Reflections on Ethical Theories

Reflecting on the ethical theories we’ve explored this semester has profoundly impacted my understanding of how to navigate complex moral landscapes in both professional and personal contexts. Initially, my perspective on ethical issues was guided by a focus on legal and national loyalties. This was particularly evident in the case of Chelsea Manning, whose decision to leak the "Collateral Murder" video sparked significant debate. However, examining Manning’s actions through the lens of virtue ethics has broadened and deepened my understanding of the role of moral character and intentions in ethical decision-making.

Virtue ethics, which emphasizes the development of moral character and the virtues that define a person’s actions, provides a compelling framework for assessing Manning’s decision. Instead of evaluating her actions based solely on their legality or adherence to established norms, virtue ethics prompts us to consider the underlying moral intentions. Manning’s decision to release the footage, which exposed troubling conduct by U.S. military forces, was not merely an act of disloyalty but one of profound moral courage. Her actions were driven by a commitment to justice and transparency, aiming to hold the military accountable and address what she perceived as serious misconduct. This perspective highlights the importance of evaluating ethical decisions based on the virtues of courage, justice, and honesty, even when such decisions involve significant personal risks or breaches of established protocols.

Transitioning from virtue ethics to consequentialism, particularly utilitarianism, further refines my approach to ethical decision-making. Initially, I approached ethical dilemmas with a more individualistic mindset, focusing primarily on personal outcomes and immediate consequences. However, engaging with utilitarianism has illuminated the importance of considering the broader impact of our actions on collective well-being. Utilitarianism advocates for actions that maximize overall happiness and minimize suffering, even if it requires personal sacrifices.

The contrasting views of Leon and Reynolds in the story illustrate this principle vividly. Leon, who possesses extraordinary intelligence, initially chooses to use his abilities for personal exploration rather than societal advancement. In contrast, Reynolds, who also gains significant intellectual enhancements, dedicates himself to the betterment of humanity. From a utilitarian perspective, Reynolds’ approach aligns more closely with the ethical principle of maximizing collective well-being. This realization has reshaped my approach to decision-making, emphasizing the need to balance personal interests with the potential impact on the greater good. Utilitarianism challenges us to consider the broader implications of our actions and to prioritize outcomes that benefit society as a whole, even if it requires personal compromise or sacrifice.

Furthermore, my perspective on privacy has evolved through the analysis of technological advancements, particularly with respect to Google Street View. Initially, I concentrated on the technological benefits, such as improved navigation and virtual exploration. However, a closer examination of privacy issues, informed by Floridi’s insights on informational friction, has highlighted the critical need to balance innovation with privacy protection. Floridi’s discussion on how technology erodes barriers to information access underscores the potential risks of privacy invasion as technologies become increasingly sophisticated and pervasive.

The concerns raised by technologies like Google Street View—where personal and private spaces are accessible to the public—demonstrate the complex interplay between technological progress and individual privacy rights. The challenge lies in ensuring that advancements do not compromise personal privacy or diminish public trust. This understanding has heightened my awareness of the importance of addressing privacy concerns proactively, advocating for policies and practices that protect individual rights while embracing the benefits of technological innovation.

These reflections underscore the significance of integrating ethical principles into our decision-making processes. Emphasizing moral integrity, considering the broader impact of our actions, and safeguarding privacy are crucial in navigating both personal and professional challenges. As I continue to develop in my career and personal life, these lessons will guide me in making ethically informed choices that balance personal, professional, and societal responsibilities. By applying the insights gained from virtue ethics, utilitarianism, and privacy considerations, I aim to approach ethical dilemmas with a nuanced understanding that respects both individual rights and the collective good.