


# CSE312/ISE312

Gift of Fire, Fourth edition by Sara Baase

Read: Section 1.4

Slides prepared by Cyndi Chie and Sarah Frye. Fourth edition revisions by Sharon Gray.



## Ethics

What is Ethics:

- Study of what it means to “do the right thing”
- Assumes people are rational and make free choices
- Rules to follow in our interactions and our actions that affect others

Technology advances create new situations in which ethics-based decisions need to be made

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### Ethical Views

- Deontological theories (Absolute rules)
- Utilitarianism
- Golden rules - Treat others as you would want them to treat you.
- Contributing to society - Doing one's work honestly, responsibly, ethically, creatively, and well is virtuous

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### Rule-Based Ethics

- Emphasize duty and absolute rules
- Example – do not lie
- An act is ethical if it complies with ethical rules
- Immanuel Kant ideas:
  - Universality – applies to everyone
  - Reason – good actions follow from logic
  - Don't treat people as a means to an end

**Class question: Are there situations in which it is ethical to lie?**

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## Utilitarianism


- Guiding principle (John Stuart Mill) is to increase happiness or “utility”
- A person’s utility satisfies its needs/values
- An act is right if it increases aggregate utility and wrong if it tends to decrease it
- Variants
  - Act utilitarianism – judge an act by its net impact
  - Rule utilitarianism – apply the utility principle to the rule

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## Class Question

- Is it ethical to kill a terminally ill patient in order to salvage organs that will save the lives of multiple people?

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### Case Study

Note: suspicion a lower threshold than certainty

- Financial institution
- Improper acts committed by the CEO
- Suspicion of criminal acts extending into the organization
- Options
  - Rule based - Investigate and possibly report suspicions
  - Utility based - No actions other than ensuring that actions are less likely to occur in future

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### Rights

- Natural rights
  - Respects fundamental rights of others
  - Examples
    - Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
    - Property
- Negative rights (liberties) The right to act without interference
- Positive rights (claim-rights) - An obligation of some people to provide certain things for others


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## Class Question

- Do you think that people in an organized society have a right to access to health care?

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## Ethical Views

- Social contracts and a theory of political justice - People willingly submit to a common law in order to live in a civil society
- Ethical theories help to identify important principles or guidelines

Class question – do you think that societies in the US can have a set of rules independent of US law (e.g., Hasidic sects, western groups)

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### Organizations

- Do organizations have ethics?
  - Ultimately, it is individuals who are making decisions and taking actions. We can hold both the individuals and the organization responsible for their acts.

Should organizational responsibility be separate from individual responsibility?  
E.g., VW, Financial crisis, energy producers, etc.


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### Ethics

Some important distinctions:

- Right, wrong, and okay
- Distinguishing wrong and harm
- Separating goals from constraints
- Personal preference and ethics
- Law and ethics

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## Ethics

Discussion Question

*Can you think of examples of liberties (negative rights) and claim-rights (positive rights) that are at opposition to each other?*

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