

Ethical Challenges:

Building an Ethics Toolkit

by

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Dedicated to my real-life sister, Debbie,
and to my spiritual sisters Allison, Rose, and Pam,
all of whom keep me nourished with their love.

An Introduction to Ethical Challenges

Right and wrong. Good and bad. What may I do? What must I do? Which is the best thing to do? Every thinking person grapples with these issues. But most people make their choices haphazardly and hope that things will turn out okay. There is a better way.

When people think about the different components involved in ethical decision making, they tend to become better at making tough choices. Their decision making improves in three ways: clarity, consistency, and completeness.

Clarity means that people can describe what they are choosing in specific situations and why. It is good to be able to explain one's choices. Saying, "I did what I felt like doing," is not an adequate explanation if someone else is suffering because of your choice. If you can explain your reasoning to yourself, you are in a better position to examine the adequacy of your choice and determine how you might want to do things differently in the future.

Choices are *consistent* when they reflect the decision maker's understanding of the principle that rests behind specific choices. For example, you might justify investing \$200 in your daughter's extracurricular activity by the fact that you funded her brother's favorite hobby last month. In this case, you are appealing to the principle of fairness.

Ethical decision making is *complete* when it takes into account everyone directly affected by the decision and other important characteristics of the situation. It is easy to respond to the need of one homeless person on the street who asks for your pocket change. But a choice to provide a more substantial donation to the local homeless shelter might be better, ethically speaking. That donation would help more people and by keeping the kitchen stocked at the shelter, it might provide more dependable assistance for the individual who approached you.

Ethical Challenges provides information and activities to help individuals or groups think through basic ethical concepts and considerations. *Ethical Challenges* will not provide specific answers for the specific dilemmas that people face but will help readers bring to conscious awareness some understandings that help in thinking through ethical issues.

This workbook can be used alone to stimulate the moral imagination and provoke interesting discussions. It can also be used in conjunction with a more theoretical book, *Ethics in the First Person: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Practical Ethics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) that I wrote. *Ethics in the First Person* provides an expanded version of the concepts that are introduced here.

Ethical Challenges is produced with thanks to the several hundreds of students, from pre-school age through middle age, who have helped me learn how to teach ethics, and thanks to Pam Hogle for expert copyediting at a minute's notice. Its production was possible at this time because of the encouragement and expert assistance of my friend and sister through marriage, Roseanna Lester. I am grateful to her for this and for her most important production, her daughter, Allison.

A disclaimer: This workbook is full of examples and hypothetical situations intended to help readers stretch their reasoning abilities. Some are classic, some are based on events or issues in current life, and some I created to illustrate a point. Usually, a variety of answers would be acceptable. In addition, much of the material here is derivative of the work of contemporary philosopher Bernard Gert. Gert's concepts that I have included in this workbook have appeared in a variety of books, journal articles and even in *Playboy* magazine. Rather than cite specific references, I have included a list of Gert's more accessible selections on the resources page.

Deni Elliott
St. Petersburg, Florida
May 2008

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Chapter 1

I am an Ethical Being

Each one of us is born to be ethical. Just as humans are hard-wired with the potential to breathe and see and hear and walk and talk and think, we arrive with the potential to take into consideration how our actions impact people and world around us. Part of what it means to be human is being a member of a species with these potentials. So, even though people have a range of visual capabilities, for example, from being completely blind to having vision that is better than the 20/20 norm, we are all part of a species with the potential of sight. So it is with ethics.

Socio-biologists say that people are born with the capacity to care for others because that is necessary for the survival of our species. Religious scholars credit God with giving humans the abilities to recognize the innate worth of other people, species, and the environment. Some philosophers argue that people recognize responsibilities to consider other people, animals, and the earth because of our natural reasoning abilities. Whatever the foundation for this ability, ethics is an innate quality. We are born with the potential of becoming **moral** beings.

The word “moral” is synonymous with “ethical.” The words have almost identical classical meanings. The word “moral” is from the Latin *mores* which means custom, as in, how people customarily behave. The word “ethics” is from the Greek *ethikos* which also refers to behaviors we expect.

Ethics, (or morality) as it is used in this book, is the **study of how people *should* act toward one another, other species, and natural systems.** The fundamental expectation is that people should avoid causing unjustified harm.

There is more to ethics than choosing not to harm others. The world would be a sad place if all that we did was stay out of each other’s way. Ethics is also about promoting the good. Activities in this book explore both, but most try to clarify what it means for an individual

1. moral agent to
2. avoid causing
3. unjustified
4. harms
5. to other humans and
6. to other subjects of moral worth

Readers who complete all 20 of the activities in this book should have a much more clear idea of what each of these 6 concepts mean than they have now.

To think ethically, a person must understand that he or she is capable of causing harm to other people, animals and the environment. Most people develop a full understanding of this slowly over a long lifetime, but by the time children are three or four years old, they begin to understand that

they can hurt others – sometimes with bites or slaps to illustrate their understanding! That’s when cultures and families begin to hold them responsible for not causing harm. The understanding that we can and should not cause harm to others is based on the **human analogy**.

Here’s what the human analogy means: I understand that you (any person who has been born and who has not yet died) are like me in that you can be caused pain and death and disability and be thwarted in your abilities to do things or seek pleasure.¹ I assume that you don’t want me to do these things to you, except in very unusual circumstances. And, I expect that you know that I don’t want you to do these things to me. The human analogy is in my thinking that we are similar in this way.

The human analogy is why we trust that strangers will not purposefully trip us as we walk down the street. It is why most people automatically tell the truth if a stranger asks for the time or for directions. It also explains why most people are kind to their pets – they extend the human analogy to understand that other creatures feel pain, wish to live, and have desires as well.

The human analogy is also that reason that torture and terrorism are such effective evils. Torture is the intentional infliction of extreme pain or fear of death. Torture makes sense only because the person doing the harm thinks that that the person being tortured will feel pain, anticipate the pain, and possibly choose to act in ways to avoid the pain. Terrorism is random violence or the threat of random violence to innocent people. Terrorism works because it involves acts that cause pain, death, and disability; and because it thwarts people from moving around freely. Human beings are not equipped to cope well with being caused intentional harm without good reason.

Terrorism is an extreme example of unethical action. But the world is filled with less extreme examples of people acting in unethical ways. This may lead one to wonder, “Why should I do what’s right when other people are doing things that are harmful to others?”

Different philosophers answer this question in different ways, but for the purposes of this book, the best answer is that each of us has the personal obligation to be the best that we can individually be. We have a duty to grow ethically just as we have a duty to nurture the intellectual and physical aspects of self. Ethics involves individual choices that are made regardless of how other people are behaving. This workbook contains activities designed to help individuals exercise and increase their ethical capacities. It is based on the assumption that thinking about doing what’s ethical will lead to more ethical choices.

¹ This list is from the work of contemporary philosopher, Bernard Gert, to whom we will later return.

A Person with Values

Everyone has values. The act of valuing judges one thing to be better than another. You prefer something you value over something that you don't. Some values are aesthetic or expressions of taste. When you say what kind of music, art, or literature you like, you are expressing aesthetic values. When you describe your list of favorite foods, fashion choices, and the kinds of sports or games you like to participate in or watch, you are expressing your tastes. It generally doesn't matter if other people share your aesthetic values or tastes.

Ethical values, however, are different because they necessarily express ideas that people bring to their interaction with others. I care about how others treat me and the people who are important to me. My own ethical values are important because they inform my personal choices and are reflected in how I get along with others.

The first activity will help you think about what you value in terms of your current life and goals. Some of these values directly affect others and some have indirect effect. While the goal of the first activity is to determine what is important to you, think about how those values might affect how you respond to others. The second activity helps you focus more specifically on the values that you want others to express in regard to you and the values you want to express in regard to others. It is interesting to do these exercises with others. If you listen to others talk about ethics, you are certain to be surprised at how differently people think.

We all have a tendency toward *projection*. Projection is the assumption that other people think, feel, value, or experience the world just like we do. While it is true that we all wish to avoid the same kinds of harms, there are significant differences among people as well. A serious form of projection occurs when an individual ascribes motives to another or thinks that he or she *knows* why a person did or said something. No one can know, for sure, what goes on in the mind of another.



Activity #1

A Personal Inventory of Values

Choose your five most important values and rank them from the most important to least important. It is okay to have ties! It's okay to include more than five or to choose fewer or to add other values. It is a list of *your* important values.

1. Ambition _____
2. Achievement _____
3. Animals _____
4. Calmness _____
5. Change _____
6. Charity _____
7. Community _____
8. Companionship _____
9. Economic stability _____
10. Environment _____
11. Family _____
12. Forgiveness _____
13. Friendship _____
14. Geographical Location _____
15. Health _____
16. Honesty _____
17. How others perceive me _____
18. Independence _____
19. Intelligence _____
20. Love _____
21. Making Money _____
22. Religion _____
23. Service to Others _____
24. Stability _____
25. Vulnerability _____



Something for the Toolkit: *The more you know what is important to you, the easier it is to make choices that best reflect those values. When you know what you value, you can explain your choices to self and others. Knowing your values gives you the opportunity to re-evaluate them and change them if you want. You are always free to grow beyond where you are.*

Activity #2

Values in Regard to Others

Part I

Choose the five most important values from this list in terms of **how you want other people** to treat you and those who are important to you. Try to determine the most important down to the least important. Again, choose more than five, fewer than five, or add in your own values if that fits your needs. It is okay to have ties!

1. Accepting _____
2. Caring _____
3. Cheerful _____
4. Creative _____
5. Empathetic _____
6. Fair _____
7. Forgiving _____
8. Friendly _____
9. Helpful _____
10. Honest _____
11. Impartial _____
12. (With) Integrity _____
13. Intellectually challenging _____
14. Judgmental _____
15. Keep out of the way _____
16. Kind _____
17. (Be) Like minded _____
18. Not causing harm _____
19. On time _____
20. Open minded _____
21. Polite _____
22. Promote my pleasure _____
23. Promote my welfare _____
24. Respectful _____
25. Responsible _____

Values in Regard to Others Part II

This time, choose the five most important values from this list that illustrate **how you treat other people**. Identify those values that express your own best self. Add missing values if needed. Rank order.

1. Accepting _____
2. Caring _____
3. Cheerful _____
4. Creative _____
5. Empathetic _____
6. Fair _____
7. Forgiving _____
8. Friendly _____
9. Helpful _____
10. Honest _____
11. Impartial _____
12. (With) Integrity _____
13. Intellectually challenging _____
14. Judgmental _____
15. Keep out of the way _____
16. Kind _____
17. (Be) Like minded _____
18. Not causing harm _____
19. On time _____
20. Open minded _____
21. Polite _____
22. Promote pleasure _____
23. Promote welfare _____
24. Respectful _____
25. Responsible _____

Now compare your lists. Do you treat people the way that you want them to treat you? Why or why not? What differences do you see and how do you explain the differences?



Something for the Toolkit: You should look for consistency in terms of how you treat people and how you want to be treated. Notice and try to explain any differences. You shouldn't expect more than you give; nor should you expect less than you give. A person's basic values for how people should treat one another should be consistent no matter who the people are.

Activity #3

Virtues and the Golden Mean

The ancient Greek philosopher **Aristotle** called certain ethical values **virtues**. Virtues express **moral excellence**, which is sometimes called **good character**. Aristotle noted that there is also a special intellectual virtue, **wisdom**. Wisdom is different from ethical virtues in that you can never have too much wisdom! But, when it comes to ethical values, too much or too little is a problem, according to Aristotle. He taught us that ethical virtues express a mid-point between the vice of excess and the vice of deficiency. For example, courage is a virtue. But, people who have too much courage (vice of excess) are foolhardy. People who have too little courage (vice of deficiency) are cowards. People who exhibit good character are those who strive for a middle point between the extremes. They exhibit the right amount of the right virtue in each situation. That is called the **Golden Mean**.

Here is a list of virtues that relate to living ethically. Identify the vice of deficiency and the vice of excess for each. Then mark where you think you are on the continuum for each virtue. Where do you lean toward excess? Where do you lean toward deficiency? For which do you hold the right amount of virtue, and thus express the Golden Mean? For more practice, use the list that is included in Activity #2.

VICE OF DEFICIENCY	VIRTUE	VICE OF EXCESS
	Assertiveness	
	Commitment	
	Compassion	
	Cooperation	
	Forgiveness	
	Generosity	
	Gratitude	
	Honesty	
	Loyalty	
	Trust	



Something for the Toolkit: When you recognize your own flaws and can name them, you have the opportunity to identify work that you need to do. Becoming a person of good character and consistently exhibiting virtues is a life-long activity.

A Person with Ethical Intuitions

By the time people start thinking seriously about questions of ethics, they come to the deliberation full of ethical intuitions. Watch children as young as eight years old play together. “You cheated!” “It’s not your turn.” “That’s not fair!” ring out, with the obvious assumption that the louder you make a moral claim, the more legitimate it must be.

Adults learn to speak in softer tones, but they are often also certain that they have the absolute right answer for every ethical dilemma. And they couldn’t be more wrong. Everyone misjudges situations. Everyone makes moral mistakes. Everyone gets their reasoning wrong. Everyone engages, from time to time, in self-deception or in denial of one’s part in a bad decision. Most of us even occasionally choose to do something that we *know* is unethical.

The good news is that each one of us is capable of becoming more morally sophisticated in our decision-making. I am certainly wiser about my choices now than I was 10 years ago. And, I hope to be even better at it a decade from now. Every choice gives us the opportunity to re-evaluate the basis upon which we make decisions.



Activity #4

Variations in Ethical Intuitions

Read through the following statements carefully and decide how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. Score the following statements using this scale:

Completely disagree - 0

Somewhat disagree -1

Somewhat agree - 2

Completely agree - 3

(Feel free to choose half points if you consider yourself somewhere in between or to give minus or plus points if you REALLY feel strongly.)

1. Sometimes telling a lie is unethical. Sometimes not. It depends on whether the individual telling the lie decides that that is the best choice. _____
2. When I say something is right or that it is wrong, that is nothing more than an expression of my individual judgment. It doesn't mean that the act is **really** right or wrong. _____
3. What is right or wrong is nothing more than what people in a particular culture believe. There are no general ethical principles that exist outside of one society's or group's perception. _____
4. I make the right ethical choices because I learned good ethics as a child, or from my church or other authority. People should just do what authority tells them to do. _____
5. Sometimes telling a lie is unethical. Sometimes not. It depends on whether everyone should tell a lie in that specific situation. _____

Total for 1-5 _____

6. If an action harms an innocent person, it is unethical. _____
7. If an action causes harm to anyone, it is probably not the best choice, no matter what benefits are achieved. _____
8. One should never intentionally cause another person harm. _____
9. It is possible to find solutions that meet the needs of everyone involved. _____
10. The ends do not justify the means. _____

Total for 6-10 _____

11. In a family, the best thing to do is usually to give every child equal treatment. _____
12. In this world, people are entitled to what they earn. _____
13. Scholarship money should be based on merit. _____
14. Scholarship awards should not be based on need. _____
15. A person's primary goal should be personal development rather than caring for others. _____

Total for 11-15 _____

Statements 1-5 let you see how **relativistic** you are in ethical decision making. A high score on these five (10-15 points) suggests that you think that ethical decision making is highly **situational** and that it is rarely right to judge someone else's choices by your standards. The good news is that you probably have a high degree of tolerance for the differences of others. The bad news is that you might refrain from making ethical judgments even when there is obvious social injustice or harm to an innocent.

But, there are some nuances here. If you scored statements 1 - 3, and 5 low (0 - 1 in each case), but scored #4 high, you think that **what is ethical depends on external rules**. This can be tricky if different people have different authorities who provide conflicting ethical rules. How do you know which is right? If you scored statements 1 - 4 low, but scored #5 high, you are an **exceptionalist**. That means that while you think that there are basic ethical rules that people should follow, you believe that there are exceptions to the rule. For example, you might think that it is wrong to tell a lie, but that everyone should tell a lie to prevent some great harm – like lying to trick a kidnapper or to prevent someone from committing suicide.

Statements 6 -10 help you assess your level of idealism. High scores for those numbers indicate that you are **highly idealistic**. You think that it is possible to make choices that don't cause harm to anyone. The lower the score for these statements, the **less idealistic** you are. A score of less than 5 indicates that you are somewhat cynical!

Finally, statements 11-15 help you think about whether you lean toward an **ethics of justice** or an **ethics of care**. High scores on these statements indicate that you make determinations out of a sense of treating individuals impartially and giving them only what they earn. Low scores indicate that you make determinations out of a sense of caring for those who you think need protection. An ethics of justice is strongly individualistic and has the concepts of liberty, autonomy, and equality at its base. An ethics of care is focused on relationships and community. It has the concepts of connection, mutual dependence, and meeting the needs of the more vulnerable at its base. People who score in the middle range (5-10 points) probably use both orientations in their decision making.



Activity #5

My Ethical Intuitions A 10-Minute Essay

Now, take a little time to consider what all of this means for how you make your choices. In no more than 10 minutes, answer the following questions.

1. Are you more relativistic or do you lean toward a belief in universal ethical truth?
2. How idealistic are you?
3. Do you lean toward an ethics of justice, an ethics of care, or both?
4. How do you see your answers to these three questions reflected in your everyday decision making?
5. As none of us are entirely consistent, provide an example of when your moral judgment contradicts your ethical intuition. For example, maybe you have a “live and let live” attitude when it comes to other people’s decisions. But, you think that it is wrong for individuals to own handguns. Or you think that abortion is the same as killing an innocent child. Or, you think that any society that allows capital punishment is barbaric. How do you make sense of your contradiction?
6. Does your job or current life situation reflect your ethical intuitions or are you required to act against your intuitions? How do you handle that conflict?



Something for the Toolkit: *Your ethical intuitions help you know the assumptions you bring to your decisions. You can think about how well those assumptions serve you. In addition, it helps to understand that different people bring different intuitions to the table. If you are able to name those differences, shared decision making can capitalize on all of your strengths.*

A Person with Responsibilities

Adults have multiple roles. Some of mine include: daughter, sibling, step-parent, relative, friend, dog owner, professor, Quaker, co-worker, activist, neighbor, citizen. You undoubtedly have roles that are not included in this list. Every legitimate role carries its own particular responsibilities.

“Fulfill your role-related responsibilities,” or, more colloquially, “Do your job!” is part of what it means to act ethically. Some philosophers talk about this as the ethical requirement that people “do their duty.” But, regardless of which bumper-sticker language you prefer, it comes down to the fact that we all have the ethical responsibility to do what our roles require. Few people have taken the time to figure out just what their roles are, and what the corresponding responsibilities might be.

Activity #6

Roles & Conflicts of Commitment

List some of your roles. Try to come up with at least five. Then, rank order the roles from most important to least important.

Role	Rank
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

Most people have an easy time identifying their roles, but have a tough time determining which is most important. You might find yourself thinking that the role you play in your work-life is most important because that pays the bills. Then it occurs to you that your role as a life-partner is most important because that relationship is most meaningful to you. But, then, what about the kids? Surely, your role as parent is most important.

Different roles have, and should have, different priorities at different times. But, our lives are not easily split into neat time packages. Sometimes, it seems that I can meet one of my role-related responsibilities only if I neglect another one. That's when we find ourselves in conflicts of commitment. A conflict of commitments occurs when you can't meet responsibilities that you have in two or more of your roles.

Activity #7

Recognizing Conflicts of Commitment A 5-Minute Essay

Take five minutes to describe a conflict that you experience in trying to meet your many responsibilities. Include how you have managed that conflict so far. Describe any concerns you have about how you have managed the conflict. You'll have an opportunity to return to this essay after you complete the next exercise.

Activity #8

Articulating Role-Related Responsibilities (RRR)

1. **State job title, professional classification, or role.** You might give your role a broad title like *parent* or *life-partner* or *teacher* or *journalist*. Or, you might want to be more specific like, *student in this ethics class* or *VP for corporate communications*.

If the level of analysis is macro or general – such as, considering what a public relations agent should do – a general title is fine. If the level of analysis is micro or specific – such as consideration of how you should act within a job description in a particular organization, the more specific title will be necessary.

The **title** of the role I am examining is _____.

2. **Think of yourself as an alien anthropologist.** If you were trying to find the (title) in this community, think about what that person would be doing that is unique. Think of what makes a person in that role different from all the rest. As you write your description, imagine the good (title) doing well. For example, if you are describing the RRR of a parent, make sure that your description shows how the parent is different from the teacher or the pediatrician or the babysitter.

3. **State the basic RRR in 25 words or less.** My role-related responsibility as a _____ is the following:

4. **Describe three reasonable expectations that others have of you because of your RRR.**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

5. **Describe three special privileges that you have because of your RRR. A special privilege is something that a person who does not have your role, does not have.** For example, as a parent, I have the privilege of guiding my 10-year-old daughter's choices and restricting her freedom so that she completes her homework. The next-door neighbor does not have those privileges with regard to my daughter.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Activity #9

Resolving Conflicts Between Role-Related Responsibilities

Now, return to the conflict that you identified in **Activity #7, Recognizing Conflicts of Commitment**. Articulate the related responsibility for each role, along with expectations and privileges that accompany each role. If you do this well, the answer of how to best manage the conflict of commitments will become clear. Sometimes, unrealistic expectations lead to conflicts of commitment. If you have identified what is reasonable for others to expect of you because of your RRR, you can tell if you or others are having unrealistic expectations. Sometimes conflicts come about because we forget that we have the privilege of finding alternative ways to fulfill RRR. An examination like this can also reveal that individuals are trying to do too much for too many to do a good job at any one task.



Something for the Toolkit: Clarify your responsibilities to help you understand what you legitimately owe to others and what you don't. This exercise can reveal how you might be out of balance, ethically speaking. Try this exercise with someone who is involved in a meaningful relationship with you. Do you have consistent ideas of your roles within your relationship? Do you agree on reasonable expectations and privileges? Reaching consensus on these aspects can cut down on tension within a relationship.

A Person with Power

Every person has the power and the responsibility to change the world. Scary thought, but true. Not many of us will turn out to be another Ghandi or Martin Luther King or Mother Theresa, but we all have tremendous power in our encounters with strangers, in our relationships with friends and family, in our work, and in our communities.

Ethics would be a meaningless exercise if it weren't for **free will**. **Free will** means that competent, rational adults make voluntary choices for how to act and can be held accountable for their actions. At the same time, we all bring baggage from the past and hidden motivations to our decisions. Philosophers and psychologists debate just how much of our action results from conditioning, prior learning, or factors beyond our control. That is, some of what we consider to be voluntary choices might be our *perception* of free will rather than true **autonomy**.

Unfortunately, this is a dilemma from which there is no escape. Competent, rational adults make voluntary choices. Some of the factors that influence our choices are not within our conscious reach. It might be years after a decision that we really understand why we chose to do what we did. But we have to make choices today. All we can do is strive to bring our best selves to current choices.

One of the ways that we recognize our individual power is in realizing that the choices that we make affect others. We tend to keep this in mind when we think of those with whom we have relationships. We get constant feedback from friends and family. I know that if I am rude to a friend, that I'll hurt her feelings. But it is easy to ignore the obligations we have toward complete strangers. That obligation is to refrain from causing them unjustified harm as well.

We generally think of refraining from causing unjustified harm in a large sense: I know not to kill or not to cause other people physical pain. But, feelings can be hurt as easily as bodies. When I am rude to a store clerk who is slower than I think reasonable, I am causing him unjustified harm. When I show frustration or annoyance when I pointedly brush past someone on the sidewalk who has gotten in my way, I am causing unjustified harm.

It might seem that the harm is "justified," because the stranger did something that elicited my negative reaction. But, in most situations, the fact that I experienced harm does not justify my intentionally causing harm.

These examples show people inadvertently doing something that I find displeasing. That is not justification for me to intentionally strike back.

Even if someone has done something that can be predicted to hurt my feelings, I am not ethically justified in treating that person badly. My job is to be the most ethical person that I can be, regardless of the actions of those around me. That is what is meant by an expression of free will. I am **blameworthy** if I cause harm that I can reasonably predict and could avoid.

It is easy to confuse the conventional understanding of "cause and effect" with the judgment of whether an individual is morally blameworthy or praiseworthy. For example, if my roommate teases me and I become angry, I am likely to say that her teasing made me angry. But, that's not the whole story. Sometimes, teasing makes me laugh or feel loved. My long and frustrating day at the office might be an equal cause to my feeling wounded by being teased.

So, in this case, is my roommate blameworthy for my hurt feelings? It depends. A factor in determining the extent of her responsibility is how well she knows me and the situation. If she could **reasonably predict** that I'd react badly, or teased me with the intent of making me feel bad, she would be morally responsible for the outcome. In this case, she would have a greater degree of blame than if she had good reason to expect me to laugh in response to her teasing.

The fact that someone has been hurt does not logically imply that some other **moral agent** is **blameworthy**. A person can be a cause for an event without being morally blameworthy for the harm that follows.

Analysis

If I stopped my car at a pedestrian crosswalk to allow a person, Y, to cross, I am not morally blameworthy for the damage caused to the driver of the car behind me who crashed into the back end of my car. Indeed, if the force of that crash propelled my vehicle forward and I ended up running over the person in the crosswalk, I am still not morally blameworthy. However, I would certainly feel sad at this turn of events.

Consider this alternative: I recognize the person in the crosswalk, X, as someone whom I wish to harm. A glance in my rearview mirror tells me that the driver of the car behind me is not paying attention. I then hit my brakes with the hope that the car behind me will crash into my car, propelling it forward to cause X injury. In this case, I would be morally blameworthy even if the police thought my action was unintentional and did not charge me with a crime.

One can be held morally blameworthy if any one of these conditions apply:

1. The harm to person (P) came about because the agent (A) neglected to fulfill his or her role-related responsibilities;
OR
2. A acted with intention to cause harm to P;
OR
3. A could have reasonably predicted the harm caused and could have accomplished the same legitimate end by causing less harm.

Activity #10

Part I Considering Harms and Moral Responsibility

Think of three examples in which people have caused you harm. These may be little harms, such as a driver splashing you when he raced through the mud puddle you were walking by. These may be huge, life-altering harms, like an unwanted divorce. In each case, try to state clearly the action and the kind of harm. Include at least one situation in which you recognize that the harm caused to you was NOT the fault of another person. Then, use the analysis process above to determine whether that person is blameworthy for the harm caused and why or why not.

ACTION	HARM	BLAMEWORTHY?

Part II Cause and Blame

In each of these cases, identify the harm(s) caused and determine who, if anyone, is blameworthy. Use the analysis process (**page 16**) to identify if and why someone is blameworthy.

1. It was a dark and stormy night. Two friends walked across the street. One woman, Sara, tripped and caught her foot in a rain gutter. Mary, her friend, tried to help her pry her foot loose. Suddenly a bus roared around the corner. Mary instinctively jumped back to safety. The bus driver was unable to stop the vehicle quickly because of the wet roads. The bus hit Sara. She was killed instantly.
2. A man was wrongly executed for the rape and murder of a young girl. Twenty years later, a witness came forward to reveal that when she was only 10 years old, she had seen the crime committed by someone other than the person executed. She did not reveal the truth at the time because she was a frightened child. Now that the murderer had died, she wanted people to know the truth.
3. An attorney represented a man who was convicted for murder. A second man was also convicted of the crime. The attorney's client told the attorney in confidence that he had committed the crime alone. The attorney told no one about his client's confession until the client died. The attorney then revealed the truth. As a result, the second man was released from prison after serving 20 years for a crime that he did not commit.
4. A friend and I go to my favorite restaurant for dinner. When we get there, the 20 tables in the restaurant are filled. We stand outside. My friend is shot and wounded. The shooting was an accident. A man across the street was sitting on his front porch and cleaning his rifle. He did not know that the gun was loaded.
5. Dozens of people were badly hurt or killed in accidents that resulted from a certain model of car being hit broadside. The model had a defect that could result in a gas tank eruption. The automaker knew and could have installed a low-cost part that would prevent the explosions. However, it seemed likely that the cost of lawsuits to the company from people harmed would be less than the cost of installing the low-cost part in every car.



Something for the Toolkit: *There is a tension between acting to avoid causing harm whenever possible and determining under which circumstances someone should be judged blameworthy for harm caused. Sometimes no one is to blame.*

Chapter 2

What Ethics Is; What Ethics Is Not

We've established that it is important to live our lives without unjustifiably harming other people, species, or the natural system. It is important to grow ethically and learn how to give to and care for the community in which we find ourselves. But we have other kinds of responsibilities as well.

We have to pay bills, obey the law, and live in a way that serves our own personal needs. For some, religious considerations are important too. If all goes well, our ethical choices integrate with all of these other decision-making factors.

Unfortunately, it is easy to substitute one kind of thinking for another. For example, most of us have made choices that serve self-interest without regard to the needs or welfare of others. Corporate decisions sometimes favor the bottom line over potential harm to individuals. In their histories, most religious movements have examples of people causing harm to others in the name of that religion.

Analysis

While all of the decision-making spheres are important, ethics should be a priority consideration in two types of choices:

1. When the choice is a direct expression of a decision maker's role-related responsibility;
2. When the likelihood of unjustified harm to humans, other species, or nature could be reasonably predicted and avoided in the achievement of a legitimate end.



Activity #11

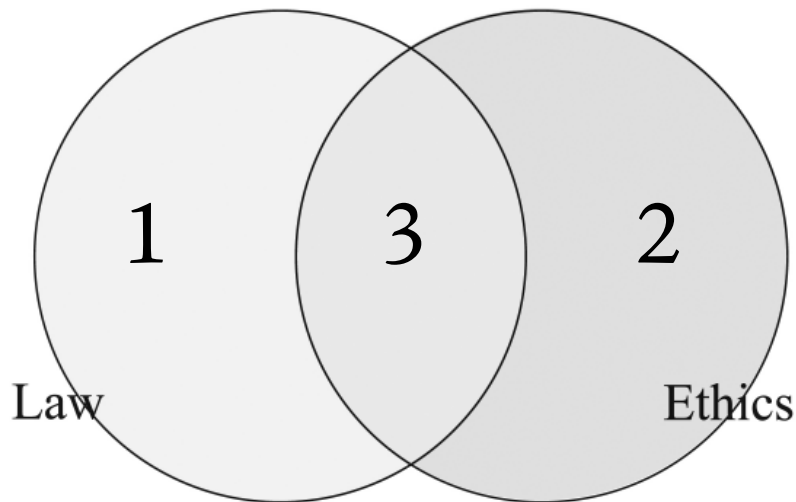
Practice with Decision-Making Spheres

For each circle combination, find an example of something that has a shared characteristic of both circles and examples that have characteristics of one but not the other.

Here is an example of how to complete this exercise:

1. An action in the legal sphere but not within the ethical sphere: *It is a legal requirement that I have up-to-date car registration when driving my car.* There really is no direct connection to ethics here.
2. Action in the ethical sphere but not within the legal sphere: *It is ethical for me to volunteer my time and effort to help a community cause; no law says that I must do this.* Notice that something “not being in the legal sphere” does not mean that the action is against the law (illegal).
3. An action that is in the intersection of the legal and ethical spheres: *It is both legally and ethically required that I report to authorities what I have seen when I witness a crime that causes serious harm to others.*

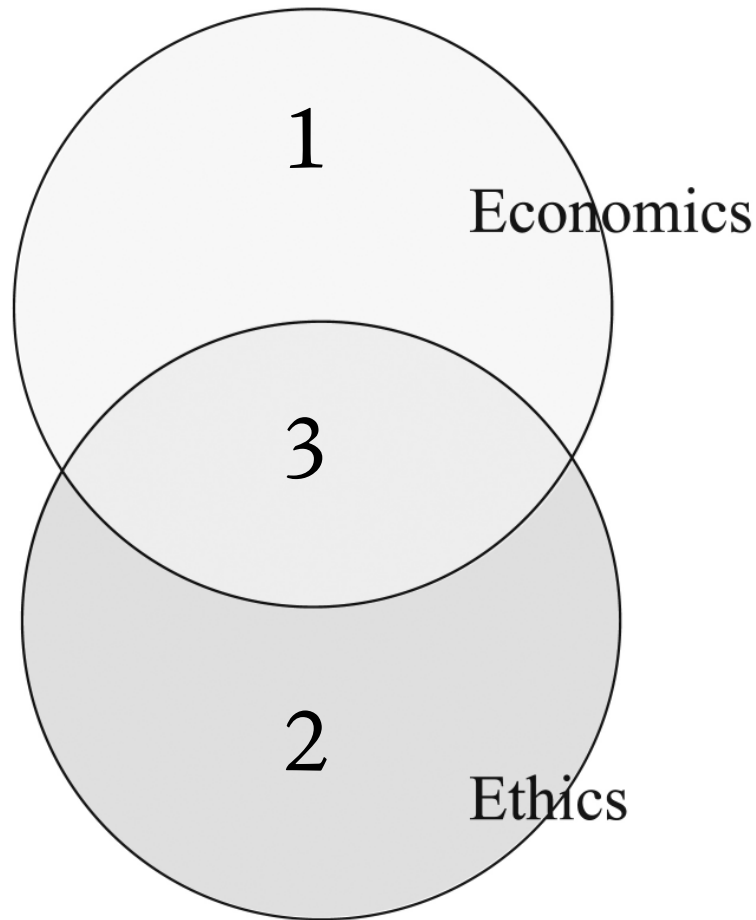
A. Law & Ethics



1. This is a legal action that is outside of the ethics sphere:
2. This is an ethical action that is not addressed by law:
3. This is an action that is both legal and ethical:

Variation: Think of actions that **violate** one sphere or the other. For example, think of something that is ethical but illegal (some people might put civil disobedience in this class) and think of something that is (or was) legal but not ethical (slavery, child labor, not allowing women to vote or own property).

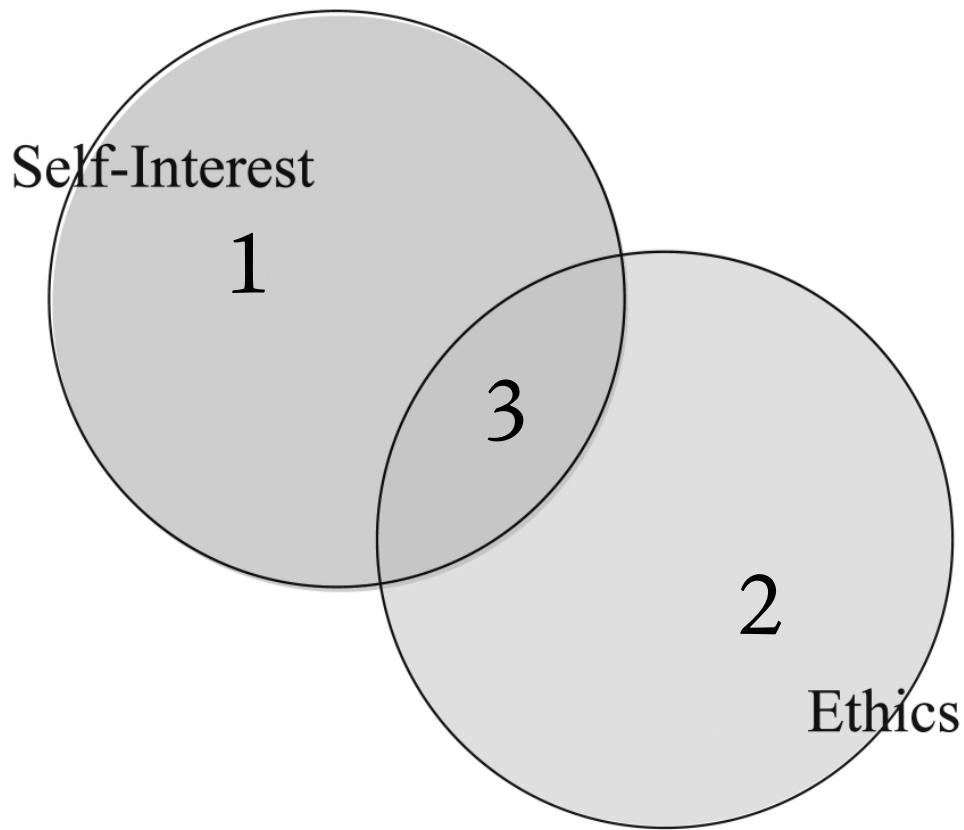
B. Ethics & Economics



1. This is an action that is in my economic interest, but does not impinge on ethics:
2. This is an action that is an ethical choice, but that has no economic consequence:
3. This is an action that has both ethical and economic implications:

Variation: Think of a choice that is economically sound but unethical; think of a choice that is ethically sound but not the best, economically speaking.

C. Ethics & Self-Interest

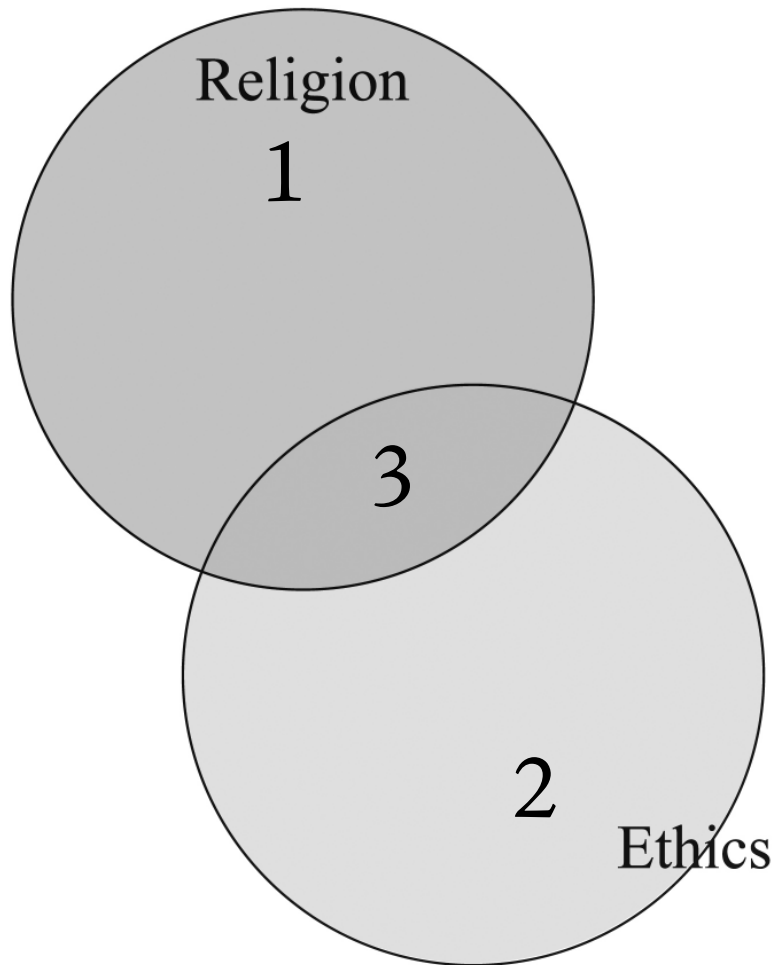


Ethics and one's own self-interest are not contradictory. It is possible to do something that is in one's self-interest (also called a prudential choice) and not cause unjustified harm.

1. This meets my self-interest and has no ethical impact:
2. This is an ethical choice in which my self-interest is not involved:
3. Here is a choice that is both ethical and prudential:

Variation: A choice that is in your self-interest that causes unjustified harm to others, and a choice that is the ethical thing to do, but that is not in your self-interest.

D. Ethics & Religion

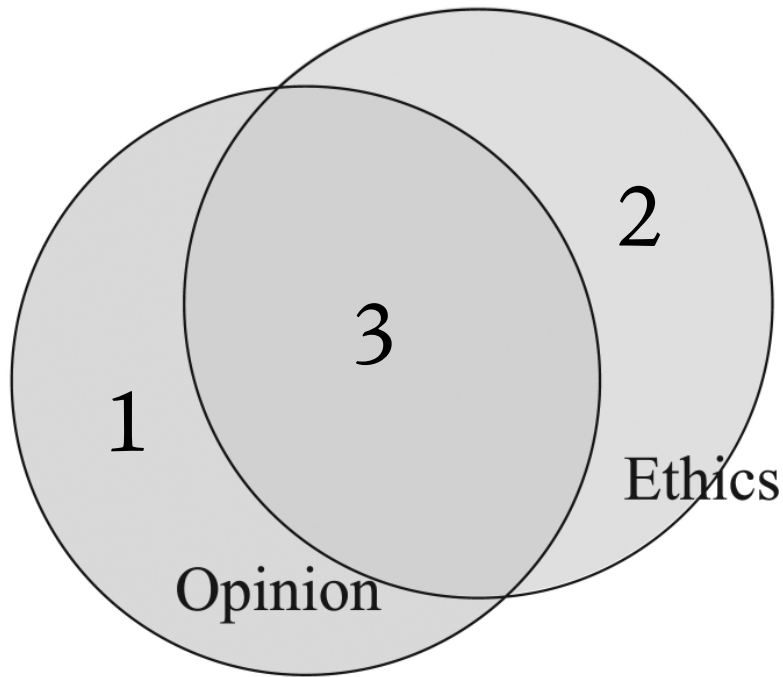


Some people think that ethics is the same as religion. Not so. Some religious rules are ethical and some are not. For example, many religions command: Do not murder. That is both religious and ethical (3). But, religions also provide rules that have nothing to do with treatment of others. For example, a religion may require devotees to go to church every week.

1. This action is religious, but is outside of the ethics sphere:
2. This action is ethical, but is not addressed by a particular religion:
3. This action follows religious rules and is ethical as well:

Variation: Find an example of an action dictated by religious rule that is unethical. Find an example of an ethical action that would go against some religious rule.

E. Ethics & Opinion

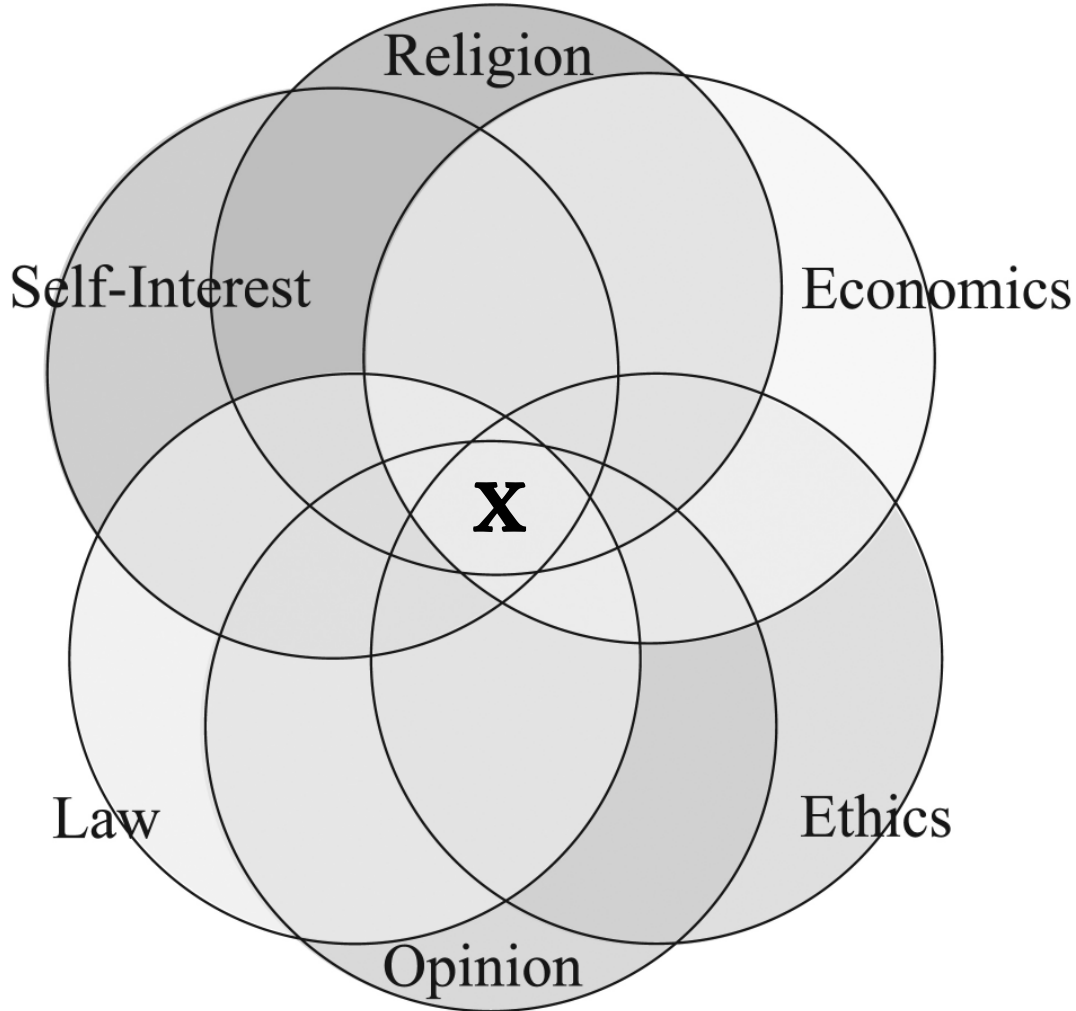


It is a surprise to some people that ethics and opinions are two different decision-making spheres. Some ethically permitted actions do not reflect my personal preference. For example, it is ethically permitted for people to give their time and money to political causes with which I disagree. My personal opinion about what I would like to see done to adults who intentionally hurt children's feelings is definitely outside the scope of what is ethically allowed.

1. Here is an example of a personal opinion that is outside of the ethics sphere:
2. Here is an example of something that is within the ethics sphere that is independent of my personal opinion:
3. Here is an example where my personal opinion and ethics coincide:

Variation: Come up with an opinion that you hold that is unethical. Come up with an example of action that is ethical, but which you personally would choose not to do.

F. An Integration of Decision-Making Spheres



For the most part, we are able to make choices that fit right in the center of all the spheres. We hardly notice the many decisions we make that integrate all of the spheres, because those choices do not require any critical thought from us.

Describe a choice you made in the last few days that reflects an integration of all of the decision-making spheres.

Finally, return to **Activity #10, Part II, Cause and Blame**. This time, examine those scenarios using your new understanding of decision-making spheres. In addition, use the analysis section **on page 19** that describes under which conditions ethics should be a priority. See if this helps you articulate what happened in each case.



Something for the Toolkit: While it is good to strive for integrated decision making, it is important to remember under what conditions ethics should be the primary consideration.

Activity #12

What Kind of Problem Is This?

For each of the following situations, identify how the action might be viewed within the various decision-making spheres (ethics, law, economics, self-interest, religion, opinion). State the origin of the problem in each case.

1. A man fed expired parking meters in town. When he did so, he saved the owners of the cars from getting parking tickets. It turned out to be against the law to feed people's meters unless they had given permission. The man was fined for his actions.
2. A newspaper ran a front page photo of a family grieving over their child's body. The boy had just drowned in a local lake. The picture was used by newspapers throughout the nation because of the intense visual grief. In newspaper language it was "a hellova picture." Although the picture was taken in public, the family considered it a very private moment.
3. The local public high school offered a course in meditation. However, the school did not allow a Christian student group to meet for daily public prayers on campus.
4. An infant was willingly placed by her parents in temporary foster care. Although they expected her to be in foster care for no more than a few months, it was five years before they were able to take her back. At that point, they petitioned the court to return the child to their custody. The foster parents said that they wanted to adopt the child and argued that the child had now bonded with them. The court returned the child to her biological parents.



Four Categories of Choices

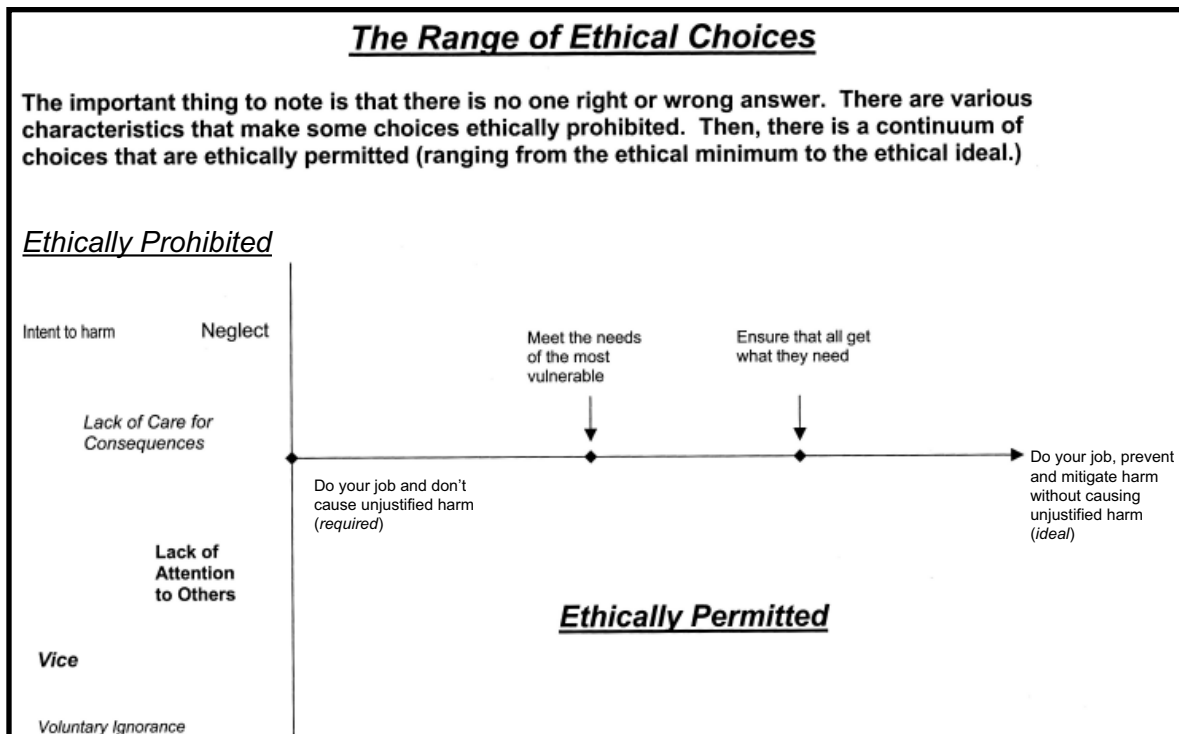
Some people think of moral judgments as having two possibilities: right or wrong. Actually, there is a whole range of ethical choices. Imagine ethical choices on a continuum (see illustration below). Contemporary philosopher Bernard Gert has described four categories of ethical choices: those that are ethically prohibited, those that are ethically required, those that are ethically permitted, and those that are ethically ideal.

Ethically prohibited actions are those that are wrong. These are actions that cause unjustified harm or that involve a person's unjustified neglect of his or her role-related responsibilities.

Ethically required actions are those that follow directly from a person's role-related responsibilities. This category is the inverse of actions in the prohibited category: It is ethically required to avoid causing unjustified harm.

Ethically ideal actions occur when a person meets his or her role-related responsibilities, avoids causing unjustified harm, and also acts in a way that promotes the good, and that prevents, mitigates, or addresses harms that have been caused.

Ethically permitted actions are those that range on the continuum between those that are required and those that are ideal. A variety of alternative actions might be ethically permitted. And, as you know from completing **Activity #11 E**, there are ethically permitted actions that don't express one's personal opinion. For example, think of the concept of good parenting. Some parents might think that encouraging their children to participate in sports reflects good parenting; others might decide that their children should spend that time learning to appreciate the music, art, literature, and cultures of the world. These ways of parenting are both ethically permitted. But neither of them might address your preference for how the "good" parent should act.



Activity #13

Home on the Range

Identify four legitimate roles to examine. Include a mix of professional roles (banker, teacher, physician), public roles (citizen, member of a club, group or religion), and personal roles (life-partner, friend, parent, child). Practice identifying actions that would be ethically prohibited, required, ideal and permitted within those roles.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

If you try this activity with others, you'll find that there will generally be more agreement on actions that are ethically prohibited than there will be for actions that count as ethically ideal. Why is it easier to agree on what is ethically prohibited?



Something for the Toolkit: Strive to be “home on the range” when making ethical decisions rather than simply declare that actions are “right” or “wrong.” Thinking about ethical choices through the four categories provides for more creative alternatives.

Activity #14

The Best of All Possible Worlds

The goal of this activity is to help you focus on moral ideals. The more that we think about how to be the best that we can be, the more likely it is that we'll get there, or at least reach some close approximation.

This activity is based on a wonderful series of inspirational decks of cards created by author Lynn Gordon. The decks include the practical, such as *52 Fun Things to Do on the Plane*, and the developmental, such as *52 Ways to Simplify Your Life*. Each card has a catchy message on one side with an illustration, and a 50-100 word description on the back that explains the message.

For this exercise, you are going to contribute to an imaginary deck of cards: *52 Ways to Create the Best of All Possible Worlds*. The deck would include messages that express ideal action in professional, public, and personal roles. Here are two examples:

Card #1

Don't Fight Back

When someone is rude to you, it is tempting to respond in the same way. Resist that temptation! Instead, answer rudeness with kindness. If that seems too tall of an order, express your experience calmly. Tell the rude person how you feel in response and then get out of the line of fire.

Card #2

Own Your Power

Every one of us has the power to change the world, one action at a time. Look for the little opportunities. Say "thank you" and make eye contact with a clerk. Pick up trash when you walk down the street. Open a door for the stranger who is behind you. Look for bigger opportunities. Volunteer. Join an activist group. Ask yourself, "How could the world be a better place?" and then be the change you want to see.

Now, it's your turn. Return to the roles that you described in **Activity #13, Home on the Range**, and choose two to create cards for a "Best of All Possible Worlds" deck. Write a succinct 3-6 word message for the front of your card, and a 50-100 word explanation for the back. If you have time, draw or find a clever illustration that demonstrates your thought.



Something for the Toolkit: Place the cards where you will see them and be reminded of a few ways of how to build your ideal world. Add to the deck over time.

A Moral Community Census

Throughout this workbook I have referred to obligations that competent, rational adults have toward 'others.' It is time to get clear about the nature of these 'others.' What makes some entities worthy of **moral protection** and other things not? If an entity is entitled to moral protection, it is ethically prohibited to cause that entity unjustified harm.

Initially, when the ancient Greek philosophers discussed among themselves who deserved moral protection, they first identified themselves – rational, competent moral agents. Actually, this core group was even more restricted in that it consisted only of the free men who were also rational, competent adults. At the time, any protections given to women, children, slaves, or animals was derivative, based on the rights of these men. Over the centuries, the boundaries of the **moral community** have expanded. Now, it is uncontroversial to say that all human beings between birth and death are members of the moral community. The core group (the inner circle on **page 32**) is responsible for making sure that born human beings who cannot care for themselves get equal moral protections.

But, unjustified harms happen every day to members of the moral community. Children are abused or neglected. Women are stoned to death for having been raped. Whole groups of people are victims of genocide for no reason other than their ethnicity or history. Unjustified harms happen. But they *should* not. It is wrong that these things occur.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1948, is an excellent articulation of the moral protections that every human being deserves. The Declaration is endorsed by nations that are members of the UN, which means virtually all nations. Few, if any, nations completely live up to protecting all of the rights of every individual. But the existence of the document demonstrates global understanding of how people *should* be treated. Governments have the special responsibility of protecting their citizens from certain harms and the special privilege of holding those who violate those rights accountable. No government, no individual, is perfect. But that shouldn't stop us from striving to be better.

Being in the moral community means that every individual has the same basic rights. If my son needs a liver transplant, it is not acceptable for me to access the needed organ by arranging for the killing of the child next door or a child on the other side of the world. While I have the special role-related responsibility to advocate for my son, all three of the children in this scenario have equal rights to life and to not be caused unjustified harms.

There are other entities that have some claim to moral protections, but not at the level of those within the moral community. Examples of these **subjects of moral worth** include animals, the environment, human fetuses, human corpses, art, culture, and the environment. These subjects have worth, but don't have rights that are equivalent to those in the moral community.

A difference between obligations to members of the moral community and obligations to subjects of moral worth is that every rational, competent adult has an obligation to not cause unjustified harm to any member of the moral community. Because of the human analogy, it is expected that we know this.

Subjects of moral worth, on the other hand, have some rights, but not rights equal to those in the moral community. Subjects generally have **stewards** who have the special job of protecting them and educating other people about obligations in regard to them. For example, I am the steward of my dog. I have special obligations to protect him and to shield him from people who might inadvertently step on him. As citizens of the world, we have obligations to use limited resources, such as water, judiciously. I know this because those who have stewardship responsibilities over water have educated me about the scarcity of water and about how to make careful use of this resource.

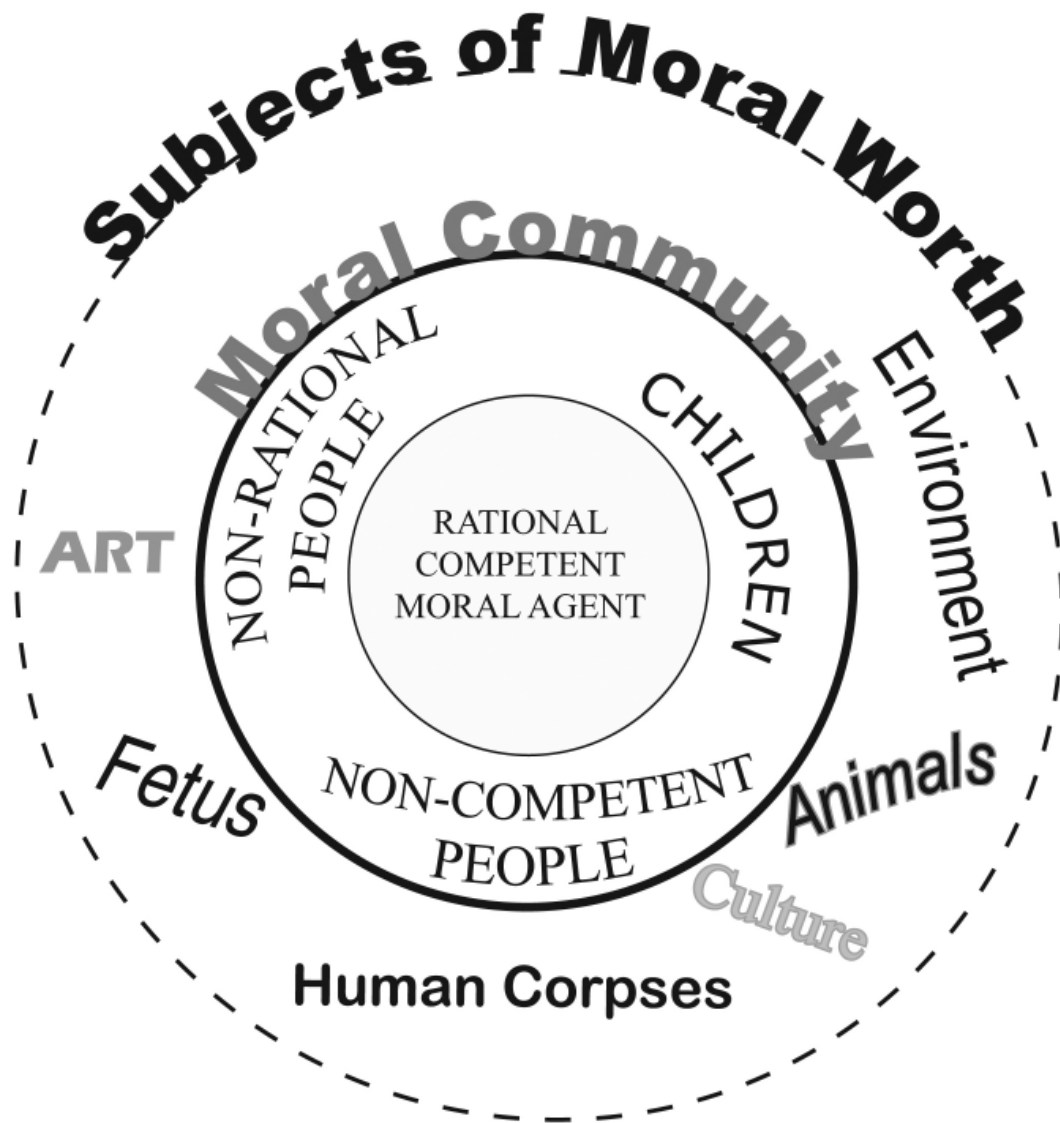
Subjects of moral worth have limited moral claims, but it doesn't follow that human interests necessarily win out over those of a subject of moral worth. If a museum is on fire, firefighters should save the people before carrying out pieces of art. But judicial opinions often favor preserving ecosystems or endangered species over human interests in developing wetlands or wilderness.

However, when a member of the moral community and a subject of moral worth have the same legitimate claim, the member of the moral community comes first. That is why it is ethically permitted to abort a human fetus to preserve the life of the gestating woman. In such difficult situations, the woman's life takes precedent. When it is ethically permitted to stop the growth of other potential human life depends on its level of development: A fertilized egg has less of a "claim" than a human fetus that is in the process of being born. As with other ethical questions, the strength of moral claims regarding subjects of moral worth exists on a continuum and depends on a variety of factors found in the specific situation.

Analysis

A non-human entity or object is a subject of moral worth if it has any of the following properties:

1. It is essential for human survival; or
2. Causing harm to the entity/object causes pain or deprives pleasure to a representative number of those within the moral community; or
3. The entity is believed to be sentient or intrinsically worthwhile by a representative number of those within the moral community; or
4. The entity is human in its potential or in its recent past.



Activity #15

Balancing Ethical Claims

Identify five subjects of moral worth. Determine who is a steward for the interests of each. Determine under what conditions the claims in regard to each subject of moral worth should win out over that of a member of the moral community. Justify.

SUBJECT OF MORAL WORTH	STEWARD	WHEN SHOULD CLAIM TRUMP HUMAN DESIRE?

Chapter 3

Systematic Moral Analysis

This section introduces a process I call systematic moral analysis (SMA). It is systematic in that it follows a specific procedure to make sure that all important aspects are considered and it is systematic in that it is based on a well-developed theory, by philosopher Bernard Gert.²

The first step is to recognize that analysis needs to be done. While it is good for everyone to spend time thinking about how they might make the world a better place, it is ethically required that people think about ethics when there is the potential for causing harm.

Conceptualization is the process of determining that there is potential harm and that someone is morally responsible for that harm.

I. What's the problem?

Who is being harmed? Who is likely to be harmed and how? Gert provides the following list of **moral rules**. Harms are caused through violations of the moral rules.

1. Do not kill.
2. Do not cause pain.
3. Do not disable.
4. Do not deprive of freedom.
5. Do not deprive of pleasure.
6. Do not deceive.
7. Keep your promises.
8. Do not cheat.
9. Obey the law.
10. Do your duty.

II. Who is Responsible?

1. Does someone have role-related responsibilities (RRR) with regard to the person or subject of moral worth that might be harmed? If so, what are those responsibilities and how do they relate to the causing of the harm?
2. If the harm caused is not a violation of a person's RRR, could the harm have been predicted and avoided in achieving some legitimate goal? If the goal is not legitimate, then causing harm is rarely justified.

Once you have identified harms and have determined that someone is a responsible agent, you have an **ethically questionable** act. That doesn't mean that the action is wrong. It just means that further analysis is needed.

² Readers are encouraged to explore Gert's work that is listed in the resources section at the end of this workbook.

Activity #16

Part I Practice with Conceptualization

For each of the following, identify one or more moral rule violations. Determine if there is a responsible moral agent. Don't worry about whether the harm is justified or not.

SCENARIO	HARMS CAUSED	RESPONSIBLE MORAL AGENT
1. A drunk driver injured a pedestrian.		
2. A picture that you find embarrassing appears without your permission on the front page of the newspaper.		
3. Despite Mary's agreement to be faithful to John, she is dating someone else.		
4. The hurricane destroyed the building and inventory of Matt's store.		
5. Pat told Sue that there were no plans for her birthday even though a surprise party was planned for her.		

III. Can the action be justified?

1. Does the agent's RRR provide special expectations or privileges that justify the harm?
2. Is harm being avoided or prevented that justifies the harm caused?
3. Are benefits being promoted that justify the harm caused?
4. Are there alternative actions that are ethically permitted that could achieve the same end without causing harm or by causing less harm?
5. What would your moral hero do?
6. If there are people of unequal power involved, have you chosen an action that cares best for the most vulnerable?

Part II

Practice with Justification and Alternatives

Now, consider if the harm is justified or not. If you are not sure, determine under which conditions the harm would be justified and when it would not.

SCENARIO	HARMS CAUSED	JUSTIFIED?
1. A drunk driver injured a pedestrian.		
2. A picture that you find embarrassing appears without your permission on the front page of the newspaper.		
3. Despite Mary's agreement to be faithful to John, she is dating someone else.		
4. The hurricane destroyed the building and inventory of Matt's store.		
5. Pat told Sue that there were no plans for her birthday even though a surprise party was planned for her.		

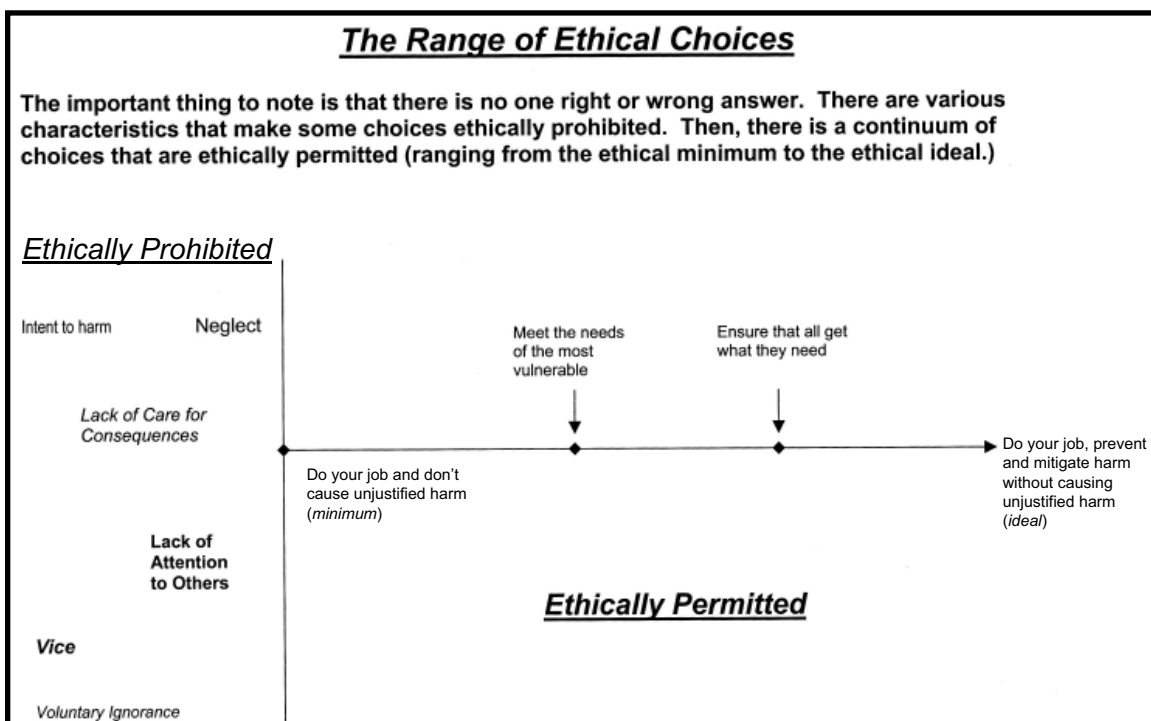
IV. Apply Four Categories Thinking: In each of these five scenarios

1. Identify some actions that would be ethically prohibited for the responsible agent to do.
2. Based on the agent's RRR, what is that person ethically required to do?
3. Identify some ethically permitted actions.
4. Choose the ethically ideal action, explaining why it is ideal.

Part III

Practice Applying the Four Categories

Complete the analysis by plotting alternative actions on the range of ethical thinking.



(Suggested answers to this exercise and a clean outline of the systematic moral analysis process appear at the end of this book.)



Something for the Toolkit: There are often other people, aside from the responsible agent, who can have impact on a situation. Someone is blameworthy if she or he fails to meet his or her role-related responsibilities. However, people are praiseworthy when they go beyond what is required to protect others from harm.

Some Tips for Conceptualizing and Justifying

Complete explanation of moral rule violations can be found in the works of Bernard Gert, listed on the resources page, but here I include some tips that students unfamiliar with Gert's work have found helpful.

Any ethically questionable action toward a human being can be reduced to one or more of these 10 moral rule violations:

1. Do not kill.
2. Do not cause pain.
3. Do not disable.
4. Do not deprive of freedom.
5. Do not deprive of pleasure.
6. Do not deceive.
7. Keep your promises.
8. Do not cheat.
9. Obey the law.
10. Do your duty.

Breaking any of the first five rules causes direct harm to individuals. Breaking any of the second five rules doesn't always cause direct harm, but does cause harm to the social system. Some philosophers would argue that doing ethically prohibited acts also causes harm to the person who does these acts.

For example, if I fail to "do my duty" to a student, it is the same thing as failing to meet my role-related responsibilities. Let's say that I give an A to a student who doesn't deserve it. I probably haven't hurt that student at all. If I'm not grading on a curve, I probably haven't hurt any of my other students. And, assuming that I was paid \$100 to give the undeserved A, one might think of this as a "no harm" win-win situation. But, such actions do cause harm to the university's evaluation system that people trust to be honest and fair. I also find that I am the kind of person who can be 'bought.' That hurts my integrity and violates my duty to become the best person I can be.

If I disobey the law, I imply that the law is not necessary for a well-functioning community. If I break a law publicly and with a willingness to accept the consequences of my actions, I am committing an act of civil disobedience. Civil disobedience is ethical if it encourages all other people to violate a bad law. Otherwise, we should obey the law.

Sometimes it takes a little work to clarify how an action violates the moral rules. We know that it is usually unethical to invade a person's privacy, for example. But there is no moral rule that says, "Don't invade privacy." So, the next step is to figure out what harms are caused if an individual's privacy is invaded. That action causes pain and deprives the person of the freedom to move around without being watched or to control information about him or herself.

"Don't disable" is a rule that is troublesome to some people. People who are living with disabilities sometimes read that rule as making a negative judgment on their lives. This is not the case. Human

lives all have value. In comparison to the ideal human prototype, we all suffer from one or more disabilities. The moral rule violation occurs when someone interferes with the abilities that we do have. This can mean causing a physical disability, but there are volitional and emotional disabilities as well. If I intimidate a child over whom I have power to the extent that the child is afraid to express herself, I have disabled that child.

Remember that identifying something as a moral rule violation does not imply that the harm caused is unjustified. There are justified exceptions to every one of these rules.

The quick test for justification is to ask what would happen if it were widely known that moral rules could be violated under these particular conditions. This is the **publicity test** and is an essential step in justifying ethically questionable acts.

Here are some other justifications for causing harms:

- i. **Consent.** If an adult consents to having a harm (or potential harm) done to him or her, it is usually justified. This covers painful medical treatments and even harsh academic or employment evaluations. When I voluntarily take on a role, such as student or employee, I consent to what conventionally comes along with that role, including well-deserved negative evaluations.
- ii. **Paternalism.** Sometimes it is justified to break a moral rule in regard to another if that rule is broken for the individual's own good. Ask, "Could impartial, rational adults agree that moral rules should be violated toward them under these conditions?"
- iii. **Role-Related Responsibilities.** Often, harms caused in the process of someone fulfilling his or her RRR is the other side of consent or is an expression of paternalism. But, legitimate roles also allow causing pain in the performance of duties. For example, government officials may create or enforce laws that limit citizens' freedom. News organizations cause pain when they expose corrupt politicians.
- iv. **Aggregate Good.** The aggregate good is the good of the whole – the whole community in which we live. Sometimes, it is justified to cause harm because doing so supports the interests of the whole. This is not the same as doing "the greatest good for the greatest number." Aggregate good considers if impartial, rational adults could accept causing this harm, even if they didn't know if they would be the people caused the harm. For example, it is okay for people with higher incomes to pay more taxes. It is okay for law enforcement to punish offenders. Offenders would want to be protected if they became victims of crime.

Of course, even with a group of impartial, rational adults, you are not likely to get full agreement in every situation about whether causing harm is justified or not. Gert tells us that causing harm in particular situations is:

strongly justified if all impartial, rational persons would think that less evil would be suffered if that kind of violation were publicly allowed;

weakly justified if impartial, rational persons would disagree about whether less evil would be suffered if that kind of violation were to be publicly allowed; and

not justified if all impartial, rational persons would think that more evil would be suffered if that kind of violation were publicly allowed.

Activity #17

Justified and Unjustified Harms

For each scenario, list the harms caused; determine the basis of justification (consent, paternalism, role-related responsibilities, or aggregate good); and decide whether causing the harm in each case is strongly, weakly, or not justified.

SCENARIO	HARMS	BASIS OF JUSTIFICATION	STRENGTH OF JUSTIFICATION
A 42-year-old man was diagnosed with bone cancer. His treatment included leg amputation and chemotherapy. He died from side effects of the chemotherapy.			
Fourteen-year-old Jessica asked to go to the movies with friends. Her mother said no as it was a school night and she had homework to finish.			
Sue is a 22-year-old woman who has epilepsy. She has episodes several times each week that include blackouts. Her physician refuses to sign a release for her to get a driver's license.			
John is visually impaired and uses a guide dog to assist him. Mike cannot take his pet dog into restaurants and theaters, although John can take his guide dog.			



Something for the Toolkit: Following a procedure for dealing with ethical questions can seem complex at first. But, just as with learning rules of a game, once you know the steps, you are able to concentrate on the content of each issue or question. With some practice Systematic Moral Analysis (SMA) will become a habit.

Close Analysis of Deception, Cheating, and Promise-Breaking

Deception, cheating, and promise-breaking are common moral rule violations in personal, public, and professional life. Because these are common acts and are often denied or misunderstood, complete descriptions for conceptualization and justification of these moral rule violations follow.

Deception

I. Conceptualization

Deception is the correct label for any action or non-action that is intended to lead others to a false conclusion.

Paternalistic Deception is deception that is done with the intent of acting in the best interest of the person deceived.

Non-paternalistic Deception is deception that is **not** done with the intent of acting in the best interest of the person deceived.

Lying by speech or action is ethically questionable and requires justification. (If I dress like a physician to gain entrance to a patient's hospital room, I have 'lied' by how I dressed.)

Failing to disclose information only sometimes counts as deception. Failing to disclose information is an act of deception only if the failure to disclose also:

- a. breaks a promise, or
- b. cheats, or
- c. is illegal, or
- d. neglects one's duty.

Misleading people by using accurate statements also counts as deception as it is failing to disclose one's true intentions and involves cheating. It is an act of cheating because using accurate statements to mislead violates general rules of how people use language.

II. Justification

Paternalistic Deception is justified by how likely the deceived person would be to consent to the deception:

1. If the person deceived is a rational, competent adult, it is justified only if the person gave consent or would consent to the deception. For example, if a patient with advanced illness requests that his doctor NOT tell him when he is likely to die, it is justified deception for the doctor to fail to provide this information (that would otherwise be the doctor's duty to provide).
2. If the person deceived is a child or non-competent adult, paternalistic deception is justified if it
 - a. advances this person's growth or autonomy, *or*
 - b. protects him or her in a way that he or she would wish to be protected if it were possible for him or her to give consent.

Non-paternalistic Deception is justified if both of the following conditions are met:

1. The harm caused by the deception is significantly less than the harm caused if the deception does not occur, *and*
2. The deceiver is willing to publicly advocate that deception be ethically permitted in all cases of this kind (even if he or she were the person deceived).

Cheating

I. Conceptualization

Cheating is different from deception. Cheating violates rules or standards that everyone is reasonably expected to follow. One can cheat by action or non-action. It is reasonable for my students to expect me to show up on time to teach class. If I fail to do so, I have cheated the students.

It is possible to deceive without cheating and it is possible to cheat without deceiving. For example, if I lie to Federal investigators about how I got that investment tip, I haven't "cheated" in telling the lie, but I'll be likely to go to prison anyway. I have acted deceptively.

On the other hand, if I move my ball from the sand trap to the fairway when my subordinates are playing golf with me, I have cheated, even if everyone puts up with it because I'm the boss. I haven't deceived anyone, I have just taken advantage of my position in violating a standard or rule that everyone can be reasonably expected to follow. I cheated.

II. Justification

Cheating is justified if the following two conditions are both satisfied:

1. The cheating is a public act that can be known to all involved or the cheating is a significantly smaller rule violation than the one being prevented by the act, *and*
2. The cheating does not involve misuse of power, objectification or exploitation of another.

Promise-Breaking

I. Conceptualization

Making a promise turns an act that is morally neutral into one that is morally required. Promising is a *performative* – just the act of saying "I promise" or "I certainly will" gives the person responsibilities that she or he didn't have before saying those words. A promise is binding only if the act is voluntary.

II. Justification

Breaking a promise is justified if **all** of the following conditions are met:

1. The harm caused by keeping the promise is greater than the harm caused by breaking the promise, *and*
2. The harm vs. harm balance is done with every person directly affected being considered and the consideration favors the most vulnerable, *and*
3. The promise-breaker acknowledges to all parties involved that the promise is being broken and provides reasons for that.

Activity #18

Considering Ethically Questionable Actions A 10-Minute Essay

Write a short essay in which you consider a situation in which you have been perceived as having deceived, cheated, or broken a promise. Using the conceptualization criteria included above, did you deceive, cheat, or break a promise? If so, was your ethically questionable act justified? Looking back, can you identify an alternative action that would not have involved this moral rule violation?



Something for the Toolkit: Deceiving, cheating, and promise-breaking are moral rule violations that are often denied or excused. Systematic analysis of these actions can show them for what they are. It is easier to recognize instances of deception, cheating, and promise-breaking if you think about what the labels really mean and how rarely the actions are justified.

Chapter 4

The Life of an Ethical Person

Don't Deny

Excuses, rationalizations, and explanations are all methods that people use to deny their moral responsibility. Even though there might be justification for breaking a moral rule, it is necessary to admit the moral rule violation. Here are the common ways that people deny their ethically questionable acts. They say to themselves (or others):

1. Other people do it.
2. (Some authority) told me to do it.
3. I didn't intend to hurt anybody.
4. No one knew that I did it.

As the activities in this book have shown, justifying an ethically questionable act takes careful and honest consideration. Here's what is wrong with these common excuses:

Other people do it. The fact that other people do unethical things does not justify me doing the same thing. If the action is ethically prohibited, it is wrong no matter how many people are doing it.

(Some authority) told me to do it. Competent, rational adults cannot pass their moral responsibility off to another. I might choose to stay in a job that requires me to act unethically, but that is an economic choice, not an ethically sound decision.

I didn't intend to hurt anybody. Most of the interesting ethical issues arise when good people are trying hard to do the right thing. The fact that causing harm was unintentional might mitigate the level of moral responsibility, but doesn't change the fact that harm was caused.

No one knew that I did it. When I do something unethical, I know it. I am the person to whom knowledge of my act matters most.

The principle of impartiality tells me that it is not okay to make an exception of myself. If I determine that there is a justified exception to following a moral rule, that is because I would approve of an exception being made for all people in a similar situation – even if I was the one who would suffer the consequence of the ethically questionable action.

Admit and Mitigate Moral Mistakes

Once we start admitting to ethically questionable actions, it becomes uncomfortably obvious that sometimes the harm we cause is not justified. That's when it becomes important to tell those we have harmed that we recognize what we have done, are sorry for that, and hope not to do it again. When strangers are harmed, about all that we can do is toss our apologies to the universe and strive to promote the good in the future rather than cause harm.

Just as it is important to recognize that we have made mistakes and strive to do better in the future, it is equally important to allow for the humanity of others. Forgiveness is a concept often ignored in the process of doing ethics. As none of us has achieved perfection, letting go of others' transgressions is as important as admitting our own.

Life beyond the moral mistake is just that, life. We have few models for how people grow beyond unethical choices. Usually, when someone is publicly labeled as having done wrong, the story coverage rarely goes beyond that person's fall from power or the punishment that follows. Yet, people make mistakes, get caught or don't, and continue with their lives. Whether the mistake is my own or someone else's mistake that impacts me, the importance of the transgression is in the lesson that can be found in the experience. The Greek philosopher Socrates believed that no one does wrong intentionally. If we really knew and understood the consequences of our bad actions, we would not choose to act unethically.

It is always gratifying to see someone recognize the error of their ways, apologize, and become a better person. But none of this is necessary to practice forgiveness. Forgiveness requires a change in the person wronged, not the person who has done wrong. Forgiveness might require compassion or the development of empathy, or might require time to heal the wounds. But, ultimately, forgiveness is an act that recognizes two things: first, that the wrong doer might grow into a better person and next, accepts that whether the person does grow is irrelevant to the one's own moral journey.



Activity #19

Two of the Things That Matter Most A 10-Minute Essay

Author and palliative care physician Ira Byock (reference on resources page) tells us that “Please forgive me,” and “I forgive you,” are two of the most powerful phrases in our language. Take some time to recognize your own moral mistakes and the mistakes of others that have had impact on you. Describe imaginary scenarios in which you say these phrases to others.



Something for the Toolkit: Ironically, one cannot become a more ethical person without recognizing his or her own ethical flaws.

Examine Your Motivations and Grow Beyond Them

Moral development theorists (see references on the resources page), examine the reasons behind the ethical choices that people make. Roughly speaking, those reasons can be split into three categories: reasons that demonstrate moral immaturity, those that demonstrate a conventional level of growth, and those that demonstrate moral sophistication.

Morally immature decisions are based on the hope of pleasing others or concerns that others might punish me. When I act out of fear of punishment or hope for reward, when I tell myself that I am powerless, or when I wait for authority to give me the answer, I am acting as a small child, denying my ethical responsibility.

Conventional decisions tend to be those that follow rules or peer expectations, or those that take the needs of others into account while denying our own, or those that change depending on the group within which we are functioning. This is a transitional stage between being dependent on powerful external authority for approval and realizing one's own power and responsibility.

Morally sophisticated decisions reflect autonomous understanding of the principles that lie behind the rules or expectations. They reflect the understanding that everyone should be taken into consideration in the making of choices. And they are made with a certain degree of humility: I know that I am making the best decision that I can at the moment, but I also know that my understanding of what is best may change over time, as I gain more wisdom.

Moral sophistication is a set of capacities, not a way that anyone behaves all of the time. Sometimes (like when a police car is signaling you to pull over), it is completely rational to operate out of respect of authority or fear of punishment. Most of the time, it makes sense to act "conventionally," by just following the rules. But, being morally sophisticated means that it is possible to pull out the ethics toolkit and make independent choices that express one's own best self.



Activity #20

Charting Moral Growth and Development A 10-Minute Essay

This is an exercise to help you notice how you have grown morally over time.

First, state an ethical principle that you generally follow. Here are some examples of principles: Tell the truth. Play fair. Keep your hands off others' property.

It is likely that your favorite principle has been in your life for a while. Try to remember why you first followed this principle. Where you rewarded if you did and punished if you didn't? Did you feel coerced or intimidated into following it?

Try to identify the next stage of moral growth. Describe the circumstances under which you tended to uphold the principle and circumstances when you tended not to uphold the principle.

Last of all, explain why you follow the principle today. You will probably find yourself discussing how following that principle promotes the aggregate good or meets the needs of everyone directly involved.

Variation: If you have trouble tracing your growth from your current level of moral sophistication back to its source, try it from the other direction. Find a principle that you were expected to uphold as a child. Plot the course of your reasons for adhering to it and see where you today. Or, try this exercise with some professional value. It may be easier to see the line of development if you think about why you followed some professional principle initially as compared to why you adhere now to it as someone more comfortable in your field.



Something for the Toolkit: Use the sensitivity you have developed working through this book to notice ethical issues and do what you can to make the world a better place. As Aldous Huxley taught us, "The more you know, the more you see."

Chapter 5

The End is Only the Beginning

Resources for Practical Thinkers

- Bok, Sissela. 1978. *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*. New York: Vintage. This little book is a wonderful introduction to the problems of lying.
- Byock, Ira. 2004. *The Four Things That Matter Most*. New York: The Free Press. This book provides advice about living and dying well.
- Elliott, Deni. 2007. *Ethics in the First Person, A Guide to Teaching and Learning Practical Ethics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. This book provides more explanation and some theoretical backing for the concepts included in Ethical Challenges.
- Gert, Bernard. 2004. *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do*. New York: Oxford University Press. This book is written for the non-philosopher who wants to understand the theory behind the moral rules and moral rule violations.
- Gert, Bernard. 2005. *Morality: Its Nature and Justification*. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press. This book is theoretical, but contains careful description and explanation for the moral rules system.
- Gert, Bernard. 2006. "The New 10 Commandments," *Playboy Magazine*. February 2006. This is a good illustration that good philosophy can appear in very non-traditional venue.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. This is an important book for understanding moral development as it examines how women may develop ethically in ways different from men.
- Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1981. *The Philosophy of Moral Development*. San Francisco: Harper and Row. Larry Kohlberg is considered the father of moral development.
- Noddings, Nel. 1984. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press. This book looks at practical applications of caring for the most vulnerable in the making of ethical choices.
- Perry, Jr., William G. 1970. *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. With the works of Kohlberg and Gilligan, Perry's work provides a comprehensive view of the meaning of moral sophistication.
- Singer, Peter. 1995. *How Are We To Live? Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest*. New York: Prometheus. A contemporary philosopher helps us consider obligations to other humans, animals and the environment.

Glossary

Reprinted from Elliott, Deni. 2007. *Ethics in the First Person, A Guide to Teaching and Learning Practical Ethics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Used with permission.

The terms included reflect stipulated meanings used in this book and may not fit conventional usage.

absolutism - a style of moral judgment that begins with the belief that rules are rigid and always hold (e.g., don't lie no matter what).

aggregate good - the good of the whole, which may be different from the good of the individuals added together. Mill's utilitarianism is often misunderstood to be a quantified theory (the greatest good for the greatest number, the least harm for the smallest number). He clarifies in chapter 3 of *Utilitarianism* that our individual happiness rests on the health of the whole community, that achieving happiness is not a struggle between rivals but rather a recognition of what contributes to the overall happiness in an aggregate rather than quantified sense.

analogy, argument by - an argument by analogy concludes that since situation A and situation B are similar in relevant ways, the best answer in B will be the same as the best answer in A.

applied ethics - the application of an ethical theory or system to real-life issues.

argument - a technical term to describe the structure of reasoning that includes one or more premises and a conclusion.

authority, appeal to - using a person as a reason for holding a certain view. Some appeals to authority, based on expertise, are good reasons for holding a view (e.g., the weatherperson said that a hurricane is heading this way). Other appeals to authority do not provide good reasons for holding a view (e.g., my boss said I should do this, so I will even though I think it's wrong).

autonomous - internally directed.

bandwagon - a fallacious way of reasoning that rests on the idea that a choice is ethically acceptable because "everyone" holds that view.

begging the question - a fallacious way of reasoning in which the support of the conclusion is just another way of stating the conclusion (e.g., the mother who killed her children should be found not guilty by reason of insanity because she'd have to be crazy to do something like that); begging the question also occurs when an ethics question is recast as a question of economics, law, or opinion.

cogent - an argument that has true and complete premises and a probably true conclusion but lacks strict deductive validity; an argument that lacks cogency does not include relevant information or worthy counterarguments.

conclusion - the statement at the end of the argument that states what the listener should accept.

consequentialism - a method of ethical decision making that determines the moral permissibility of an action based on actual or predictable outcomes.

contradiction - the logical claim that counters a proposition. $\sim A$ is the contradiction to A . The contradiction to “abortion in some cases is morally permitted” is “abortion is never morally permitted.”

contrary - the logical claim that there is middle ground in what is presented as an either/or situation. For example, if an editor says that the choice is whether or not to print a questionable photograph, she may be ignoring possible contrary actions. See false dilemma.

deduction - the logical claim that the conclusion of an argument necessarily follows from its premises.

deontology - a method of ethical decision making that determines the moral permissibility of an action based on an analysis of the agent’s role-related responsibilities and/or intentionality, often without regard to the consequences of a specific act (e.g., it is right that teachers flunk students who perform poorly because it is the teacher’s duty to give students the grades they earn).

descriptive ethics - an analysis of human conduct that details how people **do** behave in regard to one another (rather than how they **should** behave).

duty - the special responsibility associated with a particular profession/occupation or societal role (doctors have unique duties; so do journalists, students, and parents). The duty of an individual or group includes description of how that responsibility is unique and essential to the legitimate social role. See role-related responsibility.

duty-based ethics - see deontology.

ethicist - a word made up by news media to describe a certain kind of source.

ethics - the discipline that looks at how people do and should act in regard to subjects of moral worth (from the Greek *ethike*, meaning custom). See morality.

exceptionism - a style of moral judgment that is universal but not absolute. Exceptionists believe there are justified exceptions to universal moral rules.

false dilemma - the presentation of alternatives in a dichotomous way (e.g., “either print the story or don’t” is a false dilemma; there are many other choices: print later, print some, print differently).

fatalistic relativism - a refusal to engage in ethical analysis characterized by the speaker’s unwillingness to judge another person’s actions or motivations.

fundamental moral unit (FMU) - the primary basis for moral consideration. In classical Western ethics, the FMU is the individual person; in some feminist critiques, the FMU is the relationship

among people; in some non-Western and indigenous philosophies, the FMU is the system that sustains connections between humans and other natural and transcendental entities.

generalizability - quality that makes a rule or an exception applicable to others who are similarly situated.

harm - what all rational people want to avoid for themselves, unless they have what they think is a good reason for wanting it. Direct harms include death, pain, disability, and being deprived of freedom or pleasure. Indirect harms include being deceived or cheated and having people break promises, break the law, or neglect duties toward you. What is irrational to want for oneself is immoral to cause to another.

heteronomous - externally directed.

human analogy - the understanding by all competent human beings that other human beings can suffer harms and want other people to refrain from causing them to suffer those harms.

ideal - how we would like people to act but don't think they have to act: An ideal action is one that is morally encouraged but not morally required.

idealism - the assumption that desirable outcomes can be obtained without causing harms.

impartiality - a requirement for minimalist morality that requires that moral agents avoid causing harm to all people without adequate justification.

induction - a type of argument in which the conclusion is based on premises that note instances and probability. The best inductive arguments are those that are based on the most instances (e.g., my heart has been beating for more than fifty years; it will continue to beat today). But as that example shows, conclusions based on many instances will turn out to be wrong if other data that make the argument cogent (such as mortality) are ignored.

irrationality - the key to a system of morality. It is irrational to want harm without reason. It is immoral to cause what it is irrational to want.

judgment - deciding what is morally required, prohibited, permitted, or encouraged in a particular situation.

justification - how one explains that behavior that causes harm is permitted in a particular case. A questionable act such as lying is strongly justified if all rational, impartial persons could advocate lying in situations of that kind (i.e., it would not be irrational to advocate it). The questionable act is not justified if no rational, impartial persons could advocate lying in situations that have the same morally relevant features. It is weakly justified if a rational, impartial person could go either way.

law - a system of rules different from ethics: The scope of law includes only what is enforceable; the scope of morality excludes whatever causes unjustified harms.

minimalist morality - systems that describe only those behaviors that are morally prohibited.

mixed formalism - a contemporary style of ethical reasoning that uses elements from different classical ethical theories, recognizing that different classical theories may prioritize different, but equally important, morally relevant features. Mixed formalists create decision-making processes that include review of features from different theories.

moral agent - a competent, rational, conscious adult who is voluntarily choosing an action or inaction.

moral community - all human beings between birth and death; those deserving of moral protections equal to what all others deserve. It is morally prohibited to cause a member of the moral community unjustified harm without good reason.

moral development - a theory that describes moral sophistication and the steps that one follows in reaching moral sophistication.

moral system - the structure that both describes how people **do** act in regard to one another and prescribes how people **should** act in regard to one another. A moral system differentiates among behaviors that are morally prohibited, those that are morally permitted, those that are morally required, and those that are morally encouraged.

morality - see ethics (from the Latin *moralis*, meaning custom).

morally relevant difference - a difference that shows why one entity deserves to be treated differently from another in similar circumstances. For example, children may be deprived of some freedoms for their own protection because of their age and perceived inability to take full responsibility for their actions. This is a morally relevant difference between children and adults.

normative ethics - arguments leading to the conclusion of how people should behave in regard to one another (as differentiated from how they do behave).

objective - having reality or truth-value external to the judgment of individuals. Torture of innocent children is objectively wrong as it is a cause of unjustified harms.

permitted - behavior that is within the bounds of the moral system. It is morally permitted to act in any way that does not cause others unjustified harms.

practical ethics - the study of how people **do** act and how they **should** act in regard to others and in regard to subjects of moral worth.

professional ethics - the study of how people **do** perform and how they **should** perform job-related duties.

prohibited - behavior that is not morally permitted. It is morally prohibited to act in ways that cause others to suffer unjustified harms.

rationality - 1. the inverse of irrationality; 2. the ability to know that oneself and others can be harmed, the ability to recognize harms as such, and the ability to understand that questionable action requires justification.

reason - an appeal to benefit for oneself or others. If one has a reason for doing something, it is because the agent believes that someone will benefit.

relativism - the belief that there are no universal moral rules.

required - behavior that an agent must do. People are morally required to meet their role-related responsibilities and to avoid causing unjustifiable harms to others.

rights - what follows from being a member of the moral community. Subjects of moral worth have a right to not be caused unjustified harms.

role - related responsibility - the unique duties associated with one of a person's multiple societal roles.

rule - how we expect people to act unless they have a good reason for doing otherwise; people are blameworthy if they violate a rule.

slippery slope - the fallacy of deriving an unacceptable conclusion from incremental steps. For example, the argument that if we allow abortion, then we'll allow the killing of newborns; once that happens, we will allow the killing of all who cannot defend themselves. Therefore, we should not allow abortion.

soundness - a judgment about the quality of an argument. An argument is sound if it has true premises and a true conclusion and if it is valid. Arguments in ethics will rarely have logical validity and thus will rarely be sound, in a strict logical sense. However, the goal is to avoid fallacious reasoning and produce as strong and cogent an argument as possible.

stewardship - the voluntary assumption of responsibility for a subject of moral worth.

straw man - the fallacious method of reasoning that involves constructing a very weak counterargument to the position one holds.

subjective - not objective; having reality or truth-value only in regard to what people think. A subjective way of thinking can lead to the following fallacious conclusion: If I think something is wrong, it is wrong. My thinking makes it so.

subjects of moral worth - entities outside of the moral community that deserve moral consideration (e.g., human corpses, human fetuses, some animals, the environment, art, and culture are subjects of moral worth). They ought not be caused harm without good reason but are not of value equal to those in the moral community.

teleology - the set of moral theories that justifies questionable actions by appeal to an ultimate outcome - the ultimate outcome could be expected good consequences, or it could be self-actualization of the agent.

theory - the foundation that supports a system; by way of analogy, a grammatical theory explains how and why a grammar system works.

universal - applies to everyone in similar circumstances.

utilitarianism - theories that justify choices by appeal to the greatest good or the greatest aggregate good for the community (or the least aggregate harm for the community).

validity - a judgment about the structure of an argument; whether it has true premises and a true conclusion.

values - expressions of what people desire or want to avoid. Ethical primary values articulate what people want to avoid or seek for their own good. Rankings of values differ among people. There are also aesthetic and religious values that are not necessarily connected with ethics.

virtue ethics - the set of moral theories that appeals to what one's moral hero might do. The agent, rather than the act, is judged. One uses virtue ethics to consider how to be the kind of person who promotes good and prevents harm.

Some Suggested Answers for Activity #16

SCENARIO	HARMS CAUSED	JUSTIFIED?
1. A drunk driver injured a pedestrian.	Pain, disability, deprived someone of pleasure, disobeyed the law, neglected the RRR of being a driver	No. The driver is responsible for his actions, even if drunk. If he were involuntarily drugged, he would not be the responsible agent.
2. A picture that you find embarrassing appears without your permission on the front page of the newspaper.	Pain, deprived subject of pleasure, possible cheating	Maybe. A news organization can legally publish pictures of events that happen in public. But if you are not a public official or celebrity, or part of a newsworthy event, you can reasonably expect not to have embarrassing pictures published of yourself.
3. Despite Mary's agreement to be faithful to John, she is dating someone else.	Deception, promise-breaking, cheating, neglect of RRR of being a life-partner	No. Even if John never finds out, Mary has acted unethically.
4. The hurricane destroyed the building and inventory of Matt's store.	Pain, deprivation of freedom and pleasure	As there is no responsible moral agent, there is no justification possible.
5. Pat told Sue that there were no plans for her birthday even though a surprise party was planned for her.	Deception, possible neglect of RRR of being a friend	Yes. Conventionally, we want people to deceive us if a surprise party is planned in our honor.

Appendix

Systematic Moral Analysis

I. What's the problem?

Who is being harmed? Who is likely to be harmed and how? Gert provides the following list of **moral rules**. Harms are caused through violations of the moral rules.

1. Do not kill.
2. Do not cause pain.
3. Do not disable.
4. Do not deprive of freedom.
5. Do not deprive of pleasure.
6. Do not deceive.
7. Keep your promises.
8. Do not cheat.
9. Obey the law.
10. Do your duty.

II. Who is Responsible?

1. Does someone have role-related responsibilities (RRR) with regard to the person or subject of moral worth that might be harmed? If so, what are those responsibilities and how do they relate to the causing of the harm?
2. If the harm caused is not a violation of a person's RRR, could the harm have been predicted and avoided in achieving some legitimate goal? If the goal is not legitimate, then causing harm is rarely justified.

III. Can the action be justified?

1. Does the agent's RRR provide special expectations or privileges that justify the harm?
2. Is harm being avoided or prevented that justifies the harm caused?
3. Are benefits being promoted that justify the harm caused?
4. Are there alternative actions that are ethically permitted that could achieve the same end without causing harm or by causing less harm?
5. What would your moral hero do?
6. If there are people of unequal power involved, have you chosen an action that cares best for the most vulnerable?

IV. Apply Four Categories Thinking

1. Identify some actions that would be ethically prohibited for the responsible agent to do.
2. Based on the agent's RRR, what is that person ethically required to do?
3. Identify some ethically permitted actions.
4. Choose the ethically ideal action, explaining why it is ideal.

About the Author

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