Ethical Issues in Aviation

–Carlin Laviolet Clarke, MCA
What are ethics?
Values v ethics
Applied ethics in business
  ◦ Ethics in Aviation
Ethics = Common Sense
Are consequences what matter in ethics or should morality be based on universal laws?
Colgan Air Flt 3407

Sometimes bad things just happen?

Should we trust our gut reaction?
Ethical Theories

- Moral decision-making can be a very difficult task
  - Can we avoid it?
  - How can we determine who is choosing wisely and who is choosing poorly?
  - How can we know whether choice is correct or acting out of prejudice?
We often disagree over just what it is we think we ought to be measuring!

Should we measure:
- Consequences?
- Whether an action conforms to law or principle?
- Moral rights?
Consequentialist Ethics = the greater good

- Value maximizing
- Assumes we are goal-directed
- Makes choices with regard for specific results
- Judges actions to how effectively they produce intended consequences
Consequences are not enough. We must ask two questions:

- 1. Consequences for whom?
- What sort of consequences should we look for?

Our actions affect more than ourselves... who counts as morally important?
Consequentialism Ethics, cont.

- Ethical Egoism: consequences for the self
  - What is morally right is the action that has beneficial consequences for ME.
  - What sort of person is this? What is this person’s life like?
  - How do you treat someone whom you know is only out for their own interests?
Ethical Altruism:
Consequences for others

- Look to how our actions will affect others
  - Morally good actions = morally good consequences for others
  - Morally bad actions = morally bad consequences for others
- The interest of self is not factored into this moral decision-making process

Consequences for everyone

- Looks to how our actions will affect others and self = Utilitarianism
  - Promotes general happiness/happiness of group
  - Emphasizes impartiality
What sorts of consequences count, either as good or bad?
The Greatest Happiness Principle

A well-known form of ethical consequentialism

Moral right and wrong determined by extent of actions that contribute to or detract from happiness

Happiness v Suffering

“Some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others.”

Intelligent & emotionally sophisticated
What would Utilitarian demand of Flt. 3407?

How to support moral intuition about human rights/justice?

Our actions have consequences beyond the immediate participants. What we sanction in a particular instance may be read by others as a precedent for their behavior.

Trickle effect Consequences
Strengthen & Weaknesses of consequential ethics:

- Common sense experience – people do things to accomplish things, to produce certain results
- Appeals to criterion of moral right and wrong that is a public criterion
- Concerns results of actions
- Utilitarianism = against self-interest & self-serving choices at the expense of others.
- Consequentialist reasoning is not complete
  - Captures truth about human nature and motivation
  - Not appropriate characterization of moral reasoning or motivation
Moral duty is not about convenience, saving money, or making people happy. It is simply about doing one’s moral duty.

Assesses actions according to whether they are done in line with a universal rule of morality.

- What we “ought” to do, regardless of consequences.
Results are not as important as the fact the action followed the standard universal moral law.

“Divine Command Ethic”: What makes acts morally right or wrong is their conformity to moral laws laid down by God.
Kantian Deontology

- Kantian Deontology = Duty to God

- “Act only on the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”
  - 1. Rational Will – not responsible for consequences, only our motive and intention
  - 2. Autonomy
    - Our mind makes us who we really are
    - People are capable of placing their own rules or laws upon themselves (autonomy)
    - Respect the capacity of others to make personal choices for themselves.
Kantian Deontology, cont.

- 3. What is true for one is true for all

Categorical Imperative = “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that is should become a universal law”

What I allow myself, I must allow for others

Can I tell a lie when it would be to my advantage?
Strengths & Weaknesses:

◦ Emphasizes the inherent dignity and worth of the moral agent
◦ Value in being true to innermost self – our nature as rational moral agents
◦ Serves as ground for strong claims to moral rights
◦ The Categorical Imperative allows no room for exceptions
◦ Gives little guidance on what to do when two or more moral duties conflict with one another.
◦ It is not clear that such reasoned choice is all there is to being a moral agent or that it constitutes our innermost being as persons...certainly one’s feelings could be crucial to morality?