

COMMON MORALITY

NACSW Conference

Objectives

- Unpacking moral maturity
- Unpacking the moral system
- Contrasting the moral system as a framework to ethical decision-making versus principlism and other moral theories.
- Application of our understanding of moral maturity and the moral system to ethical decision-making.

The story

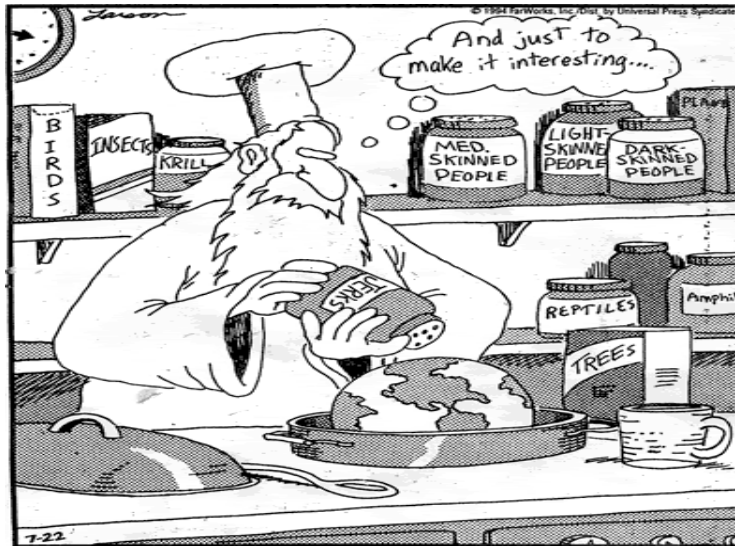
- “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us” (1 Corinthians 2:12).
- Paul was talking about the gospel and not likely referring to issues like paternalism, competency, or informed consent.



Decision-making and a Christian Worldview

- Don't want to discount the role of the Holy Spirit
 - “... but be filled w/ the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 5:18)
 - “Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119)
 - “pray for wisdom” (James 1:5)
 - “Trust in the Lord with all your heart...” (Prov. 3:5-6)
 - “without me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5)
- In the same vein, Jesus also pointed followers to the moral system
 - Challenging the Pharisee's legalism
 - Challenging our own sense of righteousness – even calling us to an unattainable higher moral standard
 - “the moral system doesn't solve the problem of evil – it just proves it exists”
 - It's very existence assumes that we are all vulnerable and fallible

Moral Arrogance: What is it?



Moral Arrogance

- What is moral arrogance?
 - Moral arrogance involves holding that your moral decision or judgment is the only correct decision or judgment on a controversial issue when there are conflicting moral decisions or judgments that are also morally acceptable (defensible).
http://www.hmn.bun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/pasta/gert/gert_handout.pdf
- How does our understanding of the moral system help guard us against moral arrogance?
 - A moral theory should explain why most moral questions have unique correct answers, but it should also explain why some moral questions do not.
http://www.hmn.bun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/pasta/gert/gert_handout.pdf

Understanding moral maturity: The Four Component Model

- Moral Sensitivity
- Moral Judgment
- Moral Motivation
- Moral Character



Gert's Criticisms of Principlism

- Moral principles have no priority ranking and their application may be subject to the bias of the one (or group) applying them. When in conflict which principle takes precedence?
- Moral principles blur the line between what is a moral rule and what is a moral ideal. This can obscure what is and what is not a moral issue.
- Moral principles can be vague in their definition and application



Moral Theory and the Moral System (Common Morality)

- According to Gert the moral system is Common Morality at Work
- Common Morality does not provide unique answers to all moral questions, whereas the moral systems generated by other moral theories are intended to do so.
- Common Morality simply provides a common framework for working through moral problems.
- Common Morality assumes that all persons are both fallible and vulnerable

Hopeful Outcomes of Understanding an explicit account of the moral system

1. Reaffirm good decisions and challenge bad ones by making one's moral reasoning more explicit.
2. Provide a framework that clarifies ethical and non-ethical issues to foster more meaningful dialogue regarding morally acceptable outcomes
3. Provide a framework that is useful in dealing with truly difficult cases
4. Enhance moral maturity

According to Gert, Common Morality:

- Is an informal public system
 - “All people are subject to morality simply by virtue of being a rationale person...”
- Is agreed upon by all rational individuals
 - Rationally acceptable beliefs
 - Rationally required beliefs
- Is characterized by impartiality
 - In reference to a group, no one benefits or is harmed
 - Public allowance
- Consists of moral rules and moral ideals

Moral Rules inherent in Common Morality (according to Gert)

- 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. Do not cheat.
- 8. Keep your promise.
- 9. Obey the law.
- 10. Do your duty.



Application of Common Morality to an ethical dilemma



"Fair is fair, Larry...We're out of food, we drew straws—you lost."

Application of Common Morality to an ethical dilemma

- What is an ethical dilemma?
- How then do we justify violating a moral rule?
- 2 Steps
 - Step 1: Identify the morally relevant features
 - Step 2: Answer the question: "Can an impartial/rational person publicly allow this violation?"



Morally Relevant Features

1. **What moral rule is being violated?**
2. What harms are being **caused** / **avoided** / **prevented**?
3. What are the relevant desires/beliefs of the person toward whom the rule is being violated?
4. What is the relationship between the person toward whom the rule is being violated and the person doing the violation?

Morally Relevant Features (con't)

5. What goods are being promoted by the violation?
6. Is the rule being violated to prevent him or her from violating another moral rule when that violation is weakly justified.
7. Is the rule being violated because a moral rule has been violated?
8. Are there other alternative actions?
9. Is the violation being done intentionally or **only** knowingly?
10. Is the situation an emergency such that no person is likely to plan to be in that situation?

Case of Charles



- At a nursing home the activities staff are working with an elderly man who is upset about being in the nursing home, particularly since he thinks the cost is being borne by the taxpayers. He is in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's disease, but he is still capable of understanding most information. The staff assure him that the money is coming out of his own savings through the guardian who is managing his money, although it actually is coming out of long-term care money (tax supported). He feels better, so he participates more.

**QUESTIONS /
COMMENTS?**

Wanna Learn More?

Gert, Culver, Clouser (1997). *Bioethics: A return to fundamentals*.
New York: Oxford University Press

Bryan, Sanders, Kaplan (2015). *The helping professional's guide to ethics: A new perspective*. Chicago: Lyceum Books Inc.

