

How to Teach This Book
Ethics: A Complete Method for Moral Choice
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Ethics has suffered from a lack of definition. *Ethics: A Complete Method for Moral Choice* addresses that problem by explaining and defining ethics, showing why it is a distinct discipline of study, and offering a holistic method for making moral judgments. Most books on ethics, whether philosophical or religious ethics, touch on important aspects and problems in ethics without offering a full method that students can master. All those books have contributions to make by explaining such ethical concerns as utilitarianism, consequentialism, relativism, emotivism, and so on, or by showing the contributions of past masters such as Plato, Aristotle, or Kant. All these matters relate to and are treated in *Ethics: A Complete Method for Moral Choice*, and this book can be supplemented by all that the teacher brings from other sources.

Professors of philosophical ethics bring enormous stores of knowledge that will enrich the teaching of a course centered on *Ethics: A Complete Method for Moral Choice*. Whether they have used categories such as teleology/deontology, virtue ethics, or meta-ethics, they can feed these resources into the framework of this book. The method is open to truth from whatever source.

Professors of religious ethics which give special attention to the moral traditions housed in world religions can incorporate all of that into a course based on this book. The method invites input. Both teachers of philosophical ethics and teachers of religious ethics are doing ethics and have a common need for a basic method to frame their search for moral truth. This book gives the methodological grounding and framework for both philosophical and religious ethics.

Method, Not Uniformity

This method, illustrated pedagogically by a wheel model, is not a straightjacket leading to uniformity. If it did, it would not be a method but a form of thought control. Students using this method can disagree with one another, with both sides in the argument using this method. I urge my students who disagree with me on a particular moral issue to use this method to argue against me. What the method does is give thoroughness to the search for moral truth and encourage sensitivity to the myriad complexities that mark even apparently simple moral quandaries. It presses us to avoid the pitfall of unasked questions since it is the unasked question that bedevils most ethical disagreements.

The book also recognizes that it is not by reason alone that we develop moral intelligence. The affective experience of the value of life in all its forms is the grounding of ethics. Creative imagination is at the heart of ethical inquiry, and advances in ethics have come from those who perceive new possibilities for the enhancement of human and the rest of terrestrial life. History turns a corner when new moral insights take hold. The “divine right of kings” with its basal axiom “the king can do no wrong” dominated much of human history, until moral insights leading toward democracy emerged. Literacy, once a rare privilege, came to be

seen as a human right, as did basic health care. It was not just naked reason that brought all this about but revolutions of the heart, new affective appreciations, which were then supported by solid reasoning.

The quest for moral truth is aided in ethics by all fields of human endeavor including the arts and literature. For this reason *Ethics: A Complete Method for Moral Choice* incorporates poetry, literature, and other art forms as ways of opening the human mind and stirring human imagination and uses the work of the social sciences to promote a solid database.

Putting Flesh on Theory

Ethics should not be dry. It's about life, and life is a miracle of energy. Intelligence, including moral intelligence, is served by abstraction, logic, and analysis. But the moorings of all that theory in the swirl and excitement of life should not be lost. Cases are the answer. Theory without application is a yawn. On top of that, cases keep theory honest. Of course, an ethics course that just hops from case to case without offering a method is rootless and disjointed.

Scheduling in one or two debates into a semester is very useful. I announce the debate schedule in the syllabus at the very beginning of the semester. Students are asked to volunteer for either the pro or con position. I tell them that they can even offer to defend a position that they do not hold themselves, just as a lawyer will have to defend a client whose conduct he does not approve but who deserves competent representation. As an inducement I point out the value of debating experience. Many educated people become stumblingly inarticulate when they stand in front of a group. The experience of debating is valuable for life. Each student who debates is awarded one free pass on a designated question in the final exam, that is, they may skip one question in the final exam, a question designated by the professor, and receive an A for that question. One week before the debate, the students have to submit a bibliography of materials they will use for the debate to make sure they are not arriving at the debate with a few thoughts off the top of their head. I find that students take this very seriously, often dressing up a little more formally and often asking if they can invite friends to attend.

During the debate the professor can sit at the back of the room after first introducing the topic and announcing which side is pro and which con. The four debaters each take around five minutes to make their case. They may use handouts or computer display or chalk board notes if they wish. After their presentation, time is allotted to critique the other case just presented. Then the floor is open to the class. One of the debaters can be appointed to recognize questioners and keep order, with occasional prompts from the professor if a waving hand is being ignored. Participation is usually excellent. In the class after the debate, the professor can offer comments and note how well the ethics method they have been learning played in the debate, or should have.

Small Group Case Studies

A marvelous source for cases and quandaries presented with just enough detail to get a discussion going is <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/index.html>. It is often useful to open a class with a case and show how it illustrates the methodological point to be taught in that class. Thus in

teaching chapter 12, "Principles and Their Limits," you can begin with a case and show how it involves several competing principles, for example, truth-telling versus life-saving. It is also useful to give a case to students after covering certain material and, physical arrangements permitting, to divide them up into small groups to discuss the case for some fifteen minutes. Then each group will appoint a spokesperson to report on their conclusions regarding the case. This illustrates how groups with the same case can come up with different conclusions. It gives the teacher the opportunity to show what was missing in the various analyses.

Students, however, must be told that in an exam that it is not enough to give mostly cases in their answers without explaining the methodological issues involved. A student who is not well prepared for a test will remember the case but not necessarily the issues of method being illustrated by the case.