

EELE 487 Professionalism and Ethics

SP17

Lecture 1

Ethics? Is this just “doing good?”

- Ethics is the study of how people develop and apply moral principles that govern individual and group behavior
- This treats our collective notion of good and evil
- Moral principles often come from philosophers and from spiritual traditions

Moral Rules

- Typical moral codes include:
 - Do not kill
 - Do not cause pain
 - Do not disable
 - Do not deprive freedom
 - Do not deprive pleasure
 - Do not deceive
 - Don't break promises
 - Don't cheat
 - Don't disobey laws
 - Don't fail to do your duty

This seems easy! But...

- What do you do if there is a conflict in the rules:
 - You promised to meet a friend at noon, but you lost track of time and now the only way you will make the meeting is by speeding.
 - You accidentally overhear a conversation between two strangers regarding a bid on a real estate transaction that you are contemplating.
 - A police officer responding to a crime scene ends up shooting a suspect fleeing with a hostage.

Other questions...

- What are your obligations to others in need, particularly people you will never actually meet?
- Does being a *professional* change your ethical obligations?
 - Professional means someone whose position requires significant intellectual development, organized in a self-regulated manner, organized with published ethical standards, and often has certification or licensing by the state

Engineers

- Most people use and rely upon technology and engineered systems, but don't really need to know how they work.
- Do engineers have special obligations and ethical responsibilities?
- YES: engineers must be willing to make greater personal sacrifices than others when it comes to pointing out dangers, defective designs, etc.