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SKU: 9780134296548-SOLUTIONS

Chapter 2

Introduction to Ethics

1. The "ethical point of view" means respecting not only your own goals and aspirations, but taking into consideration the goals and aspirations of other people as well.

2. Morality refers to guidelines that you can use to determine what you ought to do in a particular situation. Morality also allows you to figure out whether a particular decision or action is right or wrong. Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. Ethics is broader than morality in that it includes the higher-level activities evaluating moral systems and the creation of new ways of evaluating moral problems.

3. Ethical relativism is the view that "the good" exists inside the human mind; i.e., it is a human invention. Since "the good" is invented, its definition is malleable. Ethical objectivism is the view that "the good" exists outside the human mind. Our role as humans is to find or discover "the good." Since "the good" exists independently of our intellectual activity, its definition never changes.

4. Person B has not made a strong ethical argument because she has not brought up any facts or values that would undermine or contradict the explanation of Person A.

5. When we say an ethical theory is rational, we mean that it relies upon logical reasoning from facts or commonly held values.

6. The many/any fallacy is to conclude that any option is acceptable after observing that many options are acceptable. For example, you may observe me take several different routes between home and work, and all of them are good in the sense that they allow me to reach my destination safely and in a reasonable amount of time. That does not imply that all possible routes between home and work are good ones.

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7. The equivalence fallacy is to confuse similarity with equality. It comes into play in this chapter in the discussion of the divine command theory. When we say "God is good," it is fallacious to argue that God and the good are identical.

   Another example of the equivalence fallacy would be to conclude from the statement "Adolph Hitler was evil incarnate" that everything Hitler said or did was evil.

8. Sometimes I leave home a little late, but I'd still like to get to work on time. I want to be able to drive through red lights on those days when I am running late. The proposed moral rule is: I may ignore traffic laws when I am pressed for time. It is also my will that the traffic lights keep everyone else driving in an orderly manner. If we universalized this rule and everyone else who was running late also ignored traffic laws, then the streets would be chaotic, contradicting my desire that everyone else drive in an orderly manner so that I can accomplish my illegal maneuvers. Hence my proposed moral rule is logically self-defeating. It is wrong for me to drive through red lights on those days when I am running late.

9. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas without giving that person credit. Appendix A actually gives five ways of committing plagiarism: copying another's words without putting the words in quotation marks and citing the source; paraphrasing another's words without citing the source; incorporating someone else's figures or drawings without citing the source; referencing facts that are not common knowledge without citing the source; and using another person's ideas without giving that person credit.

10. Plagiarism refers to deliberately concealing the fact that you have used someone else's words or ideas. If the action is not intentional, it should be called misuse of sources.

11. A consequentialist theory determines whether an action is right or wrong by evaluating its consequences. Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory. A non-consequentialist theory determines whether an action is right or wrong by considering the underlying rule or principle motivating the action. Kantianism and social contract theory are non-consequentialist theories.

12. Three situations in which my action would be primarily motivated by a sense of duty or obligation:

    (a) I promised someone if he could get two tickets to a rock concert, I would purchase a ticket and go with him. He got the tickets and expects me to pay for mine. I keep my promise, even though I just lost my job and I really can't afford to go.

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(b) I pay my income taxes, even though I think the government has some wasteful programs.

(c) Everybody in my fraternity is going to give blood. I donate blood, too, even though just thinking about it makes me queasy.

Three situations in which my action is primarily motivated by its expected consequences:

(a) I give money to a particular charity because it has the lowest administrative overhead of any international relief organization. I figure more of my money will actually reach those who need it.

(b) I work extra hard in a particular class, even though I am not interested in the material, because I hope the professor will write me a good letter of recommendation.

(c) I slightly exaggerate my experience in order to get a good job as a server in a nice restaurant, figuring that the probability of someone discovering my exaggeration is very low.

13. Vicki is driving her car through the city. Her cell phone rings, and she looks down to see who is calling. As a result, she does not see that she is approaching a crosswalk. She drives through the crosswalk without slowing down. Her car strikes a child and kills him. Two minutes earlier, another driver, Helen, had been distracted by the ringing of her cell phone, had looked down to see who was calling, and had driven through the same crosswalk without slowing down. Nobody was in the crosswalk, and Helen caused no harm. Vicki and Helen did exactly the same thing, but Vicki's action had far worse consequences than Helen's action.

14. Businesses and governments often use utilitarian thinking to determine the proper course of action because it allows all of the relevant consequences of each alternative to be weighed quantitatively.

15. The US federal tax code allows individuals who own homes to deduct the amount of mortgage interest paid on the home loans. The Tax Foundation and other groups argue that this deduction is of the greatest benefit to the wealthy, which means it violates the difference principle.

16. Social contract theory as first presented is a non-consequentialist theory. Social contract theory as articulated in Rawls's two principles of justice is a non-consequentialist theory.

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17. Here are some moral virtues not mentioned in Section 2.10: altruism, ambition, charity, compassion, conscientiousness, continence, courteousness, courtesy, discretion, empathy, generosity, hospitality, humility, industry, integrity, kindness, patience, perseverance, persistence, prudence, sincerity, temperance, tranquility, and trustworthiness.

18. Subjective relativism and ethical egoism are similar in the sense that both theories allow an individual to put himself or herself first in determining the right action to take in a particular situation. However, there is a crucial difference between the two theories. Subjective relativism, like all relativistic theories, holds that each person decides what is right for himself or herself. Two people in the same circumstances could choose completely different actions, and both could be right. Ethical egoism, on the other hand, is an objective theory. It holds that the right action for a person to take in a particular situation is the action that will be to the greatest long-term benefit of that person. A rational, objective process is used to determine the greatest long-term benefit, meaning anyone in the same situation should reach the same conclusion.

19. Both divine command theory and Kantianism are objective, holding that right and wrong can be expressed in rules that are true for all people at all times in history. Divine command theory identifies the good with the will of God, and holds that the will of God is communicated through holy books. Kantianism, on the other hand, holds that we can use our reason to determine what is good.

20. Both subjective relativism and act utilitarianism would allow an individual to evaluate a situation to determine whether a particular action is right or wrong. However, subjective relativism allows a person to use any means to decide the right thing to do. According to act utilitarianism, the consequences of the possible actions must evaluated. The correct action is the one that leads to the greatest increase in total happiness among the parties effected.

21. Both Kantianism and rule utilitarianism are objective. According to both theories, right actions are those that are in line with universal moral rules. However, the two theories derive the rules in different ways. Kantianism determines whether a proposed moral rule is acceptable by evaluating it according to the Categorical Imperative. Utilitarianism determines whether a proposed moral rule is acceptable by considering the long-term, overall total change in happiness that would result if everyone always followed the rule.

22. Both act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism are consequentialist theories. However, act utilitarianism considers the consequences that would result from an action taken

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in one particular situation. Rule utilitarianism considers the consequences that would result if everyone always took a certain course of action in all similar situations.

23. Both theories focus on the notion of society, but they are quite different. For one thing, cultural relativism is an example of relativism, while social contract theory is an example of ethical objectivism. Cultural relativism says each society determines what people ought to do in various situations. Different societies may come up with different moral codes. These rules may be based heavily on tradition and not on reason. Social contract theory says morality consists in those rules that rational people ought to recognize are in everyone's best benefit if they are universally obeyed.

24. Both Kantianism and social contract theory are objective, rule-based theories. In Kantianism, proposed rules are derived by seeing if they can meet the requirements of the Categorical Imperative. In social contract theory, proposed rules are derived by seeing if their universal adoption would be to everyone's mutual benefit.

25. According to virtue ethics, there is a set of character traits that human beings need to possess in order to be truly happy. Some of these character traits may depend on the culture. In this respect virtue ethics is similar to cultural relativism. However, the differences between virtue ethics and cultural relativism are more significant than the similarities. Virtue ethics is an example of ethical objectivism, while cultural relativism is an an example of relativism. Although some of the character traits prized by virtue ethics may be culture dependent, other would seem to be universal: honesty, justice, and loyalty, for example.

26. Alexis did wrong when she made use of a student's login and password to gain access to the library's computers and printers. Alexis treated that student as a means to her end of getting access to the private college's computers.

    The anti-spam organization is treating the innocent computer users in the East Asian country as means to its end of reducing spam. That is wrong.

    The analysis depends upon the expectation of privacy people should have. The existence of the cameras is public knowledge. If nobody is being "used," the action appears to be morally acceptable.

    Releasing the software without informing the potential users of the possible bugs would be wrong. However, if the hospital staff were fully notified that the product was in beta test, a decision to release the product could be justified.

27. The benefits to Alexis were large. The harms to others were small. Her action was morally acceptable.

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Millions of people are getting much less spam. The benefit to each of these persons is small, but meaningful. Tens of thousands of citizens of the East Asian country cannot send email to the United States. The harm to each of these persons is significant. Concluding whether the action is right or wrong depends upon the weight you give to each person's benefit or harm.

In this case the benefits seem to outweigh the harms. The actions of the East Dakota State Police are morally acceptable.

To do the analysis, we must examine the various courses of action and weigh, for each one, the potential benefits and harms to the patients, nurses, hospital, and members of the start-up company.

28. A rule utilitarian is likely to subscribe to the rule "Gaining access to another person's private information is wrong," since a great deal of harm can result if people were unable to protect confidential information such as credit card numbers. For this reason, Alexis did wrong when she used someone else's login and password to access the library's computers and printers.

    The challenge with this scenario is to determine whether any moral rules have been broken. In general, utilitarianism is comfortable with the notion that maximizing the overall good may mean that the majority gains a benefit while the minority suffers a harm.

    The East Dakota State Police is using technology to increase the safety of the community. Its actions appear to be morally acceptable.

    As long as the company fully discloses the status of the product, it appears to be on safe ground.

29. Alexis violated the property rights of the private college when she used its computers without permission. Her action was wrong.

    The residents of the East Asian country had a reasonable expectation that their email would be delivered. By blacklisting the country's ISPs, the anti-spam organization encouraged American ISPs to refuse to forward email. This seems wrong.

    How much privacy should a person have while operating a motor vehicle on a freeway? If a person has given up all privacy, then there seems to be nothing wrong with this action. If a person has a reasonable expectation of privacy, then the East Dakota State Police may have done something wrong if it secretly gave the FBI access to the information.

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The purchaser of a product has a right to expect the manufacturer stands behind the quality of the product. In this case it would be wrong for the company to sell the product as if it were completely debugged and 100 percent reliable. On the other hand, the hospital might be willing to beta test the device if it could get a discounted price or if that would help the company certify its reliability. The company could begin shipping the device to hospitals that understood the current state of the software.

30. Virtues associated with students are honesty, justice, and industriousness. Alexis demonstrated industriousness by working a part-time job, finding a way to get access to PCs and printers, and completing the extra research projects. Alexis did not demonstrate honesty when she sneakily found a valid login/password combination, and she did not act in a just way when she used the resources of the private college without paying for them. Taken as a whole, Alexis's actions do not appear to be characteristic of a virtuous student.

    Virtue ethics is not an appropriate theory to use when evaluating the action of a government or business, so we skip Scenarios 2 and 3.

    Two virtues associated with a good employee are honesty, industriousness, and loyalty. Out of loyalty to the company, you want to find a way for your company to stay in business in the short run and prosper in the long run. However, honesty compels you to inform the customer regarding the true state of the software. Rather than cover up the problem, you should find a way to work with the customer to ensure the customer sticks with your company's product. As an industrious employee, you should volunteer to put in some extra time if that will help reduce the delay in getting the product to market.

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