

DePaul University

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Ethics 101: a common ethics language for dialogue

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ETHICS 101

A COMMON ETHICS LANGUAGE
FOR DIALOGUE

Compiled by the Ethics
Across the Curricula Committee



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ETHICS ACROSS THE CURRICULA AT DEPAUL

A COMMON ETHICS LANGUAGE FOR DIALOGUE

As part of DePaul's VISION twenty12, in particular Objective 1e: "Provide opportunities for all students to learn ethical systems and demonstrate ethical practice," and in response to the ever-increasing demand for more ethical behavior on the part of business, the professions, in politics, and in public life, the Institute for Business and Professional Ethics has been given the opportunity to coordinate, encourage, and enable the teaching of ethics across the curricula at DePaul, in every discipline and every school. This is not a mandate to require ethics modules in every course, and how ethics is presented in each discipline will, of course, be quite different, depending on the area of study and focus. Thus we have titled this initiative, Ethics Across the Curricula.

Part of this initiative is to develop a common glossary or language for talking about ethics at DePaul, and to share some commonly used tools in thinking about and teaching ethics in various disciplines. This is a living document. We encourage all faculty to discuss, critique, and amend this initial formulation.

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INTRODUCTION

DePaul University is a diverse institution. Its student body, administration, and faculty come from all parts of the world and from a number of religious and ethnic communities. What unifies DePaul is its commitment to Vincentian values. These values derive from the teachings and practices of St. Vincent de Paul. These are core values, that is, global, shared commitments of all communities at DePaul.

The distinguishing marks of DePaul's mission are clearly stated on its web site:

By reason of its Catholic character, DePaul strives to bring the light of Catholic faith and the treasures of knowledge into a mutually challenging and supportive relationship. It accepts as its corporate responsibility to remain faithful to the Catholic message drawn from authentic religious sources both traditional and contemporary. In particular, it encourages theological learning and scholarship; in all academic disciplines it endorses critical moral thinking and scholarship founded on moral principles which embody religious values and the highest ideals of our society.

On the personal level, DePaul respects the religiously pluralistic composition of its members and endorses the interplay of diverse value systems beneficial to intellectual inquiry. Academic freedom is guaranteed both as an integral part of the university's scholarly and religious heritage, and as an essential condition of effective inquiry and instruction.

The university derives its title and fundamental mission from St. Vincent de Paul, the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, a religious community whose members, Vincentians, established and continue to sponsor DePaul.

Motivated by the example of St. Vincent, who instilled a love of God by leading his contemporaries in serving urgent human needs, the DePaul community is above all characterized by ennobling the God-given dignity of each person. This religious personalism is manifested by the members of the DePaul community in a sensitivity to and care for the needs of each other and of those served, with a special concern for the deprived members of society. DePaul University emphasizes the development of a full range of human capabilities and appreciation of higher education as a means to engage cultural, social, religious, and ethical values in service to others.

As an urban university, DePaul is deeply involved in the life of a community which is rapidly becoming global, and is interconnected with it. DePaul both draws from the cultural and professional riches of this community and responds to its needs through educational and public service programs, by providing leadership in various professions, the performing arts, and civic endeavors and in assisting the community in finding solutions to its problems.
(www.depaul.edu/about/mission/, accessed March 5, 2007)

Because of these shared commitments, the University Committee on Ethics Across the Curricula, mandated by Vision Twenty12, is trying to bring together the diverse communities at DePaul, not through an edict but rather with an aim to develop a common vocabulary with which we can all talk about ethics in our classes and student dialogues. We recognize that each school or department at DePaul may have its own shared mission and common vision for its endeavors. Thus, we are not seeking absolute agreement, but rather consensus on a common dialogue that we can share in teaching ethics. This is the first effort at this enterprise. As such, this is a working and living document upon which we can build a common vocabulary, to which we invite faculty input and critique.

PART I: CAN ETHICS BE TAUGHT TO ADULTS

The issue is an old one. Almost 2500 years ago, the philosopher Socrates debated the question with his fellow Athenians. Socrates' position was clear: Ethics consists of knowing what we ought to do, and such knowledge can be taught. Most psychologists today would agree with Socrates. In an overview of contemporary research in the field of moral development, psychologist James Rest summarized the major findings as follows:

- Dramatic changes occur in young adults in their 20s and 30s, in terms of the basic problem-solving strategies they use to deal with ethical issues.
- These changes are linked to fundamental changes in how a person perceives society and his or her role in society.
- The extent to which change occurs is associated with the number of years of formal education (college or professional school).
- Deliberate educational attempts (formal curriculum) to influence awareness of moral problems and to influence the reasoning or judgment process have been demonstrated to be effective.
- Studies indicate that a person's behavior is influenced by his or her moral perception and moral judgments.

Many factors can stimulate a person's growth through the three levels of moral

development. One of the most crucial factors, [Lawrence] Kohlberg found, is education. Kohlberg discovered that when his subjects took courses in ethics and these courses challenged them to look at issues from a universal point of view, they tended to move upward through the levels. This finding, as [James] Rest points out, has been repeatedly supported

by other researchers. (*Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, S.J., and Meyer, 1987 from the Markkula Center*)

James Rest's model outline for teaching ethics to adults is the following:

- Raise ethical issues through case studies [Adults relate and remember particulars and generalize from them rather than the reverse.]
- Develop and teach a process of reasoning—a decision model that can be used with the examples.
- Develop moral imagination.
- Engage in iterative practices of applying the reasoning process to particular situations.
- As a teacher, also be a role model for what you teach.
- If possible, provide internships so that students can “practice” before getting real jobs.

James Rest's [optimistic] conclusion: Behavior can be changed! (Rest, 1998)

... a common vocabulary with which we can all talk about ethics...

PART II: WHAT ETHICS IS NOT

- Ethics is not the same as feelings. Feelings provide important information for our ethical choices. Some people have highly developed habits that make them feel bad when they do something wrong, but many people feel good even though they are doing something wrong. And often our feelings will tell us it is uncomfortable to do the right thing if it is hard.

- Ethics is not merely religion, although most if not all religions present a set of ethical standards. Many people are not religious, but ethics applies to everyone. Most religions do advocate high ethical standards but sometimes do not address all the types of problems we face.
- Ethics is not merely following the law. A good system of law does incorporate many ethical standards, but law can deviate from what is ethical. Law can become ethically corrupt, as some totalitarian regimes have made it. Law can be a function of power alone and designed to serve the interests of narrow groups. Law may have a difficult time designing or enforcing standards in some important areas, and may be slow to address new problems.

Ethics consists of knowing what we ought to do...

- Ethics is not merely following culturally accepted norms. Some cultures are quite ethical, but others become corrupt-or blind-to certain ethical concerns (as the United States was to slavery before the Civil War). “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” is not a satisfactory ethical standard. On the other hand, it is advisable to also be aware of and sensitive to cultural norms when entering another's environment. Some theorists would contend that, as long as those norms do not violate one's own fundamental principles, imposing one's own standards on other's cultures may cross underlying principles of autonomy and dignity.
- Ethics is not identified with science. Social and natural science can provide important data to help us make better ethical choices. But science alone does not tell us what we ought to do. Science may provide an explanation for what humans are like. But ethics provides reasons for how humans ought to act. And just because something is scientifically or technologically possible, it may not be ethical to do it. (Markkula Center, 2007)

PART III: BASIC DISTINCTIONS

Values

The term “value” implies the (conscious) prioritizing of different behavioral alternatives or standards that are perceived to be possible, worthwhile, or esteemed for the individual, an institution or a nation. Thus values can be espoused and apply to groups (such as ‘American values’) or to individuals.

For example, religious values are both group-related and individually espoused. Values can function both as processes and goals. For example, democracy is both a process, and a goal. Values can be instrumental, that is, what is thought to be worthwhile in achieving other things. But ordinarily values are thought to be intrinsic, that is, those behaviors, standards, and principles that we find worthwhile, worth defending, and worthy of our esteem for their own sakes. For example, often we hold liberty to be a value worth defending for its own sake, whether or not defending liberty produces positive consequences in every instance. Values also function teleologically as ends or purposes of human activities, usually some form of human well-being or flourishing. (Hollar, 1997, 592) Each individual has certain underlying values that contribute to their value system. Integrity in the application of a “value” ensures its continuity and this continuity separates a value from beliefs, opinion and ideas.

Ethics is the reflective consideration of our moral beliefs and practices.

Value System

“Value System” refers to how an individual or a group of individuals organize their ethical or ideological values. These may simply be values that emerge from, or are built into, a culture or religious system. Or values may be standards or principles developed or created by individuals or organizations. A well-

defined value system is a moral code. One or more people can hold a value system. A communal value system is held by and applied to a community/group/society. Some communal value systems may take the form of legal codes or law. A value system may consist of three value categories: 1) Core Values, which prescribe the attitude and character of an individual, a religion, an organization or a system, 2) Protected Values, those protected through rules, accreditations, standards and certifications, and/or 3) Created Values, the values that we develop and expect from each other, from groups, or the organizations or political systems to which we belong.

Morality

“Morality” refers to the beliefs and practices about good and evil by means of which we guide our behavior. Ethics, in contrast, is the reflective consideration and evaluation of our moral beliefs and practices.

Common Morality or Common Sense Morality

“The moral system that thoughtful people use, usually implicitly, when they make moral decisions and judgments.” (Gert, 2004, 2) One form of these may be thought of as negative moral minimums:

- Do not kill
- Do not cause pain
- Do not disable
- Do not deprive of freedom
- Do not deprive of pleasure
- Do not deceive
- Keep your promises
- Do not cheat

Moral Codes

Moral codes are often complex definitions of right and wrong that are based upon well-defined value systems. They dictate proper personal conduct. Although some people might think of moral codes as simple and “universal”, they are often controversial due to one’s religious and cultural values. Sometimes, moral codes give way to legal codes, which couple penalties or corrective actions with particular practices. Examples of moral codes include the Golden Rule; the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism; the ten commandments of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (please refer to the Moral Codes document available on Blackboard for additional information).

Ethics

The explicit reflection on and evaluation of moral beliefs and practices. The difference between ethics and morality is similar to the difference between musicology and music. Ethics is a conscious stepping back and reflecting on morality, just as musicology is a conscious reflection on music.

Ethical Codes

Ethical codes also referred as “codes of conduct,” are usually codes adopted by a profession, an organization or by a governmental or quasi-governmental organ to regulate the behavior of those working in the organization or those who are members of that profession. Some codes of ethics are promulgated by the (quasi-)governmental agency responsible

PART IV: TRADITIONS OF ETHICAL REASONING

for licensing a profession. Violations of these codes may be subject to administrative (e.g., loss of license), civil or penal remedies, or simply the loss of membership in the organization. Other codes are merely advisory and there are no prescribed remedies for violations or even procedures for determining whether a violation even occurred.

The subject matter of ethics is often further articulated in terms of:

- **Meta-ethics:** the study of ethics, values, and belief systems;
- **Normative ethics:** the formulation of prescriptions and proscriptions about what we ought and ought not to do, all things considered;
- **Practical or applied ethics:** the normative practice of ethics in particular disciplines, professions, or organizations;
- **Social ethics:** “assumes that human activity has both individual and social dimensions and that both are part of ethics.... In Judeo-Christian ethics the term implies a critical reflection on social and political aspects of morality as opposed to strictly personal or interpersonal aspects.” (Hollar, 1997, 590-1)

- **Descriptive ethics:** factual descriptions and explanations of moral behavior and beliefs.
- **Professional ethics:** an inquiry into professional conduct. It is part of applied ethics but considers professional codes and obligations. Professional ethics deal with issues of ethical conduct within the profession and how these codes of conduct relate to the greater goals of society.

VINCENTIAN ETHICS

The “Four - S” Vincentian Ethics Principles

St. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) is well known for his contribution to charitable and social causes. He did not specifically write about his ethics and leadership practices. However, by examining his writings, life examples and commitment to the poor, it is possible to frame a Vincentian ethics for personal and organizational service-oriented leadership. The competencies, values and leadership models that emerged from the research of the William and Mary Pat Gannon Hay–Vincent de Paul Leadership Project (DLP) provide a basis for the formulation of a Vincentian ethical paradigm embedded in Catholic social teaching that includes a preferential option for the poor, a particular attention to the person, and the creation and management of sustainable and effective organizations oriented toward service and social change. Building on previous studies in this field, (Bowes, 1998, Mousin, 2005, Rybolt, 2005, Tavanti, 2006,) we can summarize the ethical paradigm inspired by St. Vincent de Paul into the 4S Principles for

Vincentian Ethics:

There are various approaches and traditions to ethical thinking

Principle of Solidarity

Vincent’s preferential and evangelical option for the poor is both a humanistic and faith based perspective. For Vincent, the poor are “our lords and masters” and they are “the place where we meet Christ and find salvation.” In other words, the first Vincentian ethical principle suggests that active local/international solidarity for poverty reduction is a must for Vincentian leaders. This principle is closely related to the Vincentian leadership orientation identified as “SERVICE.”

Principle of Synchronicity

Vincent knew that organized charity would not be effective unless diverse people, organizations and institutions work in partnerships and collaborations. The effectiveness, quality and sustainability of the services delivered depend on the leader’s vision and faith in the divine providence and on his/her innovative strategies to engage people to collaborate toward the same mission. This principle is closely related to the Vincentian leadership orientation identified as “MISSION.”

Principle of Subsidiarity

Vincent's emphasis on the dignity of the human individual transpires from many examples of his personal dedication to the poor and his managerial style. Central leadership authority in organizations should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. In terms of "positive subsidiarity," institutions are ethically called to create the social conditions necessary to the full development of the individual, such as the right to work, decent housing, health care, etc. This principle, summarizes Vincent's firm conviction that organizations, including the Catholic Church, should be at the service of the human person. In Catholic Social Teaching, 'subsidiarity' sometimes refers to decentralizing decision-making authority and responsibility to subsidiary groups whenever this serves the common good. In a more secular modern context, it is connected with concepts of participatory democracy and limited government. At DePaul University, the concept often referred to as 'personalism,' is a reflection of the subsidiary principle. This principle is closely related to the Vincentian leadership orientation identified as "PEOPLE."

Principle of Sustainability

Vincent committed his life not only to serving the poor directly, but also to creating and managing capable and sustained institutions at the service of the poor. The institutionalization and sustainability of a project are therefore essential and integral elements in Vincentian leadership ethics. Vincent's phrase, "It is not enough to do good, it must be done well" translates here as "It is not enough to develop servant leaders unless we also engage in the development of servant structures." Sustainability refers to personal and organizational commitment to provide the best outcomes for the human and natural environments both for immediate and future needs. This principle is closely related to the Vincentian leadership orientation identified as "TASKS."

CLASSICAL ETHICS TRADITIONS

There are various classical approaches to ethical thinking in leadership practices and decision making. These have both secular and religious roots. Each is to help us determine what standards of behavior can be considered ethical. Although limited, each approach gives us important information with which to determine what is ethical in a particular circumstance. Much more often than not, the different approaches do lead to similar answers. Some of the most common approaches include the following:

Virtue Approach

- Focuses on attitudes, dispositions, or character traits that enable us to be and to act in ways that develop our human potential.
- Examples: honesty, courage, faithfulness, trustworthiness, integrity, etc.
- The principle states: "What is ethical is that which develops moral virtues in ourselves and in our communities."

Utilitarian Approach

- Focuses on the consequences that actions or policies have on the well-being ("utility") of all persons who are directly or indirectly affected by the action or policy.
- The principle states: "Of any two actions, the most ethical one will produce the greatest balance of benefits over harms for the greatest number."

Deontological Approach

- Often identified with Immanuel Kant, the focus is on one's duties and unconditional obligations. For Kant, there is a single moral obligation, which he called the "Categorical Imperative." It applies to all and only rational agents.
- Kant's first principle states, "Act in such a way that your actions could be formulated as a law applying universally to everyone."

- Kant's second principle states, in addition to the first: "Act in such a way that you treat every human being as an end, not as a means."

Rights Approach

- Identifies certain interests or activities that our behavior must respect, especially those areas of our lives that are of such value to us that they merit protection from others.
- The principle states: Each person has a fundamental right to be respected and treated as a free and equal rational person capable of making his or her own decisions.
- This implies other rights (e.g., privacy free consent, freedom of conscience, etc.) that must be protected if a person is to have the freedom to direct his or her own life.
- This also implies that each of has duties to respect, equally, the rights of everyone else.
- Tom Donaldson frames common morality internationally in terms of basic minimum universal rights:
 - Right not to be tortured
 - Right to a fair trial
 - Right to equal opportunity
 - Right to security
 - Right to free speech and association
 - Right to minimal education
 - Right to political participation

- Right to subsistence
- Right to freedom of physical movement
- Right to own property (Donaldson, 1990)

Fairness (or Justice) Approach

- Fairness requires consistency in the way people are treated.
- Distributive justice focuses on how fairly or unfairly our actions distribute benefits and burdens among the members of a group.
- The principle states: “Treat people as equals unless there are morally relevant differences between them.”

Common Good Approach

- Presents a vision of society as a community whose members are joined in a shared pursuit of values and goals they hold in common.
- The community is comprised of individuals whose own good is inextricably bound to the good of the whole.
- The principle states: “What is ethical is that which advances the common good.” (Tavanti, 2007; Markkula Center, 2007)

Communitarian Approach

- Espoused by Amatai Etzioni, this approach focuses on communal responsibilities rather than individual rights. The communitarians defend the primacy of the common good, stressing the importance of commitment and collaboration as the touchstones of any society’s moral values. Conscience is not an individual compass, but all the ways that a community makes public its principles and standards. Etzioni attempts to achieve balance with his contention that the primary values are moral order and autonomy.

Ethics of Care Approach

- Assumes that ethics is formed in and through our relationships with others. Reflection on principles is secondary to the attentiveness and care with which we nurture relationships.
- An ethics of care approach is emphasized in those traditions which see compassion as central to interpersonal flourishing.
- The principle states: “What is ethical is that which fosters the flourishing of relationships and of each living being within a given relationship.

Ethics and Law

- There is the set of ethical challenges which face lawyers and other participants in the legal system — these concern the morality/ethics of the law as it is applied, especially in cases of discretion where lawyers/judges have several choices legally available. This would include issues raised by professional codes of ethics, but also ethics in a broader sense.
- There is also a more general concern, which is with the indirect ethical effects of a particular set of legal rules as a guide to individual behavior. The legal rules selected may affect the choices people make in their daily lives.
- In addition, there is the concern if one considers following a legal rule in a particular context to be unethical.
- Finally, one could consider if and when ethical considerations should be incorporated into substantive legal rules where the two diverge.

Other Approaches

There are many other ways to think about ethics and moral reasoning including: An Ecological Approach, Feminism, Social ethics, Professional Ethics Approach, Applied or Practical Ethics, Research Ethics Approach, Race Theory, Queer Theory, and others.

For example:

Ecological Approach

Claims that the well-being of Earth is primary, and human well-being is derivative. Ecological ethics is becoming a central source of ethical discourse and analysis, and provides a strong corrective to anthropocentric approaches to ethics. The principle states: “What is ethical is what preserves the integrity of the ecosystem.”

We invite definitions and discussion of these and other approaches.

PART V: SUGGESTED MODELS FOR CRITICAL ETHICAL REASONING AND DECISION-MAKING

Any model of decision-making is necessarily an oversimplification, because it separates out reflective activities that we actually perform all mixed together, and identifies as separate “steps” of the decision-making process activities that are highly interdependent in actual ethical reflection. In addition, in our ordinary ethical reflection, we do not completely finish one step before beginning on another. Instead we move back and forth between the first four steps, learning from one of them that we haven’t adequately answered another, and gathering data from one of them that proves informative for another, and so on. (Ozar 2007) With that precaution in mind, we present several models for ethical decision-making.

What models for ethical decision-making are available to us?

Markkula Center’s Framework for Ethical Decision-Making¹

Step 1 Recognize an Ethical Issue

- Is there something wrong personally, interpersonally, or socially? Could the conflict, the situation, or the decision be damaging to people or to the community?
- Does the issue go beyond legal or institutional concerns? What does it do to people, who have dignity, rights, and hopes for a better life together?

Step 2 Get the Facts

- What are the relevant facts of the case? What facts are unknown?
- What individuals and groups have an important stake in the outcome? Do some have a greater stake because they have a special need or because we have special obligations to them?

- What are the options for acting? Have all the relevant persons and groups been consulted? If you showed your list of options to someone you respect, what would that person say?

Step 3 Evaluate Alternative Actions From Various Ethical Perspectives

- Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm?

Utilitarian Approach

The ethical action is the one that will produce the greatest balance of benefits over harms.

- Even if not everyone gets all they want, will everyone’s rights and dignity still be respected?

Rights Approach

The ethical action is the one that most dutifully respects the rights of all affected.

- Which option is fair to all those who affect and are affected by the action?

Fairness or Justice Approach

The ethical action is the one that treats people equally, or if unequally, that treats people proportionately and fairly.

- Which option would help all participate more fully in the life we share as a family, community, and society?

Common Good Approach

The ethical action is the one that contributes most to the achievement of a quality common life together.

- Would you want to become the sort of person who acts this way (e.g., a person of courage or compassion)?

Virtue Approach

The ethical action is the one that embodies the habits and values of humans at their best.

Step 4 Make a Decision and Test It

- Considering all these perspectives, which of the options is the right or best thing to do?
- If you told someone you respect why you chose this option, what would that person say? If you had to explain your decision on television, would you be comfortable doing so?

Step 5 Act, Then Reflect on the Decision Later

- Implement your decision. How did it turn out for all concerned? If you

had it to do over again, what would you do differently? (www.scu.edu/ethics/, accessed January 22, 2007)

David Ozar’s Model Of Ethical Decision-making (Ozar, 2007)

Step 1 Identifying the Alternatives

- The first step consists of determining what courses of action are available for choice, and identifying their most important features. Special circumstances about the situation or our own habitual ways of perceiving and acting can cloud our vision of our options. Our questions for this step include these: What courses of action are available to us? What would be their likely outcomes? To what other choices for ourselves and for others are they likely to lead? Just how likely are such outcomes and such future choices?

Step 2 Determining What is Morally/Ethically at Stake By Reason of Our Social Roles

- Once we know our alternatives, if we are in relevant social roles or relationships, we must examine the alternatives specifically from that point of view, i.e. what those roles or relationships indicate ought or ought not to be done. It will involve identification and careful consideration of the specific obligations relevant to that role or relationship. Each of the identified alternatives must be examined from this point of view.

Step 3

Determining What Else is Morally/Ethically at Stake

- Each alternative must be examined specifically from the point of view of the broader criteria of what ethically, ought or ought not to be done, over and above the norms of the person's specific social roles and relationships. If specific role-based obligations norms conflict, or if they fail to adequately determine action in the situation at hand, or if other commitments conflict with the commitments most obvious in the situation, then the more fundamental moral categories need even more careful consideration because they are the key to resolving such conflicts.
- The details of this process will depend upon the particular approach that a person takes to ethical reflection in its "largest" or "deepest" sense. Ordinarily, at the most general level, people do their moral reflection chiefly either in terms of maximizing certain values for certain persons, or in terms of conformity to certain fundamental moral rules or rights, or in terms of actualizing certain human virtues or ideal conceptions of the human person.

Step 4

Determining What Ought to be Done, All Things Considered

- The process of determining what is morally/ethically at stake will sometimes yield, without further effort, the conclusion that one of our alternatives is morally/ethically better than all the rest. At other times, matters will be more complex because the various values, rules, virtues, role-based norms, etc., that are involved favor different courses of action. Then one's choice of action becomes also a choice between the alternative values, rules, norms, etc.
- In addition, judgments about actions can sometimes leave a person with a choice between several equally superior alternatives; or a choice between the least worst alternative. In such cases, one may morally choose either of the equal alternatives, provided that they are all superior to every other alternative considered.

Step 5

After judging, it is still necessary to choose a course of action in order to act?

SOME TESTS FOR EVALUATING DECISIONS

- Am I or my company making at least some individuals or institutions better off? At what expense to others?
- What rights are at stake?
- What basic principles underlie the decision?
- What character traits does this alternative exemplify in those implementing this?
- How does decision this link to my personal values?
- Publicity test: Could we defend this decision in a public forum?
- Precedent? Do we want others to practice this? In the profession? In the organization? Nationally? Could this action be formulated as a rule for all individual, professional, organizational, or global activities?
- Reversibility? Does this pass the Golden Rule test? Would we want this "done unto me?"
- Conscience test: Can I defend this action to myself in terms of my own values?
- Can I brag about this to my friends and relatives?
- Is this the way I want to live my life? Is this how I want to be remembered? Is this the way I want my profession, organization, or society to be remembered? (Werhane, 2007)

HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE

Six Critical Questions to Ask Before Engaging in Ethical Reflection or Analysis.

The following questions provide a useful basis for understanding some key beliefs or assumptions an individual or group brings to the task of "doing" ethics. These questions are taken from the Hermeneutical Circle designed by the feminist Christian social ethicist Beverly Harrison. The full circle consists of seventeen questions and can be found in the Appendix of this text.

- What is the **community of accountability** for the person or group being questioned?
 - Community of accountability = who the person/group feel they most have to please, abide by, not alienate. Whose opinions do they most value?
- What **praxis** does this person's or group's work serve or hope to serve?
 - Praxis = work, project, physical undertaking
- What **attitude toward social change** is being exemplified by the individual/group being examined?
 - Attitude toward social change = Does the person/group believe that it is possible, or even desirable to change society/public conduct in some way?

GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS

- What is the individual's or group's **conception of power**?
 - Conception of power = what does the person/group believe is the greatest source of power? Is it found in money? Weapons? God? Philosophy?
 - How does the person/group think such power operates?
- What are the individual's or group's **truth claims** (or what in their opinion, is "known" and what is "up for debate?")
 - Truth claims = Where does truth come from in the opinion of the writer? What is that truth? What truth cannot be debated in the eyes of the person? group? What truth is open to examination and possible revision, according to the writer?
- Where does the person/group claim **knowledge** comes from? Experience? Scripture? History? Science? A combination of these and other sources?

ONE FORM OF CATHOLIC ETHICAL REASONING: VINCENTIAN ETHICAL REASONING

The 4-S Principles of Vincentian Ethics suggest the formulation of a simple set of questions for Vincentian ethical reasoning. The decision making process that inspired St. Vincent de Paul was probably quite similar to those very same Catholic social thinking principles and values expressed in these questions.

- Does my decision positively affect the poor or most vulnerable people?
SOLIDARITY PRINCIPLE
- Is my decision true to my deepest values and uncompromising principles?
SYNCHRONICITY PRINCIPLE
- Does my decision empower others and promote leadership development?
SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE
- Does my decision make a positive change for the community and future generations?
SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLE

Altruism

The selfless motivation or concern for the welfare or good of others. This perspective draws attention to the values of charitable work on behalf of those less fortunate and the heroism of those who risk their life for others, and the ethic of "love of neighbor" is at its core. As a tradition, altruism is a powerful inspiration to advance the common good.

Autonomy

The ability to freely determine one's own course in life. Etymologically, it goes back to the Greek words for "self" and "law." This term is most strongly associated with Immanuel Kant, for whom it meant the ability to give the moral law to oneself.

Categorical Imperative

An unconditional command. For Immanuel Kant, all of morality depended on a single categorical imperative. One version of that imperative was, "Always act in such a way that the maxim of your action can be willed as a universal law."

Common Good

This may describe a specific "good" that is shared and beneficial for all (or most) members of a given community. Another definition of the common good is the sum total of the conditions of social or political life which enable people to live decently or well. Thus, in essence, helping the common good equates with helping all people, or at least the vast majority of them. In that sense, the term could be synonymous

with the general welfare. The common good is often regarded as a utilitarian ideal, thus representing "the greatest possible good for the greatest possible number of individuals."

Conscience

A faculty or sense that leads to feelings of remorse when we do things that go against our moral precepts, or which informs our moral judgment before performing such an action. Such feelings are not intellectually reached, though they may cause us to "examine our conscience" and review those moral precepts, or perhaps resolve to avoid repeating the behavior. Although there is no generally accepted definition of what conscience is or what its role in ethical decision-making is, conscience is generally emerge from secular, religious or philosophical views. Commonly used metaphors refer to the "voice of conscience" or "voice within."

Consequentialism

Any position in ethics which claims that the rightness or wrongness of actions depends on their consequences.

Deductive

A deductive argument is an argument whose conclusion follows necessarily from its premises. This contrasts to various kinds of inductive arguments, which offer only a degree of probability to support their conclusion.

Deontology

Any position in ethics which claims that the rightness or wrongness of actions

depends on whether they correspond to our duty or not. The word derives from the Greek word for duty, *deon*.

Egoism

It is a focus on the self. Psychological egoism is the view that individuals are always motivated by self-interest or interests of and in the self. Ethical egoism is the view that claims that individuals *ought* to do what is in their self-interests, a moral requirement. Rational egoism is the view that identifies rationality with individual utility maximization, which in many cases may refer to one's own self-interest.

Emotivism

A philosophical theory which holds that moral judgments are simply expressions of positive or negative feelings.

Good (and Evil)

Refer to the evaluation of the ends of morality and thus the evaluation of human behavior across a dualistic spectrum—wherein in one direction are those aspects which are morally *positive*, and the other are morally *negative*. The good is sometimes viewed as whatever entails reverence towards either life, continuity, happiness, or human flourishing, while evil is given to be the support for their opposites.

Heteronomy

For Kant, heteronomy is the opposite of autonomy. Whereas an autonomous person is one whose will is self-determined, a heteronomous person is one whose will is determined by something outside of the person, such as overwhelming emotions. Etymologically, heteronomy goes back to the Greek words for “other” and “law.”

Hypothetical Imperative

A conditional command, such as, “If you want to lose weight, stop eating cookies.” Some philosophers have claimed that morality is only a system of hypothetical imperatives, while others—such as Kant—have maintained that morality is a matter of categorical imperatives. Also see: categorical imperative.

Justice

In the first instance justice may be defined as the “consciousness of ill-desert.” (Smith, 1769; 1976, II.ii.3;4) So in this minimal sense, justice refers to fairness, or the treatment of every individual as an equal, in all circumstances. It is also defined as giving to each and all what is due to them, which are their moral and legal *rights* to do, possess, or exact something. This is equal insofar as each one receives what he is entitled to, but may be unequal insofar as different people may have

different rights: two children have different rights from a certain adult if that adult is the parent of one of them and not of the other.

Distributive Justice: concerns what is fair with respect to the allocation of social benefits, goods, and burdens in a society. Thus, a community whose individual members are rendered their due would be considered a society guided by the principles of distributive justice.

Procedural Justice: concerned with just processes such as in the administration of law or the respect for human rights.

Social Justice: an ideal of society, based on the idea of a society which gives individuals and groups fair treatment and a just share of the economic and other benefits of society, although what is “fair treatment” and a “just share” is subject to interpretation.

Law

The meaning of “law” is subject to a number of different interpretations. The word “law” may refer to positive law, which can include acts of legislation, judicial opinions, and regulations set forth by government agencies. Positive law may also stem from other sources, as occurs with international law. Positive law is frequently rule-like and prospective, and may have a threat of sanction when it is not followed. The concept of “law” may also include natural law. Natural law often refers to a set of rules or standards of just conduct deducible by reason. Theories of natural law may

have a secular or revelatory grounding. Some, but not all, understandings of law link the concept to considerations of morality. In addition, positive law may expressly incorporate moral standards into its legal requirements.

Libertarianism

refers to a political philosophy maintaining that all persons are the absolute owners of their own lives, and should be free to do whatever they wish with their persons or property, as long as they allow others the same liberty. Libertarians favor an ethic of self-responsibility and strongly oppose the welfare state, because they believe *forcing* someone to provide aid to others is ethically wrong, ultimately counter-productive, or both.

Narcissism

An excessive preoccupation with oneself. In mythology, Narcissus was a beautiful young man who fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water.

Natural Law

In ethics, believers in natural law hold (a) that there is a natural order to the human world, (b) that this natural order is good, and (c) that people therefore ought not to violate that order.

Nihilism

The belief that there is no value or truth. Literally, a belief in nothing (nihil). Most philosophical discussions of nihilism arise out of a consideration of Friedrich Nietzsche's remarks on nihilism, especially in *The Will to Power*.

Particularity

In recent discussions, ethicists have contrasted particularity with universality and impartiality and asked how, if morality is necessarily universal and impartial, it can give adequate recognition to particularity. Particularity refers to specific attachments (friendships, loyalties, etc.) and desires (fundamental projects, personal hopes in life) that are usually seen as morally irrelevant to the rational moral self.

Pluralism

The belief that there are multiple perspectives on an issue, each of which contains part of the truth but none of which contain the whole truth. In ethics, moral pluralism is the belief that different moral theories each capture part of truth of the moral life, but none of those theories has the entire answer.

Relativism

In ethics, there are two main types of relativism. *Descriptive ethical relativism* simply claims as a matter of fact that different people have different moral beliefs, but it takes no stand on whether those beliefs are valid or not. *Normative ethical relativism* claims that each culture's (or group's) beliefs are right within that culture, and that it is impossible to validly judge another culture's values from the outside.

Rights

are entitlements to do something without interference from other people (*negative rights*) or entitlements that obligate others to do something positive to assist you (*positive rights*). Some rights (natural rights, human rights) belong to everyone by nature or simply by virtue of being human; some rights (*legal rights*) belong to people by virtue of their membership in a particular political state; other rights (*moral rights*) are based in acceptance of a particular moral theory.

Satisficing

A term utilitarians borrowed from economics to indicate how much utility we should try to create. Whereas maximizing utilitarians claim that we should strive to *maximize* utility, satisficing utilitarians claim that we need only try to produce *enough* utility to satisfy everyone. It's analogous to the difference between taking a course with the goal of getting an "A" and taking it pass-fail.

Skepticism

There are two senses of this term. In ancient Greece, the skeptics were inquirers who were dedicated to the investigation of concrete experience and wary of theories that might cloud or confuse that experience. In modern times, skeptics have been wary of the trustworthiness of sense experience. Thus, classical skepticism was skeptical primarily about theories, while modern skepticism is skeptical primarily about experience.

Subjectivism

An extreme version of relativism, which maintains that each person's beliefs are relative to that person alone and cannot be judged from the outside by any other person.

Teleology

The term "teleological" comes from the Greek word *telos* for "goal" or "aim." An ethical conception counts as teleological if its ethical recommendations are directed entirely toward some idea of the good. Teleological ethics focuses on the consequences or results, and moral judgments are based entirely on judgments of good or bad consequences. (Becker, 1992, 1235-8)

Transcendental Argument

A type of argument, deriving from Kant, which seeks to establish the necessary conditions of the possibility of something's being the case. For example, we have to believe that we are free when we perform an action; thus belief in freedom is a necessary condition of the possibility of action.

Universalizability

Immanuel Kant used this term when discussing the maxims, or subjective rules, that guide our actions. A maxim is universalizable if it can consistently be willed as a law that everyone ought to obey. The only maxims which are morally good are those which can be universalized. The test of universalizability ensures that everyone has the same moral obligations in morally similar situations.

Utilitarianism

A moral theory that says that what morally right is whatever produces the greatest overall amount of pleasure (*hedonistic utilitarianism*) or happiness (*eudemonistic utilitarianism*). Some utilitarians (*act utilitarians*) claim that we should weigh the consequences of each individual action, while others (*rule utilitarians*) maintain that we should look at the consequences of adopting particular rules of conduct.

Virtue: A character trait valued as being good. The conceptual opposite of virtue is vice.

Virtue

A character trait valued as being good. The conceptual opposite of virtue is vice.

Virtue Ethics: An approach to ethics that studies the character traits or habits that constitute a good human life, a life worth living. The virtues provide answers to the basic ethical question: "What kind of person should I be?"

APPENDIX I

WHAT DO WE EXPECT FROM OUR COURSES AND FROM OUR STUDENTS?

Course Goals

- To develop and enhance awareness of ethical issues in their discipline, subject or profession.
- To challenge students to understand basic principles of ethics, to think and write critically, and to confront inconsistencies in their own ethics and values systems.
- To help students develop a decision model for reasoning through ethical issues.
- To enable students to apply ethics traditions and their decision model to new ethical issues they will encounter.

Student Outcomes of The Ethics Across The Curricula Initiative

Ethical Traditions

Students will demonstrate knowledge of some ethical traditions, that is, ways of conceiving, grounding, structuring and thinking about issues of moral import.

Ethical Reasoning

Students will be able to think critically about ethical issues applying tools drawn from various ethical traditions to concrete cases pertinent to a variety of subject matters.

- Students will be cognizant of and able to recognize ethical issues. It is important that students cultivate the capability to detect moral problems, as well as understand hidden value biases. Students will face moral and ethical dilemmas and must discern and examine these conflicts.
- Students will develop critical thinking skills. They should understand that they are responsible for their own actions and decisions. In actions of moral concern, students should understand the importance of carefully reasoned options and alternatives to their dilemmas.
- Students should understand there will be disagreement and ambiguities when dealing with ethical problems. It is important to encourage tolerance for opposing viewpoints with the students. Students should recognize

that we gain ethical concepts from our society. We are always accountable for our individual judgments, yet it is wise to consult the moral reasoning of others in that formulation of personal judgments.

Professional Ethics

Students will demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to develop an analysis of and response to ethical issues pertinent to their specific field of study and/or intended career.

- Students should be able to recognize ethical issues in their area of study.
- Students should have developed critical thinking skills.
- Students will aim to become better managers, politicians, and professionals in response to increasing demands for more ethical behavior in business, professions and politics.
- For those in formal professions such as law, health care, engineering, etc. students should be familiar with those professional codes and how they apply to practice.
- Students should have developed a sense of moral understanding. Primary to this goal is asking the imperative moral question, “Why ought I to be moral?”

Social Responsibility

Students will demonstrate an understanding of their own relationship with the larger society and of the ethical implications of the multitude of social forces that structure the world in which they live. Students will be able to articulate, from a moral point of view, their own responsibility within the relationships that sustain their lives and for shaping the social forces that structure their world.

- Students should acquire a sense of moral obligation that extends beyond personal values to social and professional interactions and relationships.

APPENDIX II

THE HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE (IN ITS ENTIRETY)

A creation of the feminist Christian social ethicist Beverly Harrison, the hermeneutical circle is a systematic method for interrogating a person or a movement in an effort to determine the basis from which they approach the task of ethical reasoning. As such, the following set of questions can be used as the basis of a self-examination prior to engaging an ethical dilemma, or as a means of inviting others to more concretely name the foundational claims and motivations they are drawing on as ethical thinkers.

- What is the community of accountability for the person or group being questioned?
 - Community of accountability = who the person/group feel they most have to please, abide by, not alienate. Whose opinions do they most value?
- What are some of their other loyalties stated or implied?
 - Other loyalties = to whom or what do they feel aligned with/obligated to?
- What praxis does this person's or group's work serve or hope to serve?
 - Praxis = work, project, physical undertaking
- What attitude toward social change is being exemplified by the individual/group being examined?
 - Attitude toward social change = Does the person/group believe that it is possible, or even desirable to change society/public conduct in some way?
- What is the individual's or group's conception of power?
 - Conception of power = what does the person/group believe is the greatest source of power? Is it found in money? Weapons? God? Philosophy? How does the person/group think such power operates?
- What are the individual's or group's truth claims (or what in their opinion, is "known" and what is "up for debate?")
 - Truth claims = Where does truth come from in the opinion of the writer? What is that truth? What truth cannot be debated in the eyes of the person? group? What truth is open to examination and possible revision, according to the writer?
- What status does the person/group give to theological or religious claims?
 - The status of theological/religious claims = How important are such claims to the person's or group's position? Are such claims primary or secondary to their position?
- What status does the person or group give to historical claims?
 - Status of historical claims = How important is the person's or group's view of history in terms of explaining or justifying their position?
- What sources does the person or group use to justify their claims? Are they scriptural? Are they economic? Are they _____?
- Does the person/group leave room for his or her claims to be contested?
- Does the person/group allow people to question his or her statements/opinions, or are the listeners expected to accept them *carte blanche*?
- What does the person/group see as the scope of their claims? Are their claims only valid for a particular place and time, or are they held to be universal?
- What is the person's or group's attitude toward institutions?
- What does the person/group hold to be the moral norms operating in the social context they are examining?
 - Moral Norms = Agreed upon goods which have been identified by a particular group.
- What type of relationships is the person/group primarily interested in?
 - Is it interpersonal relationships?
 - Inter-group or inter-community relations?
 - Political and Economic Relations?
 - The relations between nation-states?
 - Some combination of these?
- Where does the person/group claim knowledge comes from? Experience? Scripture? History? Science? A combination of these and other sources?
- Does the person/group seek to apply his or her religious or philosophical norms across religious boundaries? (i.e. Is this a Christian trying to make pronouncements regarding how Jews, Muslims and secular folks should conduct themselves?)
- What is the theological anthropology being claimed or implied by the person or group?
 - Theological anthropology = where does the person or group place human beings in relation to God and the rest of creation? Is the human the most important thing on earth after God, or are humans terrible creatures at the bottom of the food chain?

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ENDNOTES

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