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# **The Right Choice: Applying Ethics and Happiness to Engineering**

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# **The Right Choice: Applying Ethics and Happiness to Engineering**

*William A. (Bill) Brant, JD, PE*

## **COURSE CONTENT**

*“[H]uman good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.*

*But we must add ‘in a complete life.’ For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy.*

...

*Will not the knowledge of it [happiness], then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least to determine what it is...”<sup>1</sup>*

*Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle introducing the good for man what we call “HAPPINESS.”

### **1.0 WHO AM I TO TELL YOU ABOUT ETHICS AND HAPPINESS?**

Really, who am I to tell **you** about ethics and happiness and apply it to engineering? I felt I had to answer that question first.

I’ll begin by saying, I have been preparing for lectures given on Engineering Ethics over the years at University of Texas at San Antonio, and the local sections of ASME, ASM International, and ASHRE. I quote Dr. Arthur Dobrin:

**“The people who are happiest are mainly those who have learned how to balance their ethical values with other values.”<sup>2</sup>**

I follow with, who does not want to be happy? We all want to be happy. We want our children to be happy. Good ethics makes you happier,

**which in turn makes your family happier, fellow workers happier, and gives you self-satisfaction as a byproduct.**

**I give a casual mention of happiness as an overarching reason for ethics.**

**Richard Taylor in his book, *Virtue Ethics*, asserts that most people seem to think they know what happiness is. Unfortunately, thinking they already know happiness prevents them from studying happiness any further and prevents them from learning about true happiness. “One has no incentive to inquire into what one thinks one already knows.” Taylor maintains that there are few things more fraught with error than our ideas of happiness. This is exemplified by people’s struggle for greater and greater wealth. We are reluctant to examine our own illusions of happiness and mistakenly identify pleasures with happiness.<sup>3</sup>**

**I re-visited Aristotle for research on my Oxford Round Table paper presented August 5, 2005, at Oxford University, Oxford, England. When I re-visited Aristotle, I stumbled back onto Aristotle’s happiness. Aristotle investigated and studied happiness when he wrote *Nicomachean Ethics*. *Nicomachean Ethics* is perhaps, the most classic study of ethics. Happiness was Aristotle’s key. Aristotle prompted me to investigate the relationship of happiness and ethics and see how it might be applied to engineering.**

### ***Hurricane Katrina***

**I thought about this course, gathered my sources, developed an outline and committed to start writing Labor Day weekend, 2005. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina hit the U.S. Gulf Coast. All of a sudden I was not happy. How do you write about happiness when you aren’t happy?**

**I became glued to the TV, frustrated, upset, and maybe even angry at the United States Government as the minutes turned into hours, and the hours turned into days, and the people of New Orleans were dying.**

**My thoughts went back to the great tsunami that struck Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. The United States had ships, helicopters, food and water to the victims within three days. Southeast Asia is on**

**the other side of the world. Here were the people of New Orleans waiting without water, food, or sanitation and dying.**

### *Return from Oxford*

**My wife and I had just returned from the Oxford Round Table where the theme was “Adapting to Globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Professor Brent Porter of the School of Architecture, Pratt Institute, NY, presented his paper “Emergency Responsive Architecture to Meet Human Rights.” Brent compiled an ongoing list of basic Human Rights, none of which was being met in New Orleans. Dr. Chekuri Narasimha Rao of Acharya Nagarjuna University, India, presented “Globalization and Agriculture in the Developing Countries.” I asked Dr. Rao, in terms of dollars, how was poverty defined in India? We were shocked at his answer! Dr. Rao said they don’t think of poverty that way in India. In India, they think of poverty as anyone who can’t “obtain 2400 calories of food a day.” New Orleans’ citizens were not obtaining 2400 calories of food a day!**

**My paper and presentation were entitled, “Professional Ethics: A Must for the Global Society of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” I could not help but wonder what had happened to the response after the hurricane in New Orleans? And, why?**

**The Katrina *ethical* situation compels me to share with you a section of my Oxford paper because it causes concern about the response after the hurricane and, hopefully, does *not* portend the future.**

### *Global Ethics*

***Regarding global ethics, Peter Singer asserts that our new found global society, linking people together, “gives us a material basis for a new ethic.” If we go around acting like a tribe, then our morality will be tribal. But, the globalized revolution “has created a global audience, and we might feel a need to justify our behavior to the whole world [to share trade, if nothing else]. This change creates the material basis for a new ethic that***

*will serve the interests of all those who live on this planet in a way that, despite much rhetoric, no previous ethic has ever done.”<sup>4</sup>*

*Consequently, how well we transcend the globalization era, will depend upon how we think, act, and be ethical toward one another realizing that we all live in one world, shrinking day by day. Moreover, if the rich nations of this world do not take the ethical high road, their security will be in danger in the long term. One need only examine the fall of the Roman Empire to understand this point.*

*History tells us the Roman Empire was, arguably, the greatest and longest empire ever to exist. There were many reasons for the collapse of the Roman Empire. Perhaps, the most important reason was the decline in morals and values. Morals and values that kept the Roman legions together and the empire safe could not be maintained at the end of the empire. Violence in the streets made the cities unsafe. Public health and environmental problems abounded. Wealthy Romans brought water to their home through lead pipes, which caused high morality rates to the wealthy. The poor, who lived on the streets, in continuous contact with one another, spread disease. Alcohol abuse undoubtedly contributed to the demise. Political corruption was another cause of the fall. Before the fall, the Praetorian Guard gained complete control of determining the next emperor. The emperor, in turn, rewarded the guard. Eventually, the position of emperor went to the highest bidder. During the last years, unemployment, inflation, and urban decay contributed to the collapse. Basic research and new ideas in technology suffered. Lastly, military spending was a constant drain on the government and frustrated Romans no longer cared to defend the great Roman Empire.<sup>5</sup>*

*The causes associated with the fall of the Roman Empire were inextricably intertwined with the loss of morals and ethics. The Roman Empire was a globalized society of its time. Likewise, the globalized society of our time could be doomed to chaos, should our globalized society not exist on a high moral and ethical plane.*

**Compare the response after Katrina with the collapse of the Roman Empire. The lack of preparation and response to Hurricane Katrina could be the “tip of the iceberg” for larger societal problems if these problems are not adequately resolved.**

I am not alone in my concern. Rushworth M. Kidder in *Ethics Newslines*<sup>TM</sup> asserts the Katrina disaster is a failure of civil society:

*“Katrina’s Report Card to America: Civil Society Failed*

As the nation picks through Hurricane Katrina’s physical and mental rubble, it’s hard to find anything that didn’t collapse. Levee maintenance, local policing, evacuation planning, federal relief efforts, communication systems, refugee management, fuel availability, presidential leadership---again and again, the elements of disaster prevention and response came unstuck.

All those can be rebuilt, and the Gulf Coast can be better and stronger physically and organizationally. But that rebuilding won’t matter much unless the nation addresses something far larger. The most awful collapse last week was not of earthworks or exit strategies. It was of civil society itself. As New Orleans descended into anarchy---businesses wantonly looted, rescue workers drawing sniper fire, children reportedly raped in shelters, bodies unrecovered and ignored---it was clear that something less tangible and more significant than an infrastructure lay in ruins.”<sup>6</sup>

*The Evacuation*

Elation marked Labor Day weekend with the troops evacuating the Superdome, Convention Center, and the overpass. By nightfall, all had been evacuated. A smiling Geraldo Rivera from the New Orleans Convention Center declared, “what a difference a day makes!”

This leads us back to ethics and happiness and applying it to engineering. As we shall see, **one of the keys to happiness is compassion and helping your fellow man.**

However, let us first look at the opposite side of the spectrum and study what makes us unhappy. Logically, you can not be happy if you are unhappy.

## 2.0 ANGER MANAGEMENT

**“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen...Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:29-32<sup>7</sup>**

**This is the Christian perspective. It summarizes what needs to be done to remove anger. Just as I could not write about happiness when I was upset or angry, so it is you cannot be happy when you are angry. Anger is the antithesis of happiness.**

**Anger can be defined as the emotional arousal provoked by some form of threat or injury to an individual or others. A provoking cause may even have altruistic overtones, as when one becomes angry through considering the plight of the helpless, the poor, and the oppressed.<sup>8</sup>**

**Anger physiologically produces responses in the sympathetic area of the autonomic nervous system, which releases adrenalin from the renal system into the blood stream. Additionally, blood sugar increases, blood pressure rises, respiratory capacity and blood-clotting time are increased, waste is eliminated rapidly through perspiration, and muscles become tense, all measurable symptoms of anger.<sup>9</sup>**

**Unresolved anger and repressed feelings of anger can be very detrimental to your health.<sup>10</sup>**

**Anger, fear, anxiety, depression, envy, jealousy, and guilt are negative emotions. These negative emotions occur if we experience a threat to the things we internalize as essential qualities in our lives. Positive emotions, on the other hand, are responses to the things, people, and events that enhance the qualities and happiness in our life.<sup>11</sup>**

**An interesting point about anger, if you think about it, is anger only hurts you. The other person or thing isn't affected the same way you are. You are left with anger when they go away. Anger only hurts you, not the other person---or situation. You are left stewing in your own juices.**



### *Practical Anger Tips*

With anger, what do you do? A few practical tips are: (1) seek a creative outlet, a hobby such as music or painting; (2) exercise to relieve your stress and anger; (3) work with yourself in trying to express your emotions, talk to someone about it (Years ago I attended a Marriage Encounter program and was amazed how all the men in the class could not express emotions, myself included. The men were limited to about five or so emotions, whereas there are in excess of thirty or so. The women all had a much deeper grasp on identifying emotions. The men discovered that we never talk about emotions.); (4) Take little steps toward developing your emotions, confront your emotions a little at a time and practice being aware and expressing them. It is okay to feel sad, discouraged, or frustrated and to talk about it.<sup>12</sup>

### *Which Road Should We Take?*

The high road can lead to happiness and the low road leads to despair. We have the choice before us. We can change and take the high road, if we want to make that choice. We can change for the better, if we choose. Will you agree, we need to follow the road to happiness?

### *3.0 ARISTOTLE, DOBRIN AND THE DALAI LAMA*

**What are you, I, we seeking in Life?** Success at work? Marriage? Family? Peace? More money? Pleasure? Power? Pride? Recognition? Fun? Friends? All of these things?

**Why do you, I, we want any of these things? Could it be that these things make us happy and it is desirable to be happy in life?** Is not happiness the essence, the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality, in life?

**Is not the very purpose of life to be happy?** Aristotle answered these questions affirmatively and studied happiness extensively.

To say Aristotle was brilliant is an understatement. Some say Aristotle was “the most intelligent person who ever lived.”<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, was a



**Greek philosopher, biologist, physicist, chemist, political analyst, and ethicist, who began his study of ethics with the nature of happiness in his treatise, *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>14</sup> Aristotle applied a practical approach and methodology to ethics and happiness.**

**Born 384 B.C. in Stagira, northern Greece, Aristotle's father was a physician and friend to King Amyntas of Macedon. His mother was wealthy in her own right. Following his father's death, at age 17, Aristotle was sent to study under Plato. Plato's fame had attracted some of the most eminent philosophers and scientists of that era to Plato's Academy in Athens, Greece.<sup>15</sup>**

**Aristotle spent twenty years at Plato's Academy studying under philosophers and scientists and, then, writing and teaching himself. Aristotle left Athens after Plato's death. Later, Aristotle became the tutor for Alexander the Great. (Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world by age 32.) Aristotle returned to Athens and created his own Lyceum Academy in 335 B.C. He died at age 62.<sup>16</sup>**

**Primarily a biologist at heart, over fifty percent of Aristotle's writings dealt with biology. He brought this biologist perspective and empirical nature to philosophy. One of Aristotle's outstanding accomplishments was to classify or categorize things, including animals and humans, through observation. It was Aristotle who first classified animals according to genus, organisms with distinguishing characteristics, and species, organisms with similar characteristics capable of interbreeding. These classifications are used today and formed an approach to his inquiries.<sup>17</sup> Aristotles's works became the foundation for every science known in his time.<sup>18</sup>**

### ***Aristotle's Approach to Happiness***

**Aristotle's ethical theory focused on happiness and virtuous character of all cultures. His biological model became his approach to ethics. Aristotle sought the common elements in the lives of culturally diverse individuals and the organization of diverse governments. He looked for excellence in the common elements. He, then, categorized what led to excellence in the life of an individual and the life of the community.<sup>19</sup> Aristotle was searching for *excellence*.**

Moreover, Aristotle was concerned with the whole of everything; a complete philosophy that would integrate all aspects of human knowledge, and utilize the best of each aspect, the “best of the best.” Aristotle would find the certainties, commonalities, of each aspect and search for the methods to obtain these aspects of human knowledge.

He started by looking at the process of our human intelligence and the understanding of reality. He devised logic. Our word logic derives from the Greek word *logos*, or reasoning. However, for Aristotle, *logos* was more than reason, it was the principle within us that enables us to understand and govern ourselves. With logic, he could proceed with certainty.

Aristotle realized he must understand the physical world around us, the sky, animals, cultures, everything around us. Moreover, Aristotle reasoned, he must understand what lay beyond our world. What caused our being and existence; this he called *metaphysics*. *Metaphysics* investigates the first principle of things, including concepts such as being, knowing, substance, cause, identity, time, and space; a term still used today.

*Eudaimonia* was Aristotle’s quest. An exact translation of the Greek word *eudaimonia* is difficult. Most authors translate *eudaimonia* as happiness. At least one author translates *eudaimonia* as success, but concedes most refer to *eudaimonia* as happiness.<sup>20</sup> That same author uses the two words together and refers to happiness and success. Perhaps “happiness” was a little broader in Aristotle’s view. Regardless, ***Eudaimonia* was Aristotle’s answer to the question, “what is the purpose of my life?”**

Aristotle’s earlier work regarding ethics was entitled, *Eudemian Ethics*, in large part contained within his later work, *Nichomachean Ethics*. The word *Nichomachean* refers either to Aristotle’s son or father, both named Nicomachus. In both works, happiness is associated with ethics.

Aristotle connects his happiness with ethics. As a working definition, we can think of **ethics as the actions of right and wrong.**

Aristotle's model of happiness and ethics was in the context of the community in which humans live. He devoted volumes of work to politics, derived from the Greek word, *polis*. **The important part here is that politics and ethics are linked together.** The *polis*, city, state, country, must create laws, constitution, and institutions that **encourage each citizen to make good choices** in order to become excellent, accomplished citizens. The **citizens must be ethical** in their actions toward the *polis*. You can *not* have one without the other, both must be ethical.

Aristotle was practical enough to know that the *polis* had to provide laws. The role of the *polis* is to encourage citizens to be virtuous, but laws were needed to respect the rights of others. Aristotle knew it is impossible to force people to be virtuous and work for the good of society. However, the fear of punishment might steer them in the right direction. Laws, of course, must be balanced because a citizen's happiness can only come through freedom of choice.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, for Aristotle, the basic human unit is the family. The family is a vital reality because children of today become citizens of tomorrow. Aristotle developed his understanding of family from nature; man is naturally inclined to form couples even more than cities.<sup>22</sup>

We know from Aristotle's will and testament that his personal affairs and private moral opinions coincided with the importance of family and friends and successful children, the proper social roles of generosity and dignity in the service of others, and the good judgment of trustworthy men.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Aristotle "walked the talk."

**Aristotle's way to happiness is to allow ourselves to be guided by the *logos*, reasoning to the inner light that is in each one of us with the goal of a just and true end. Our inner light must be *the* true light or an enlightened state of consciousness dependent on the universal, natural law.**<sup>24</sup>

The key to happiness is that it must be identified, sought, and selected. Happiness does not just happen, it must be continually pursued. Guidelines should allow us to use our intelligence for our actions, disallowing ourselves to be overrun by our passions (wrong), and make

choices for the good (right). Guidelines should follow the fundamental laws of nature. The natural laws form a system, guidelines, of morals or virtues based on desire, which has as its core the desire for true happiness.<sup>25</sup>

### *Morals and Virtues*

Happiness requires intelligence to govern our actions. Our intelligence requires guidelines derived from the natural laws that are learned morals or virtues. In theory, our intelligence will guide our morals or virtues to select the right action, and cause us to be happy.

What are morals or virtues? How do you get them? The term *moral* derives from the Latin word “mores” referring to customary behavior. Every human act is done with a movement of attraction and tendency toward a desire. Unfortunately, desire in itself is not enough, a maturity or experience in life is necessary. Moreover, desires for good can be obscured by passions or negative emotions. An ethical approach to desires for good requires us to familiarize ourselves with the kind of vision that moves in conformity with desires of good. The desire of good becomes a person’s prime *virtue*.

**Ethics and happiness follow from *logos*, reasoning, in accordance with *virtue*. Aristotle’s *virtue* is our capacity to act well, think well, or produce good works. Again, Aristotle is searching for excellence in the acts, for excellence in acts brings happiness. If we listen to our desires for good at their deepest level, we thirst for knowledge and truth. Our intelligence finds its good and its joy in the simple fact of knowing, and our knowing seeks the truth.**

Aristotle’s *virtues* provide guidelines, structure, an inner stability. The ethical, happy person must master himself within these guidelines, structure, or framework. *Virtue* is the inner disposition that we acquire through performance, habit, and experience.

To understand *virtues*, Aristotle compares opposites and determines a mean, called by Aristotle the “Golden Mean,” between the two extremes. The two extremes are the excess as a result of too much and

the deficiency as a result of too little. Understand, Aristotle's mean is not an arithmetical mean, but a peak of excellence.<sup>26</sup>

Another way to think of *virtue* is an acquired tendency to experience certain feelings when confronted with certain situations (feelings which largely determine how we judge the conduct of others and what course of action we ourselves shall choose) and to experience these feelings in a moderate degree (neither too strongly nor too weakly) as called for by the specific circumstances of the situation.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps, it is best to visualize Aristotle's *virtues* and excess and deficiency is in a table:

| <i>Virtue</i>              | <i>Passion(s)</i>                                         | <i>Deficiency</i>     | <i>Excess</i>                  |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Courage                    | boldness<br>fear                                          | cowardice             | rashness                       |
| Temperance/<br>Moderation  | desire<br>for pleasure                                    | insensitivity         | overindulgence<br>intemperance |
| Generosity                 | propensity to give or<br>accept gifts                     | stinginess            | spendthriftiness               |
| Pride, High-<br>Mindedness | desire for large<br>honors                                | excessive<br>humility | vanity                         |
| [no common<br>name]        | desire for smaller<br>honors                              | lack of<br>ambition   | ambitiousness                  |
| Good Temper                | prone to anger                                            | spiritlessness        | irritability                   |
| Truthfulness               | self-presentation                                         | self-deprecation      | boastfulness                   |
| Wittiness                  | desire to amuse others                                    | boorishness           | buffoonery                     |
| Friendliness               | desire to please others                                   | quarrelsomeness       | obsequiousness                 |
| Sense of shame             | susceptibility to shame                                   | shamelessness         | bashfulness                    |
| Righteous<br>Indignation   | pain at good fortune of<br>others, pleasure at their pain | malice                | envy                           |

\*Magnificence is similar to generosity, but refers only to large expenditures for public benefit.

\*Justice is a mean inasmuch as it consists in a propensity to give or return to others the right amount (what is due them) rather than more or less.<sup>28</sup>

### *Using Aristotle's Virtues*

What do Aristotle's *virtues* tell us? **A person who wants an ethical and happy life must seek to become an excellent person.** We possess a rational side of human nature and an irrational side. Good moral character requires the rational side to control the irrational side. Emotions largely comprise the irrational side, such as anger, fear, lust, envy, hatred, love pity, and elation. Generally, it can be stated, the mental events and conditions are typically accompanied by pain and pleasure.

Importantly, the **good virtues are settled habits of character** that establish themselves in the correct emotional response at the right time.

Unfortunately, emotions are not easily controlled with reason. It is useless to try to reason yourself out of a feeling of anger, fear, or lust. The emotional, irrational side must be controlled in another way.

To overcome the emotional, irrational side, one has to be trained and learn over a long period time. It is best to start learning the *virtues* as a youth. Ideally, one would be trained and habituated, under the discipline of the family, in accordance with the guidance of the *polis*. The *polis* with its education, customs, and laws would complete the training in Aristotle's *virtues*. Society would benefit, the family would benefit, and the ethically trained person would lead an excellent and happy life (ever after).<sup>29</sup>

What happens if your youth has past, you did not train or learn the *virtues*, or you require a refresher course? What do you do now? Look forward to, Dr. Arthur Dobrin and his book, *ETHICS for Everyone---How to Increase Your Moral Intelligence*.<sup>30</sup>

*Arthur Dobrin*

**Who is Arthur Dobrin? Dr. Arthur Dobrin is an ethicist, who modeled himself after the American writer, John Steinbeck. Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*, and had a compassionate understanding of the world and ordinary people. Dobrin earned a BA degree in History, a Masters in Human Relations, and a Doctorate in Social Welfare. Dobrin and his wife were Peace Corps volunteers in Kisii, Kenya. In 1967, Dobrin joined the Ethical Movement, and since 1968 has served as Leader Emeritus of the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island.**

**Dobrin has authored numerous books including *Ethics for Everyone---How to Increase Your Moral Intelligence*, a book I highly recommend. Dr. Dobrin is a Professor of Humanities at Hofstra University and has appeared on CNN and in *Family Circle* magazine.**

**I had the honor of taking an internet ethics course from Dr. Dobrin. Dr. Dobrin validated my premise; specifically, that you must think, act, and be ethical before going to an ethics code.**

**How does Dobrin's *Ethics for Everyone* help us here? Remember,**

**“The people who are happiest are mainly those who have learned how to balance their ethical values with other values.”<sup>31</sup>**

**Dobrin in *Ethics for Everyone* shows us how to live through ethical dilemmas that confront us in everyday life and allows us to live vicariously through those dilemmas. When we are confronted by the same situation, we will have seen it before and thought about it; trained if you will. **By applying Aristotle's *virtues* and guidance with Dobrin's dilemmas we can learn how to balance our “ethical values with our other values” and become more happy.****

**Dobrin's *Ethics for Everyone* provides a brief description of the three types of ethics that are currently at the forefront of the ethics field: (1) virtue ethics associated with Aristotle, (2) consequential or utilitarian ethics, and (3) deontological or duty ethics. In my PDH Online course number, R 115, *The Right Choice: Applying Ethics to Engineering*, I distinguish the three types of ethics and side with virtue ethics as a model. I chose virtue ethics as a model principally because virtue ethics provides qualities of goodness as a standard to follow.**



### *Making Ethical Decisions*

In each of the ethical dilemmas that follow, imagine yourself in the same or similar situation.

First, and foremost, when making ethical decisions, you must recognize when an ethical situation (dilemma) has arisen and recognize the social pressures and ethical principles. For example, Dobrin provides a real-life situation that brings into conflict values or virtues of loyalty, friendship, self-interest, and integrity. A person of lesser means comes from a small farm background, wants to be a doctor, but can't afford college tuition. He is able to obtain a tuition free appointment to a military academy. The academy has an Honor Code that requires cadets to report any suspected cheating. His childhood friend and roommate has partially plagiarized a term paper. His friend refuses to report himself. Now faced with the dilemma of having to report his friend, he refuses to do so and resigns from the academy.

How would you handle this dilemma? It doesn't have to be a military academy, it could be at work or any whistleblower situation. The Code of Federal Regulations for the nuclear industry requires *everyone* who discovers a safety discrepancy to report it. In the example above there is loyalty to the friend and the academy, but the rules are that honesty and the Honor Code are paramount. The intent of the military is to build character and integrity. For the honest person, a moment of dishonesty is like a cancer that never goes away.

The value of this lesson is to imagine yourself in the situation and think about how you would handle the dilemma. Ethics seeks a solution to these dilemmas, but ethics requires judgment and without judgment there would be no ethics because there would be no choice. However, even where rules are given, we must decide if they are right and this requires ethical judgment.<sup>32</sup> Did he make *The Right Choice* in resigning from the academy?

### *Tainted Money*

**How about the example of a convicted mobster making a charitable contribution? The mobster offers \$1,000,000 to a hospital to build a children's wing. In return, he wants the wing named after him. The ethical question is whether the hospital should accept the gift under those conditions? The ethical dilemma presented is the question of does the end justify the means? On one hand, the hospital needs the additional children's wing, but the price paid for the bad reputation may be too high. One only has to think about ENRON FIELD in Houston, Texas, to think about tainted money associated with a name.**

**The ethical dilemma of the ends justifying the means plagues us on numerous fronts and is a lesson to consider. Ethics is about staying the moral course. When money buys respectability and clears names of contemptible people, ethical standards and values become nothing more than talk.<sup>33</sup>**

### ***Is Life Always Worth Living?***

**Is Life Worth Living is the title of one of Dobrin's chapters, but it was very personal to him because it involved his parents. Moe and Anne were married more than sixty years when Anne began to suffer from Alzheimer's, and then began to suffer heart problems. Moe was close to ninety and faced with two choices, (1) let nature take its course or (2) operate. With the latter choice, Moe knew he would have to care for her by himself and eventually, she would have to be institutionalized. How would you handle this situation?**

**Alzheimer's is a slow, deadly disease that exceeds twenty percent of adults over the age of eighty. I myself have had two uncles and an aunt succumb to the disease and the effects on the immediate family are devastating.**

**Ultimately, Moe's decision to consent to Anne's life-sustaining surgery depended upon his perspective on the meaning of their relationship and his ability to care for her financially, physically, and emotionally without failing himself under the strain.**

**We all have to make "life choices" similar to Moe's choice at sometime in our lives. My father's health is deteriorating, but my mother's health**

is excellent and she can provide his care for the time being. Our dilemma is at what point does my father's care degrade my mother's health?

Moe's choice was that he had to save her and went forward with her operation. His response to the dilemma was that he would feel guilty if he could save her life but chose not to do so. Dobrin's mother underwent a "low-risk procedure" and died on the operating table.

Ethicist Arthur Dobrin provides us with his wisdom,

**“While I believe in the sanctity of life, and believe that life is good and to be lived to its fullest, I don't think that life should always be prolonged. Life isn't always better than death.”<sup>34</sup>**

Most states have statutory provisions for living wills and directives to physicians that allow people to make their own choice as to whether they should be kept alive artificially or not. To some extent living wills and directives to physicians help with the ethical dilemma confronted by the caregivers.

As a law student, I had the profound thought that as a society we would have to answer in the near future four critical questions: What is life, What is death, What is family, and What is religion? Unfortunately, these critical questions have divided societies and not been answered.

### *Being Ethical with Friends and Family*

What is owed an elderly parent? A doctor tells you that your eighty-five year old mother or father-in-law can not continue to live alone. The choice is a nursing home or to move in with you. Making ethical judgments without knowing the full context can be disastrous. In law, we call this getting all the facts in the case. However, our judgments are made upon assumptions of our perceptions of reality.

The eighty-five year old may be a very difficult person, interfering and disrupting at every opportunity; the cause of anxiety and bad feelings at all the family gatherings; and, a highly critical person. Worse yet, they get worse with age, bordering on unbearable. Given this set of facts the

eight-five year old might be better off in a nursing home. Most of us believe we are to honor and take care of our parents, but there are limits. One limit might be the effect on our marital relationship. A strong personality might cause a divorce between the two caregivers. The resultant divorce certainly would not be in anyone's best interest.<sup>35</sup>

### *Fairness*

What is being fair? A single mother has three children. A girl ten, who is smart and talented, but an underachiever. A boy twelve, who is hardworking, but needs attention to remain an average student, and a fourteen year old girl, who was born with a chronic debilitating illness. The mother has obvious time constraints. She elects to divide her time equally among the three children. Is this fair?

Dobrin points out this situation is not uncommon. Sometimes making out a will requires a decision among the needy, talented, and the average. Second marriages can bring stepchildren and child support into the mix. School boards are faced with this dilemma. How does it apportion money? Should the average students receive the bulk of the money, typically the largest number; the talented students, those who could make a greater contribution to society; or, students with disabilities, the most expensive to educate? With the budget crunch on most schools in the United States and similar problems globally, the fairness dilemma is becoming a crisis situation.

Equality of treatment and time, with considerations of need and merit, are difficult problems both conceptually and practically. Many ethical problems do not have a perfect solution. Sometimes ethical problems have bad solutions and we are forced to choose the lesser of two evils. However, as long as there is a concern for fairness as the basis for the decision, it is an ethical decision.<sup>36</sup>

The examples above are just a few of **Dobrin's dilemmas** from *Ethics for Everyone* to forecast a flavor of ethical problems we will face. Dobrin's dilemmas allow us to pause, with a cause for concern in our own lives. The purpose is to think about ethical situations we will face in the future. Dobrin's dilemmas set us on course for making *The Right*

***Choice*** and allow us to “balance our ethical values with other values” in our pursuit of happiness.

### ***The Dalai Lama***

The Dalai Lama, a seventy year old Buddhist monk, is the spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet in exile, since the 1959 Chinese invasion. The Dalai Lama is a global ambassador urging peace and happiness. He believes people have an innate desire for happiness and peace and that violence is learned. He believes human beings through their intellect, must discipline themselves and teach their children to practice empathy for others rather than anger, hatred, and self-centered behavior.<sup>37</sup>

A Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1989, the Dalai Lama is a popular speaker for thousands. He has gathered representatives of different religions together from around the world seeking to find similarities rather than differences.

Perhaps the Dalai Lama’s exile was best for the world because his stage became global rather than limited to Tibet. Those who have seen him characterize him by his smiling, laughing, humorous, clear and easy to understand self. In short, the Dalai Lama seems happy.

### ***The Purpose of Life***

I am told the Dalai Lama starts his talks something like this,

**“I think that this is the first time I am meeting most of you. But to me, whether it is an old friend or new friend, there’s not much difference anyway, because I always believe we are the same; we are all human beings. Of course, there may be differences in our faith, or we may be of a different color, but we are human beings, consisting of the human body and the human mind. Our physical structure is the same, and our mind and our emotional nature are also the same. Wherever I meet people, I always have the feeling that I am encountering another human being, just like myself. I find it is much easier to communicate with others on that level. If we emphasize specific characteristics, like I am Tibetan or I am Buddhist, then there are differences. But those things**

are secondary. If we can leave the differences aside, I think we can easily communicate, exchange ideas, and share experiences.”<sup>38</sup>

**What a powerful introduction! We are one, let us talk.**

**The Dalai Lama believes, “that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness...Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we all are seeking something better in life...happiness...”<sup>39</sup>**

For those who doubt that seeking happiness is the very purpose of life, surveys have shown people who are socially withdrawn, brooding, antagonistic, self-focused, but not satisfied with self, are unhappy. In contrast, happy people are more sociable, flexible, creative, and found to be better able to tolerate daily frustrations. Experiments demonstrate that happy people exhibit openness and a willingness to help others.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, other people reciprocate toward happy people. If you do not believe me, smile at a stranger sometime without saying anything; chances are the stranger will smile back.

Happiness is not only a goal, but achievable through training. The Dalai Lama recognizes that this might be contrary to Western society thinking. Western society conditions itself upon science that sets up basic premises and parameters that, in some cases, limits the ability to ascertain reality.<sup>41</sup>

**The Dalai Lama’s approach to happiness is seemingly simple. Train our minds to bring about an inner discipline resulting in a transformation of our attitude, which changes our entire outlook and approach to living. Then, identify those factors which lead to happiness and those factors that lead to suffering (suffering being the opposite of happiness). Once the happiness factors and the suffering factors have been identified, gradually eliminate the suffering factors and cultivate the happiness factors. That is the way to happiness.**<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately, the gateway to happiness is not as simple as it seems. When the Dalai Lama says “train our minds,” his concept of mind is

different than most of ours. Mind means more than one's cognitive ability or intellect. The Dalai Lama's mind means the psyche or spirit including intellect, feeling, and heart.<sup>43</sup> Mind is more of a "whole self."

Howard C. Cutler, M.D. co-authored *The Art Of Happiness*. A psychiatrist, Dr. Cutler, makes the statement that "happiness is determined more by one's state of mind than by external events." Dr. Cutler provides two examples that demonstrate what psychologists call adaptation or a return to a baseline happiness following external events. One case is a young woman, 32, who co-founded a company that was bought out by a conglomerate. She was able to retire with plenty of money. She confided that overall she wasn't much happier than before she had the money. Conversely, Dr. Cutler presents a man who tested HIV positive, who, after the shock, maintained he was happier than before. He got more out of each day, appreciated things more, and was grateful that he had not developed any severe AIDS symptoms. Importantly, he really enjoyed the things he had. Being HIV positive transformed his life for the better. Therefore, we may experience temporary feeling of elation or tragedy, but sooner or later our overall level of happiness migrates back to our baseline.<sup>44</sup>

I have seen this in my own life. My wife participated in a Church Choir music workshop recently. The Music Director for Castle Hills Baptist Church, Joel Allen, led the workshop. Joel has an inoperable brain tumor, and has had it for some time. He, too, confirms a positive transformation. Joel is unbelievable. He lives for the moment and trusts in God. You can tell Joel is happy and excited about life, and he rubs off. You can not feel unhappy around Joel!

### *Your State of Mind Is the Key to Happiness*

The Dalai Lama realizes achieving happiness is not simple. There are many levels of happiness. Buddhism refers to the four factors, which taken together bring happiness: (1) wealth, (2) worldly satisfaction, (3) spirituality, and (4) enlightenment. Putting aside spirituality and enlightenment, we can look at the key elements of wealth and worldly satisfaction. Wealth or our material possessions can be regarded as a needed source for happiness. For worldly satisfaction, good health and



the need for friendship, friends we can trust and relate to emotionally, are other elements of happiness.<sup>45</sup>

However, in order to use the happiness factors, our state of mind is crucial. **Our state of mind is the key to happiness.**

Look at it this way, if we use our good health or wealth to help others, those others will contribute to us achieving a happier life. Our mind set must be to help others with what we have to offer. Good health and wealth are enjoyable for sure, but if we share with others, we multiply our enjoyment with their enjoyment. This sharing mental attitude provides *us* with happiness. Moreover, it is long-term happiness.

Unfortunately, without the proper mental attitude, good health or wealth have very little impact on our long term happiness. Moreover, anger and hatred can cause health problems defeating happiness. If you are mentally frustrated or unhappy, physical comfort does not contribute to happiness. Close friends become more distant. In a state of anger, physical possessions mean nothing. Again, if you are unhappy, you can't be happy.

However, if you can have a calm, peaceful state of mind, and a sharing, compassionate mind, you can be in poor health and still be happy. Joel Allen is an example of having this state of mind.

By grasping these concepts, we understand what a tremendous influence our state of mind has on us. Our happiness is in large part conditioned by our state of mind. **A calm, peaceful, sharing, compassionate, virtuous, mind can place us in the right frame of mind to be happy.**

### *Pre-disposing Your Mind*

Dr. Sam Schiflett, a human factors engineer, has testified in a number of my products liability cases. Dr. Schiflett explains pre-disposing factors. Pre-disposing factors are causes, if you will, that cause the causes of an incident. For example, some riding lawnmowers are designed for the five percentile male population. These riding lawnmowers don't fit the average male, the greatest user of the machine. The man has to adapt to the machine, by squeezing on

uncomfortably. In certain cases, the lawnmower pre-disposes the operator to an incident when the man can't adapt to the machine. Another example of pre-disposition is road signs. People do not pay attention to road signs. Why? Too many times the roads signs are inaccurate. People become pre-disposed not to believe road signs. When a road sign warns of ice on a 100 degree day, it pre-disposes people to not believe that sign any time. People become oblivious to the sign.

**I believe the Dalai Lama is instructing us to pre-dispose our minds to be calm, peaceful, compassionate, virtuous, and thus cause positive things to happen or lessen the negative things that happen. Overall, be compassionate toward people. Conversely, if we pre-dispose our mind negatively, frustrated, unhappy, or angry, then negative things will impact more greatly and positive things will be lessened. This is why your state of mind is key.**

Thus, the greater the peacefulness of our mind, the greater is our ability to enjoy a happy life. If we lack the inner discipline that brings calmness of mind, it does not matter what our "external facilities or conditions" are, we will never feel the happiness we are seeking. Conversely, if we have inner calmness of mind, even if we lack "external facilities," it is still possible to achieve happiness.<sup>46</sup>

### *Inner Contentment and Self-Worth*

Calmness and peacefulness of our mind is achieved by inner contentment and a sense of self-worth. One method of gaining inner contentment is to appreciate what we have. Be thankful for what we have. Self-worth is the worth and dignity you receive when you relate to other human beings. You share a common human bond that provides a sense of worth and dignity. Moreover, that human bond can be a source of consolation if you lose everything else. When we appreciate what we have and relate to other human beings, we are conditioned or pre-disposed toward happiness.<sup>47</sup>

Often we are faced with choices. We don't always choose what is good for us, because *the right choice* is often the difficult choice. If we consider our life choices with our happiness goal in mind, we are better

able to make the choices for long term happiness.<sup>48</sup> We, like archers, have a mark to aim at.

### *Ethical Behavior Leads to Happiness*

Aristotle, Dobrin, and the Dalai Lama all believe ethical behavior leads to happiness.

The Dalai Lama is convinced that inner self-discipline is enhanced by ethical self-discipline that leads to happiness. “Whether our action is wholesome or unwholesome depends on whether that action or deed arises from a [self] disciplined state of mind,” and, it is the self-disciplined mind that leads to happiness.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, it is the self-disciplined mind that overcomes negative qualities or emotions.

Why do you have to be educated or trained in order to try to eliminate negative emotions, such as anger, fear, and hatred? The answer is that we need to be able to judge the long-term and short-term consequences of our actions. As the Dalai Lama instructs, “the more sophisticated your level of education and knowledge about what leads to happiness and what causes suffering, the more effective you will be in achieving happiness.” Therefore, education and knowledge about ethical behavior are crucial to happiness.<sup>50</sup>

The most important use of our education and knowledge is to engage in wholesome, ethical actions from disciplined minds. Unfortunately, too often in today’s society, many use their education and knowledge for cleverness to avoid obligations, both ethical and legal.

How do ethical self-discipline, compassion, and state of mind help with engineering?

## **4.0 SUMMARY: THE POWER OF ONE---YOU**

The Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler, M.D., co-authored *The Art of Happiness at Work* and discuss happiness in the workplace.<sup>51</sup>

What about happiness in the workplace? What about the “bottom line,” “higher productivity,” “unfairness or social injustice in the

workplace” or dissatisfaction in the workplace? How should we deal with these problems?

**First, it is our belief system or virtue/value system that mentally pre-disposes us before dilemmas arise that is critical to our handling of the problems of life. This underlying belief/virtue/value system is the point I have been making from Aristotle through Dobrin to the Dalai Lama. Second, we must face the reality that there will always be problems in life. Third, we choose how we face reality and the problems in life.**

**How do we become happy with these problems?**

- **Remember, the purpose of life is happiness and it is a long-term project.**
- **Remember, happiness is your state of mind, not external circumstances.**
- **Remember, happiness is achieved by pre-disposing our minds and hearts using an ethical (belief/virtue/value) system that causes internal calmness, peacefulness, sharing, compassion for others, and making *the right choice*. We must train our mind in these areas.**
- **Remember, our key to happiness is in our own hands.**<sup>52</sup>

**Focus on what you have, not what you don't have! Analyze what you have. Take a global, world view. Sure, others have more, but there are people in India who can not obtain 2400 calories of food a day. One billion people in this world live on less than one dollar a day. Two billion, seven hundred million people try to survive on less than two dollars a day. Every three and six-tenths of a second, less time than it takes you to read this paragraph, another person starves to death.**<sup>53</sup>

**Be content, but not complacent, with what you have. Count your blessings. Adopt an “analytical meditation” and reasoning to diffuse anger, hatred, and jealousy. Change what you have the power to change and adapt to the things you can not change.**

**Never! Never, loose sight that happiness is the purpose of life and you **are** your ethical belief/virtue/value system. Apply ethics to make you happy in your personal and professional life.**

**Think, act, and be ethical and “balance ethical values with your other values” for happiness.**

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**The Right Choice: Applying Ethics to Engineering and subsequent Right Choice titles started development in 2001. Since then, countless websites were visited, many with links to other sources, some of which are no longer on the air. I have tried to make every attempt to credit those sources used in this course and I beg the indulgence of any who have been slighted.**

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