



Preface

Aristotle wrote that “the ultimate purpose in studying ethics is not as it is in other inquiries, the attainment of theoretical knowledge; we are not conducting this inquiry in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, else there would be no advantage in studying it.” *Ethics for Life* is a multicultural and interdisciplinary introductory ethics textbook that provides students with an ethics curriculum that has been shown to significantly improve students’ ability to make real-life moral decisions.¹

One of the frustrations in teaching ethics is getting students to integrate moral theory into their lives. Developing a meaningful philosophy of life, at one time the highest priority among entering college freshmen, has declined rapidly in the past 30 years as a motive for attending college. Criminal activities—including sexual assault, hate crimes, burglary, drug dealing, and murder—remain a problem on many college campuses. On the other hand, more and more college students are engaging in community service since 2001.² In addition, political engagement in 2008 was at a 40-year high.³ Despite their good intentions, the moral reasoning of 20 percent of college students is at the level of that of a junior high student. By the time they graduate from college, 90 percent of students will not have made the transition from cultural relativism (in which morality is equality with cultural norms and laws) to independent principled reasoning.

How can ethics teachers provide students with the skills necessary to make better moral decisions in their lives? Traditional ethics courses, which restrict the study of ethics to the purely theoretical realm and avoid any attempt to make students better people, have been found to have little or no impact on students’ ability to engage in moral reasoning outside the classroom.⁴ While students are able to memorize theories and lines of reasoning long enough to pass the final exam, there is little true understanding and carryover into their moral reasoning outside the classroom. When confronted with real-life moral issues, most students simply revert back to their earlier forms of reasoning based on cultural norms or self-interest.

In the 1970s and 1980s, some professors who were dissatisfied with the traditional theory-laden ethics course replaced it with the values-clarification or value-neutral approach. This approach involves “nonjudgmental” and “nondirective” discussions of popular moral issues where students are encouraged to express their own opinions without fear of criticism or judgment. Unfortunately, the values-clarification approach has been found to have no positive effect on students’ moral development and, may even inhibit moral growth by sending the message that morality is all relative and hence anything goes as long as it feels good.

These findings have prompted researchers and instructors to look for new approaches to ethics education. *Ethics for Life* provides a curriculum that combines traditional ethics theory with a pedagogy based on the latest research on how to enhance moral development in college students. This approach has been found effective in improving students' moral judgment, moral behavior, and self-esteem.⁵

Objective

The primary objective of *Ethics for Life* is to provide a text that is solidly based in the latest research on moral development of college students, while at the same time providing students with a broad overview of the major world moral philosophies and case studies based in real-life issues.

Interdisciplinary and Multicultural Approach

One of the main obstacles students face in taking an ethics course is its perceived lack of relevance to their lives. Most ethics students are not philosophy majors. Ethics courses also tend to attract a widely diverse group of students, many of whom do not personally relate to the traditional European approach to moral philosophy. *Ethics for Life* includes coverage of, to name only a few, Buddhist ethics, Native American philosophy, ecofeminism, Confucianism, the utilitarian philosophy of Mo Tzu, feminist care ethics, and liberation ethics. The inclusion of moral philosophies from all over the world and from both women and men makes the book more appealing to nontraditional students, and it helps students move beyond the implicit cultural relativism in most ethics textbooks that privileges traditional Western male approaches to ethics.

Moral theory does not occur in isolation nor is morality practiced within a social vacuum. While the primary focus of this text is philosophical ethics, *Ethics for Life* adopts a more holistic approach. The book is presented in a historical and interdisciplinary context and includes extensive material from anthropology and sociology, political science, religion, psychology, and literature.

Because many students taking an ethics course are weak in critical thinking skills, Chapter 2 on moral reasoning includes sections on constructing moral arguments, resolving moral dilemmas, avoiding logical fallacies, and the relation between moral analysis and practice.

A Developmental Pedagogy

There is a saying that if students cannot learn the way we teach them, we have to teach them the way they learn. In creating ethics curriculums that promote moral development, one of the approaches that has held out the most promise is the use of a cognitive-developmental approach to ethics education combined

with experiential education, generally in the form of community service and the discussion of real-life moral dilemmas.

Ethics for Life is organized using a developmental or progressive approach. This approach has been shown to have a higher success rate than the more traditional or values-clarification approaches to teaching ethics in terms of helping students move beyond ethical relativism and become principled moral reasoners.

Most ethics textbooks focus only briefly on ethical relativism. However, more than 90 percent of college students are ethical relativists. Rather than talk over students' heads, *Ethics for Life* starts at their level by including material on ethical relativism. The chapters in the book are arranged in the same order that these stages appear in a person's actual moral development. Only later are the students introduced to in-depth discussions of more advanced theories such as deontology, rights ethics, and virtue ethics.

Rather than lecturing from a higher stage of development (the traditional moral-indoctrination approach) or ignoring differences (the values-clarification approach), this approach entails building a bridge to the students and then guiding them across that bridge toward a higher stage of moral development and respectfully engaging them by challenging them to question their own assumptions. This process is also known as a cognitive apprenticeship whereby the teacher or mentor (the "expert") teaches the student (the "novice") a new skill by collaborating with him or her on a task—in this case the application of moral theory to hypothetical and real-life issues.⁶ Respectful engagement also requires that the teacher take an active role in the dialogue, including challenging students rather than creating an atmosphere of passive indifference and superficial tolerance.

To avoid reinforcing the belief that morality is all a matter of personal opinion and the mistaken impression that most moral decisions involve moral dilemmas, the case studies used in the first part of the book present situations where what is morally right and wrong seems clear-cut. This helps students sort out the relevant moral principles so that they later have a solid foundation for resolving more difficult moral dilemmas.

The book makes extensive use of exercises throughout each chapter. The purpose of the exercises is to encourage students to relate the theories in the text to real-life events and issues as well as to their own moral development. In addition to case studies that relate to students' own experience, case studies and personal reflection exercises are chosen with an eye to expanding students' concept of moral community. This is accomplished through the use of readings, case studies, and reflective exercises that focus on multicultural issues and problems of racism, sexism, classism, and nationalism. In addition, each chapter features pictures along with discussion questions related to issues raised in the chapter.

Also important for moral development is the integration of students' experiences by means of readings in developmental psychology and discussions of the personal meaning and relevance of these experiences to their own personality

development. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth discussion of the latest research on moral development. Students are also encouraged throughout the text to relate the material to their own experience and their own moral growth.

Instructor's Manual

An online Instructor's Manual provides summaries of the chapters and readings, helpful teaching tips, and a bank of test questions for each chapter. Please contact your local McGraw-Hill sales representative for more details.

Ethics for Life is set up so it can be used with or without a community service component. Studies show that participation in community service as part of an ethics class has a positive effect on people's self-esteem and level of empathy as well as their ability to engage in moral reasoning. Community service gives students an opportunity to integrate what they are learning in class into real-life situations. To assist in this goal, exercises are provided in each chapter to help students relate classroom theory to their community service. These exercises are marked with asterisks.

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