Engineering Codes: Ethics or Law?

Continuing Ed workshop by Richard Skeirik, PE

Virtue Exercise

Aristole believed that virtuous people make morally right decisions, which inherently lead to human happiness.

Your partner design team has two choices in a capacity expansion – both meet all legal/regulatory guidelines:

1. A simple bio pond meets regs, but will create a noticeable odor outside the plant.

2. A complex water treatment system won't smell, but makes the project unprofitable and hence won't be built.

Part 1:

You and your partner both embody the virtue that you value protecting the environment.

- Applying Aristotlian ethics, what is the right (i.e. ethical) decision?

Part 2:

Now, you both also embody a virtue that values prosperity, and

- The expansion will create jobs that raise 50 families out of poverty.

Now what is the ethical decision?

Part 3:

Same expansion, but different virtues. One of you is a fervent free market capitalist; the other an environmental zealot. The two of you must report out a single decision.

Now what is the ethical decision?

- Is the basis of the your partner team's decision individual, societal, universal, or situational?