

Stephen Julich
CPRE394
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Reflection on Virtue Ethics

While all of the virtues in “Virtue of Ethics” come into play to one degree or another, I think the three virtues that most closely impact the situation in this case study are integrity, fidelity, and responsibility.

The virtue of **integrity** includes such things as being of strong moral principle and exercising good ethical judgment, both of which seem to be lacking in this case study. In my view, the employee showed weak moral principle by allowing himself to apply circuitous logic to justify actions that were mainly of benefit to himself. He continued on this path until he felt threatened by forces he couldn’t control. This demonstrates weak moral character and poor ethical judgment.

Fidelity means being true to your personal ideals and standards, as well as those of your employer and the community. This means making the right decisions even when it means you have to give up a chance at personal gain. It is clear to me that the employee felt guilt about his decision to reuse the software from his old company but pursued his course of action anyway. If one cannot see beyond personal gain there can be no expectation of faithfulness to employer or community.

The article “Virtue of Ethics” defines **responsibility** as accountability, trustworthiness, dependability, reliability, and recognizing a personal and moral obligation to act for the good of others. The employee in this case study failed on all of these points. The employee had a responsibility to act in a manner that was contrary to his own self-interest. This once again is when the hardest ethical decisions are to be made. This is when there are no outside forces pressing on you to make the right decision. It is at this point that you have a responsibility to consider the interests of others before yourself. If the employee had done this in our case study the proper decision would have become clear immediately. If the right decision was not clear to the employee he had a responsibility to consult with the former employer first before using software developed with them at another employer. The proper course of action would have become immediately clear and very serious legal consequences could have been avoided.

The virtues I did not pick (charity, self-discipline, and honesty) are no less relevant to the case. I could write something about the ethical failure involved with all of these virtues. However I was limited to three. I think the six virtues of this article cover the ethical facets of this case study fairly completely. The case does a good job of pointing out that the hardest ethical decisions are often those that we must make when there are no external forces compelling someone to take a stand against their own self-interest. It is then that we must create our own external forces to argue for the interests of those outside ourselves.

What are the virtues and values that make up Virtue Ethics? What are these qualities of goodness that keep us grounded in our personal lives? My list is not all inclusive, but I think most would agree with the virtues in the list:

1. INTEGRITY

Integrity may be thought of as moral uprightness and being of strong moral principle and ethics, as well as exercising good and ethical judgment in your field of practice.

2. HONESTY

Honesty is perhaps the pinnacle of all virtues you can have for yourself. Honesty is comprised of truthfulness, fairness, sincerity, and openness. If you are honest with yourself in all aspects of your life, honesty will carry over into your professional life as well.

3. FIDELITY

Fidelity is faithfulness. It is faithfulness to yourself, your family, the public, your employer, your clients, your profession. Fidelity is demonstrated by your continuing loyalty and support to yourself, your family, the public, your employer, your clients, your profession.

4. CHARITY

Charity comprises compassion and mercy for your fellow man, kindness, caring, good will, and tolerance toward all. It is voluntarily giving your help to others.

5. RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility is accountability, trustworthiness, dependability, reliability, and recognizing a personal and moral obligation to act for the good of others.

6. SELF-DISCIPLINE

Self-discipline is like Aristotle's Golden Mean, not acting in the extremes of "excess" on one end or "deficiency" at the other end. It is not indulging one's self in excessive behavior, either personally or professionally, and instead, acting with reasonable restraint in your life.