can appear cold and impersonal, in that it might require actions which are known to produce harms, even though they are strictly in keeping with a particular moral rule. It also does not provide a way to determine which duty we should follow if we are presented with a situation in which two or more duties conflict. It can also be rigid in applying the notion of duty to everyone regardless of personal situation.

The Virtue Framework

In the Virtue framework, we try to identify the character traits (either positive or negative) that might motivate us in a given situation. We are concerned with what kind of person we should be and what our actions indicate about our character. We define ethical behavior as whatever a virtuous person would do in the situation, and we seek to develop similar virtues.

Obviously, this framework is useful in situations that ask what sort of person one should be. As a way of making sense of the world, it allows for a wide range of behaviors to be called ethical, as there might be many different types of good character and many paths to developing it. Consequently, it takes into account all parts of human experience and their role in ethical deliberation, as it believes that all of one's experiences, emotions, and thoughts can influence the development of one's character.

Although this framework takes into account a variety of human experience, it also makes it more difficult to resolve disputes, as there can often be more disagreement about virtuous traits than ethical actions. Also, because the framework looks at character, it is not particularly good at helping someone to decide what actions to take in a given situation or determine the rules that would guide one's actions. Also, because it emphasizes the importance of role models and education to ethical behavior, it can sometimes merely reinforce current cultural norms as the standard of ethical behavior.

Putting the Frameworks Together

By framing the situation or choice you are facing in one of the ways presented above, specific features will be brought into focus more clearly. However, it should be noted that each framework has its limits: by focusing our attention on one set of features, other important features may be obscured. Hence it is important to be familiar with all three frameworks and to understand how they relate to each other—where they may overlap, and where they may differ.

The chart below is designed to highlight the main contrasts between the three frameworks:

	Consequentialist	Duty	Virtue
Deliberative process	What kind of outcomes should I produce (or try to produce)?	What are my obligations in this situation, and what are the things I should never do?	What kind of person should I be (or try to be), and what will my actions show about my character?
Focus	Directs attention to the future effects of an action, for all people who will be directly or indirectly affected by the action.	Directs attention to the duties that exist prior to the situation and determines obligations.	Attempts to discern character traits (virtues and vices) that are, or could be, motivating the people involved in the situation.
Definition of Ethical Conduct	Ethical conduct is the action that will achieve the best consequences.	Ethical conduct involves always doing the right thing: never failing to do one's duty.	Ethical conduct is whatever a fully virtuous person would do in the circumstances.
Motivation	Aim is to produce the most good.	Aim is to perform the right action.	Aim is to develop one's character.

Because the answers to the three main types of ethical questions asked by each framework are not mutually exclusive, each framework can be used to make at least some progress in answering the questions posed by the other two.

In many situations, all three frameworks will result in the same—or at least very similar—conclusions about what you should do, although **they will typically give different reasons for reaching those conclusions.**

However, because they focus on different ethical features, **the conclusions reached through one framework will occasionally differ from the conclusions reached through one (or both) of the others.**

APPLYING THE FRAMEWORKS TO CASES:

When using the frameworks to make ethical judgments about specific cases, it will be useful to follow the process below.

Recognizing an Ethical Issue

One of the most important things to do at the beginning of ethical deliberation is to locate, to the extent possible, the specifically ethical aspects of the issue at hand. Sometimes what appears to be an ethical dispute is really a dispute about facts or concepts. For example, some Utilitarians might argue that the death penalty is ethical because it deters crime and thus produces the greatest amount of good with the least harm. Other Utilitarians, however, might argue that the death penalty does not deter crime, and thus produces more harm than good. The argument here is over which facts argue for the morality of a particular action, not simply over the morality of particular principles. All Utilitarians would abide by the principle of producing the most good with the least harm.

Consider the Parties Involved

Another important aspect to reflect upon are the various individuals and groups who may be affected by your decision. Consider who might be harmed or who might benefit.

Gather all of the Relevant Information

Before taking action, it is a good idea to make sure that you have gathered all of the pertinent information, and that all potential sources of information have been consulted.

Formulate Actions and Consider Alternatives

Evaluate your decision-making options by asking the following questions:

Which action will produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)

Which action respects the rights of all who have a stake in the decision? (The Rights Approach)

Which action treats people equally or proportionately? (The Justice Approach)

Which action serves the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Approach)

Which action leads me to act as the sort of person I should be? (The Virtue Approach)

Make a Decision and Consider It

After examining all of the potential actions, which best addresses the situation? How do I feel about my choice?

Act

Many ethical situations are uncomfortable because we can never have all of the information. Even so, we must often take action.

Reflect on the Outcome

What were the results of my decision? What were the intended and unintended consequences? Would I change anything now that I have seen the consequences?

CONCLUSIONS:

Making ethical decisions requires sensitivity to the ethical implications of problems and situations. It also requires practice. Having a framework for ethical decision making is essential. We hope that the information above is helpful in developing your own experience in making choices.