

Working Through Ethics in Education and Leadership

Theory, Analysis, Plays, Cases, Poems,
Prose, and Speeches

James Kent Donlevy and Keith D. Walker



SensePublishers

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and Speeches*

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THE RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

INTRODUCTION

We have been involved in education for many years as elementary and high school teachers, school administrators, and university professors. Through those experiences, it became clear to us that many education students saw their professional decision-making as guided by professional codes of conduct and their personal decision-making being subject only to their personal, subjective assessment. Moreover, such assessments were, in their opinion, ethically unassailable by others as “after all, such things are relative to the individual’s personal beliefs or the lack thereof”. The common refrain was that if a professional code did not prohibit an action, or if the action was not during school time, then “no one is right and no one is wrong in what they choose to do or not to do – it is all a personal decision!” Relativism and nihilism seemed the perspectives of the day for many students in education courses. The irony is that despite these perspectives, the people you meet as educators are, on the whole, incredibly value driven persons.

We are certainly not the first professors to note this phenomenon and not the first to be chagrined at students’ under use of their skills of synthesis and analysis in looking at ethical issues. Indeed, some former colleagues suggested that classical ethical analysis is pointless as the Cartesian divide makes such analysis impossible (Dewey, 1988; 2003) and even dangerous (Bauman, 1993; Rorty, 1991). Their argument was that classical ethics was dangerous as it “lets people off the hook” as one gives up the responsibility to act with personal responsibility for one’s actions, shifting responsibility to a code or system of belief established and promulgated by others for their own purposes. It is said that such choices display a lack of authentic freedom and autonomy and that these engender irresponsibility in ethical decision-making. Moreover, with every situation and context being different it seems impossible to provide guides to ethical action.

Our belief is that even if one accepts that there are no universal ethical values, which we do not, there is a great deal of intellectual benefit in students exercising their minds using synthesis, analysis, and critical reflection when considering ethical scenarios. Further, such a determinative process is crucial to being able to explain and defend professional decisions to others in the public square. To those who say that “the ethical” is wholly the personal, we answer that we live in relationships and as teachers, administrators, trustees – and others who hold public office – we are answerable to others for our actions which affect them. We have accepted the benefits of public service and we have a public responsibility to explain and defend our decisions in the public square with cogent, considered, rational, and persuasive argumentation. Therefore, our responses to ethical challenges must be, amongst other things, articulately defended as thoughtful and reasonable and in the interests of the common good. Those reasons alone should make the study of classical ethics a worthwhile task.

THE RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

It is our hope that ethical analysis through both reading various schools of thought and vicariously living in this book's high school and elementary scenarios will assist teachers, students, school administrators, district administrators, as well as others involved in ethical analysis, to sharpen their abilities to synthesize and analyze data, and to critically reflect upon contentious ethical matters. In turn that will assist in the development of their ability to perceive, understand, address, and to publically defend their decisions as having been made in an ethical fashion as well as being consistent with ethical values and principles in pursuit of the common good.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOOK

The significance of this book is several-fold. First, although there are many books containing ethical cases for study by those involved in education; none of these offer plays which allow the participants to engage in scripted dialogue which is authentic, entertaining, and tells a relevant story involving characters in an educational setting. These plays have been written to provide the foundation for the terms utilized in ethical analysis, for example, ethical values and ethical principles. Second, the contents of this book have been tested and found to be valuable. The authors have, for several years, used these plays in courses with school administrators in the province of Saskatchewan and in education students' B.Ed. courses at the University of Calgary and University of Saskatchewan. In their use we have noted that the level of engagement by participants with the plays and the ethical scenarios has been high.

Third, using the plays in the classroom and having them read by students who assume various characters in the plays has resulted in the participants both becoming attuned to the fact that their ethical assumptions are not necessarily the same as others and further that there is significant ambiguity inherent in real life ethical decision-making due in part to multiple perspectives.

THE INTENDED AUDIENCE FOR THE BOOK

This book is not intended as an academic treatise on ethics nor classical ethics; but rather as a tool to be used by instructors and students of ethics who are concerned with having a firm grounding of the main concepts and processes involved with ethical discernment. It will be apparent to the reader that this book is intended for use by those in education as the plays and the cases take place in educational settings. Indeed, as will be noted later in this book, some of the issues which will be considered relate specifically to the duty of care owed to children in schools and fundamental fairness owed to those in the educational community. However, ethical analysis – that is the process by which one arrives at an ethical decision which is at the core of this book – may be applied to any ethical issue facing an individual, a group, or an institution. One can argue whether or not there are universal ethical values but one cannot argue that it is possible to avoid making ethical decisions, that is, decisions between what one considers good and bad, and at times, bad and

THE RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

bad. Further, institutional decisions produce consequences for the decision-maker which she or he must live with both in the private and in the public square.

Therefore, although this book has been primarily written for school teachers and school administrators, it will be found useful by many others should they wish to know more of how one can utilize ethical reasoning in dealing with ethical decision-making in their personal and public lives.

CHAPTER 1

ETHICS

In general and very simplistically, a classical definition of philosophy is a field comprised of Metaphysics (which studies the nature of existence), Epistemology (which studies how one knows what exists), and Axiology (studying the quality of value which includes the category of ethics). Ethics asks, “How one ought to act in relation to that which exists – humans and things?” In other words what, given the nature of the entity asking the question and that which is being engaged in the relationship, is the correct type of relationship where “correct” means contributory to life or continued existence within the nature of the entity regarding the nature of those in the relationship. This been said, Boss (1998) is correct when she suggests that ethics is like air, all around but only noticed in its absence (p. 5). Ethics is not about rhetoric, what we say, what we intend, what is written, or what has been framed into a credo, but rather ethics is about actions and attitudes, who we are to people, how we treat people, who we are when no one seems to be looking ... it is about choosing to do more than the law requires and less than the law allows. Ethics is not about compliance but is about doing what is right, good, just, virtuous, and proper. Ethics is not about the way things are but about the way things ought to be. Rather, when rightly understood, ethics is a set of principles that guide our attitudes, choices, and actions. These principles determine the purpose, destiny, and course of our lives. Ethics are the principles of obligation, ends, motive, and virtue that distinguish for us how we should determine right from wrong, good from bad, proper from improper, and virtuous from vicious. Living ethically is about being, in reality, the kind of person I want others to think I am when I am at my best. The *Oxford Canadian Dictionary of Current English* (2005) defines ethics as, “moral principles that govern a person’s behaviour,” and morals as, “principles of right and wrong behaviour” and is “concerned with, based on, or adhering to a coded behaviour that is considered right or acceptable in a particular society rather than legal rights and duties”. We think it is helpful to consider the root word from which “ethics” is derived: “ethos”. In ancient days, this once described the atmosphere within a cave; an atmosphere that was quite stable (didn’t change much). So it is with stability of ethical principle. There are at least two dimensions of ethics: 1. The ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil, virtuous from vicious, and propriety from impropriety; and 2. The commitment and courage to do what is right, good, virtuous, and proper and to decline not doing the unethical act.

CAN ETHICS BE TAUGHT?

Meno. Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way? (Plato, 380 B.C.E.)

CHAPTER 1

It may be said that ethics cannot be taught as the impulse to act ethically precedes thought. And further, ethical formulas or systems of thought are mere mechanisms which at best inadvertently cause people to avoid the fundamental, innate, human pull of ethical behaviour and at worst produce an inability in people to act with authentic autonomy within their sphere of human freedom. Moreover, it has been said that even if one could teach ethics that task would only be fruitful with the young and impressionable, not with adults who have already established through experience their level of ethical awareness and accepted a process of ethical decision making, or lack thereof.

In our view, ethics can be taught to young and old to inform thought and impact wisdom in action. As humans we learn in many ways and develop our moral capacities in predictable but idiosyncratic patterns. Parks (1993) stated,

Empirical evidence demonstrating the importance of moral education in the young adult years has been charted ... by researchers such as Conry and Nelson (1989), Gandz and Hayes (1988), Bebeau (1991), and Rest.... (1988; 1986).... Surely adult moral and ethical development occurs in a variety of settings, both formal and informal, but there is now ample evidence that ethical consciousness and commitment can continue to undergo transformation at least throughout formal education. (p. 13)

Rest (1982) made the convincing point that “it is useful to think of morality as an ensemble of processes” (p. 29). He suggested that,

four major components must be considered in developing a moral framework. (1) how does the person interpret the situation and how does he or she view any possible action as affecting people’s welfare; (2) how does the person figure out what the morally ideal course of action would be; (3) how does he or she decide what to do; and (4) does the person implement what he or she intends to do. (p. 29)

The general thesis of the above, which we agree with, is that in so far as an academic study of the components or any combination of them contributes to a participant’s understanding of them, that activity contributes to an individual’s moral education. As Rest (1982) said, “this psychological model assumes that moral behaviour is defined not solely by its external consequences ... but by the internal processes that govern it” (p. 29).

Component One can be addressed in class by raising the awareness of students to multiple possible responses to an ethical conundrum and to heighten students’ awareness of the multi-layered social and person ramifications of ethical decision-making. Component Two can be enhanced by students studying the works of Kohlberg (1981), Erickson (1950), Gilligan (1982), and others which echo in part the statement that “research studies ... clearly link changes in moral judgment with changes in cognitive capacity... 100 studies ... link moral judgment test scores with real-life decision making and behaviour” (Rest, 1982, p. 32). Research into Component Three, and common experience, shows that believing what one should do does not mean that a person will choose a particular course of action. However, there are studies which indicate that being morally motivated to act in a particular way is associated with cognitive development (Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1965). Therefore, it seems

reasonable that the possibility of an individual choosing a moral outcome, at least as defined by her or him, is arguably increased when the decision-maker has an understanding and appreciation of the domains of implications and consequences of those choices to others as well as herself or himself. Component four is summed up by Rest (1982),

an educational program may increase students' ability to carry through on their moral commitments by strengthening and sharpening the skills of Components I, II, and III. A helpful technique might be role-playing simulations in which the student goes through actual motions of putting a plan into effect and works out exactly what to say and how to say it. (p. 34)

The idea of role playing figures prominently in this book as we provide two plays for the reader in Chapter 4. We recommend that the plays in this book be processed within a group setting.

We have occasionally explained to people that there are four Cs for moral development: Consciousness (ethical sensitivity), competence (ethical literacy and dialogic competence), commitment (pre-situational determinations to be and act ethically), and courage (ethical action aligned to ethical consideration and decision). The four Cs are complementary expressions to Rest's four component perspective.

In summation, the student has of course free will to decide not only what is in her or his opinion the right or wrong action or inaction when faced with an ethical decision making problem. However, the cognitive processes which provides for a deep understanding of the circumstances surrounding the situation, the consequences of making a decision, alternative paths if one chooses a resolution, and being able to articulate an intelligent rationale for such a decision, which is so crucial for teachers and others holding public office, are all matters which can be taught and practiced in a classroom using a variety of teaching techniques. As in all professional schools, whether that be medicine, law, nursing, or education, the process of ethics education can provide tools of thought for synthesis, analysis, and critical reflection. Although such activities do not guarantee a particular result, such an education can provide the tools and thereby arguably increase the likelihood of reaching a moral decision, at least as defined by the decision-maker, which the decision-maker can then accept and articulate as ethical in nature to others.

We acknowledge and agree with Goodpaster's (1982) statement that "the teacher seeks to foster a certain kind of growth, but more as a leader of active inquiry than as a therapist or physician" (p. 38). In that respect, this book espouses the thesis that by assisting students cognitively and socially in the classroom to clarify their own sense of ethical principles and by employing analytical processes and encouraging critical reflection on ethical matters students of ethics will be better prepared to make, articulate, and hence defend their decisions in the ethically charged public arena.

THE GENESIS OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

There are several sources for the ethical values which we individually or as a society use to assist us in deciding if an action or inaction is right or wrong, morally good or

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morally bad. Among those included are: a) religion (revelational text and sacred tradition); b) society (laws, customs, and moral norms); c) organizations (culture, embedded values and practices); and d) family (generational tradition and education). Religion can provide a source of ethical principles, the validity of which is deemed divinely given or inspired, universal and immutable, or unchanging from society to society and throughout all time. It is usually enforced by social opprobrium and severe spiritual penalties. Society can provide a collective definition of what is morally good and bad and provide legal and social penalties for enforcement. Some societies may claim that their ethical values, their morality, are superior expressions of morality and should be universal for all societies. Organizations, to which a person belongs, may provide a set of ethical values. Lawyers, accountants, teachers, and doctors and other professional groups all have codes of conduct, some of which are statutory in nature, that clearly state the ethical expectations of their members. Each family has its own unwritten code of ethical conduct that defines acceptable and unacceptable moral behaviour within the family group. In addition to the above, some claim that by the very fact of being human individuals know what is ethical in an organic, innate fashion which precedes thought and supersedes socialization in a particular community. Notwithstanding the variation and differences above, one point seems certain, being human means that we choose between what we believe to be the good and the bad, or the least of the bad and the worst, in many situations in life and we all seek a reason or reasons for making the choices we make – if only to be able to personally live with them or to explain to others the reasons for those choices.

A DEFINITION AND EXAMPLES OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Having defined ethics generally, for the purposes of this book, the next definition required is of ethical values and it is here that some become confused as the term values can refer to non-ethical and ethical matters. I may value Fords over Chryslers and that is simply a preference. A value is merely a preference for one thing over another. As a noun, value is the worth of something. Intrinsic value means that the “thing” has value, in and of itself. Instrumental value refers to the worth a thing has as a means to an end. Ethical values are a particular set of values which are different from all the rest. Ethical values speak to what I hold to be right or wrong in human action. These values encapsulate what is good and bad for humans given their nature in the actions or inactions which they choose. Examples of ethical values might be professionalism, friendliness, hospitality, equity, efficiency, community, and liberty.

Using an ethical analysis may be as simple as saying, for example, that some act or a failure to act is not professional, or efficient. The High School and Elementary School plays in this book, which are in Chapter Four, allow the reader to move through identification and clarification of the ethical values at play.

Once having utilized the Plays, the reader will have clarified and be able to identify a myriad of ethical values and have a familiarity with the process of ethical discernment. As the plays are intended to be taken up in a class, the participants

will have an opportunity to challenge each other's assumptions which underlie the articulation and application in particular situations of their ethical values. During the class discussion of the plays, it will quickly become evident the identification and acceptance of certain ethical values amongst the participants will differ. Clashes will occur when the choice facing a decision maker is between two positive ethical values, such as, friendship and professionalism, or two negative values, such as, lack of respect and unprofessionalism. In such cases, the ability to identify ethical values and to contemplate them in a practical case are not sufficient to make a determination for resolution in what may require a publically defensible decision in the public square. In that case, what are required are *ethical principles*. The purpose of the plays is to provide an opportunity for the readers to identify their own ethical values reflected in the scenarios and to articulate the meaning and genesis of those values in a public yet safe space where they will be subject to challenge and hence further clarification and considered application. In Chapter Six of this book, the matter of ethical dilemmas will be addressed but prior to that time it is likely that readers of the plays will require some knowledge of ethical principles in order to better understand the ethical value conflicts faced by the characters in the plays. Therefore what follows is a brief explanation of the term *ethical principles* used for the purposes of this book.

TOOLS FOR ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND THEIR USE IN ETHICAL ANALYSIS

Ethical principles are real, unchanging, self-evident, self-validating, external, eternal, and universal human values that pertain to our relations with others. The ethical principles call us to habitually think and behave in a manner consistent with what is right, good, and virtuous and to avoid the opposite.

Ethical principles provide the decision-maker with particular ethical content for analysis. As an example, imagine that you are an administrator in an institution that has a written policy that compels you to report any and all theft to your superior. The policy is simple, one strike and the employee guilty of theft is fired. Now imagine that it has come to your attention that a very hard working employee in your department has taken \$100.00 from petty cash, without your permission. The employee's purpose was to buy her secretary flowers for secretary's day. You have every reason to believe that the funds will be returned as this has happened in the past with other employees. What do you do? There are several ethical values in play, a) professionalism, b) your responsibility to be faithful to the policy (law abidingness), c) equity of treatment amongst employees, etc. What do you do? Here you may look to ethical principles to resolve the conflict. Principles such as, a) do unto others as you would have them do unto you (the Golden Rule), or b) what action would you be proud of if your child knew of your decision? (The "kid on the shoulder" principle), or c) one's duty should be the deciding factor in ethical decision-making (Deontology), or d) do what is best for the greatest number of people involved (Utilitarianism).

As seen above, ethical principles help the decision-maker to adjudicate through ethical complexity and conflicts.

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How could an instructor develop a lesson plan which would demonstrate many of the above matters raised in this Chapter? We provide a sample lesson plan in Appendix A which uses an inductive method to bring the ethical discussion alive in the classroom with adults. It had been used by us many times over the past few years with great success in raising ethical awareness and sensitivity among education students.

THE OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

This book has seven chapters with references and Appendixes.

Chapter One has presented working definitions of ethics, ethical values, ethical principles, an example of ethical analysis, and this outline of this book.

Chapter Two provides a way of considering the place of ethics in the work of leadership, with a focus on ethical discernment, determination, deliberation, and diligence.

Chapter Three looks at the various schools of ethics utilizing five titles, Virtue Ethics, Deontology, Teleology, Relativism, and Postmodernism.

Chapter Four provides two plays, the High School Story and the Elementary School Story, which may be read out loud by participants and are intended to allow the participants to clarify their own sense of ethics and to confront their unstated, and sometimes stated, ethical values, principles, and assumptions in the public yet safe space of the classroom, seminar, or workshop.

Chapter Five provides the authors' method of ethical analysis – entitled the Five Commitments – which uses a matrix of various ethical values and ethical principles to assist a decision-maker in her or his ethical analysis.

Chapter Six goes beyond the ethical identification and ethical clarification of Chapter Three to the application of ethical analysis when faced with ten difficult case studies specifically designed to produce ethical dilemmas facing decision makers.

Chapter Seven provides a very brief conclusion to this book which summarizes its key elements and reflects upon various aspects of study which may be used with students in junior and senior high school and adults in order to maximize the impact of the study of ethics.

The Appendixes are very important for the use of this book – depending upon the age and purposes of the reader. We have referenced the reader to primary sources in texts, articles, and in some cases video clips with original authors. The original readings will undoubtedly be used by some readers to delve more deeply into the key ideas in this book. That would be good! Appendix A provides a Sample Lesson Plan for teaching an ethics class. Appendix B offers the Ethics Aptitude Survey (Brady, 1990), for the reader to discern her or his own ethical tendencies. Appendix C provides the readings and video sites noted above. Appendix D gives the site for an important article, by Rushworth (1994), *Universal Human Values: Finding An Ethical Common Ground* as well as other useful references dealing with universal