Lecture 5, Sep 22, 2022

Ethics

- Branch of moral philosophy that addresses right and wrong actions
  - What is the best way for people to live?
  - What is right or wrong in a particular situation?
- Ethics can be codified e.g. religious texts
- Dilemmas are where ethical codes fail
- Morals are more personal concepts of right and wrong, whereas ethics define shared concept of right and wrong
  - Our moral foundations can shift due to changes in our worldview
    * Because they are about us, they are by definition subjective
    * "It does not mean unmalleable; it means organized in advance of experience"
    * Moral reasoning is always *post hoc* – "We reason to find the best possible reasons why somebody else ought to join us in our judgement"
- Two distinctions in Ethics:
  1. The micro/macro distinction
     - Microethics focuses on issues relevant to individuals and relationships within the engineering profession (personal decision)
     - Macroethics focuses on the social responsibility and societal decisions about technology (collective decision)
  2. The relative/absolute distinction
- The engineering code is a document framed in terms of microethics

Merit Goods

- Goods and services that should be accessible by all individuals in a society irrespective of their abilities
  - Individuals need them, and/or their universal coverage benefits society at large
- Decisions about merit goods involve macroethical decisions
- Ideals lead to principles to guide actions (absolute ethics)
  - Professional codes
  - Utilitarianism, duty ethics
  - A single account of the human good
  - Ethics as a universal aspiration
- On the other hand, situations can be compared to others' situations and actions to guide your own actions (relative ethics)
  - Relative to the aspirations of our culture
  - e.g. definition of success
  - Ethics as a social contract

Virtues

- One of the approaches to ethics
- The best is always the midpoint between contrary extremes (e.g. courage lies between foolhardiness and cowardice)