

Religion 491
Ethics in Engineering
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Section 17

Engineering Ethics and Me

Submitted to:
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by
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While I was on my mission in 1971, I once knew a man named Brother Goodman. His family owned and operated a tire store in the south part of Tucson, Arizona. Brother Goodman truly lived up to his name--he was a good man. One time, my bicycle was in need of repair. The whole drive train was ruined and we had no way of taking it in to get it fixed. We called Brother Goodman, hoping that someone would be able to help us. Brother Goodman left his work to take us up to the missionary bike shop on the north side of town. On the way back, he even found someone for us to teach and bought us some lunch.

Another young man, named Joseph Smith, lived in the early 1800's. Young Joseph claimed to have seen God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. For his entire life, Joseph stood behind his words. Joseph was the first president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a general in the Nauvoo legion, a mayor, and even began to campaign for president of the United States. But Joseph was also persecuted his whole life. Joseph's life ended abruptly on June 27, 1844 when an armed mob attacked him, his brother Hyrum, John Taylor, and Willard Richards. Joseph and Hyrum were shot and killed, and the two others narrowly escaped.

What is it that drove Brother Goodman and Joseph Smith to do the things they did? What type of reasoning did they use to justify their sacrifices? What type of reasoning do I typically use as I do the things I do throughout my life?

Philosophers claim that there are many types of moral reasoning people use. Among the different types of reasoning are:

Ethical egoism, a theory that says the whole duty of man is to maximize on our own good. In this theory, we are the most important thing.

Ethical conventionalism, a theory that reduces morality to the laws, customs, and conventions of our society. In this theory, an act is right only if it abides by the laws of society.

Divine command ethics, a theory that says an act is right if it is commanded by God and wrong if it is forbidden by God.

utility, for the most people.

Duty ethics, a theory that claims as we do our duties of being honest, keeping promises, and of doing good, we are performing our duty.

Rights ethics, a theory that argues that humans have certain basic rights. When humans respect these rights, they are being ethical.

Virtue ethics, a theory that says being ethical means manifesting good virtues--or habits which allow us to engage in rational activities and to reach a balance in our lives. As we continually work to acquire good habits, we will one day reach a "golden mean". Courage, truthfulness, and generosity are examples of virtues.¹

Schinzinger claims that the last four types of moral reasoning--utilitarianism, duty ethics, rights ethics, and virtue ethics, form the basis of moral reasoning. These ethical theories give the basic reasons why we morally ought or ought not to do certain things.

Schinzinger dismissed divine command ethics as a reasonable moral theory. He argued that divine command ethics has things backwards. Schinzinger claimed that divine commands on the basis of moral reasons that determine whether some actions are right or if the actions are wrong. But Schinzinger felt that religion plays an important part in society of reinforcing ethical values.

I would propose that Brother Goodman, Joseph Smith, and myself use a combination of the different types of moral reasoning. However, in my own life, my reasoning falls short from being perfect. In particular, I often find myself seeking my own interest--I often practice ethical egoism more than anything else. Brother Goodman, Joseph Smith, and the Savior Himself were examples of people who set aside their own interests. Instead of considering what was best for them--practicing ethical egoism--they considered what was best for others. They truly wanted to help others and to serve the Lord. Brother Goodman, Joseph Smith, and the Savior reasoned more using divine command ethics, virtue ethics, and utilitarian ethics.

Schinzinger, Martin. *Ethics in Engineering*, 2nd Edition.

my major, as you already know, is civil engineering. As a freshman in college, I was a bit lost. Just like all the other freshmen, I was not sure what I wanted to be when I grew up. I knew I wanted to be some kind of engineer, so I started out in chemical engineering. As I started out in the chemical engineering program, I knew that that major wasn't me. One of my plans for the future was to have a big ranch out in the country. As a civil engineer, I knew I could live almost anywhere I wanted; and since any engineer makes lots of money, I decided to enter the civil engineering department.

Originally, I only thought about my own self interest--what I wanted. I used a style of "ethical egoism" to decide that I wanted to be a civil engineer. Now, I still want to be a civil engineer and live in the country. But now, I realize that I can do lots of good in the world as a civil engineer. My reasoning behind being a civil engineer has now moved to more of a utilitarianism--as a civil engineer, I can do a much good in the world.

What styles of moral reasoning do I typically use?

What style should I use?