



Philosophical Perspectives on Ethics

There are five philosophies which are traditionally considered when discussing ethics, though many other variations exist. Each seems to hit on at least one of three themes. Good is seen as a balance of happiness (utilitarianism, Kantian, or Confucianism), as legal (Social Contract Theory), or as in accordance with conscience (natural law).

Utilitarianism: Good is defined as a situation in which more happiness exists than any other possible situation would have had. A right action is thus one which creates the greatest happiness for the greatest number of sentient beings affected.

Kantian Philosophy: Good is a situation in which there is happiness without persons having been used to achieve that happiness. A right action is one which does not use unconsenting persons as means to achieve an end. In this philosophy, intentions are judged rather than consequences.

Social Contract Theory: There is no innate good, except that which satisfies individual interests, and that ethical or right action is characterized only by the rules that we as humans set up for one another. Only these rules prevent us from focusing solely on self-interest and allow many individuals to coexist. In a community a right action is, therefore, one which abides by rules.

Natural Law Theory: Humans have a natural purpose and “good” is fulfilling that purpose. In other words, a right action is one which follows one’s nature. According to natural law, one can ‘feel’ when one is going against one’s purpose and thus one will know when doing wrong.

Confucianism: Goodness is justice and justice is defined as that which is fair for all individuals. A good or right action is one which serves justice or, in its simplest form, is fair.

Murray, J.L. (1994). Training for student leaders. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.





Kitchener's Five Ethical Principles

- 1) **Respect Autonomy** – Individuals have the right to decide how they live their lives, as long as their actions do not interfere with the welfare of others. One has the right to act as a free agent and has the freedom of thought and choice.

- 2) **Do No Harm** – The obligation to avoid inflicting either physical or psychological harm on others may be a primary ethical principle.

- 3) **Benefit Others** – There is an obligation to improve and enhance the welfare of others, even where such enhancements may inconvenience or limit the freedom of the person offering assistance.

- 4) **Be Just** – To be just in dealing with others assumes equal treatment of all, to afford each individual their due portion, and in general, to observe the Golden Rule.

- 5) **Be Faithful** – One should keep promises, tell the truth, be loyal, and maintain respect and civility in human discourse. Only in so far as we sustain faithfulness can we expect to be seen as trustworthy.

Taken from Kitchener, K.S. (1985). Ethical principles and ethical decisions in student affairs. In H.J. Carson & R.D. Brown (Eds.), Applied ethics in student services (New Directions for Student Services No. 30, pp. 17-30). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.





The Ethics Check

1) Is it Legal?

- ✚ Will I be violating civil or criminal law or organizational policy?

2) Is it Balanced?

- ✚ Is it fair to all concerned?
- ✚ Does it promote win-win situations?

3) How will it make me feel about myself?

- ✚ Will it make me proud?
- ✚ Would I feel good if my hometown newspaper published my decision?
- ✚ Would I feel good if my family knew?

Taken from Blanchard, K. & Peale, N.V. (1988). The Power of Ethical Management. New York, NY: Fawcett Columbine.





Scruples: How to Play

1. Choose a player to be the dealer.
2. The dealer should give each player 4 “Dilemma Cards” and place the rest of the stack facedown in the center of the playing area.
3. The dealer will then shuffle the deck of “Reply Cards”, deal **one** to each player, and place the rest of the deck facedown next to the stack of “Dilemma Cards”.
4. Players should look at all of their cards, but keep them secret.
5. The player to the left of the dealer begins.
6. On your turn, you will select one of your Dilemma Cards. Assess each player’s character and how they might respond to the dilemma posed. Select a player and ask the question to them (someone whose answer, you believe, will match your Reply Card). For example, if the dilemma you select is “Would you ever steal?” and your Reply Card says “No”, you will want to choose a player who you believe will reply that they would never steal.
7. Read the dilemma card aloud to the person you have selected, the “Answering Player”.
8. When answering a dilemma, please provide a brief explanation with your answer of YES, NO, or MAYBE.
9. Allow the Answering Player to reply and then flip over your Reply Card.
 - ∞ If the reply does match, you are rewarded by getting rid of the Dilemma Card you used from your hand. Discard it face-up next to the Dilemma Cards in the middle.
 - ∞ If the reply does not match, you are penalized by taking a new Dilemma Card from the stack of unused cards. You may discard the Dilemma Card you used in the discard pile. You should end your turn with the same number of cards in your hand.
10. After a turn, discard your Reply Card and take a new one from the deck.
11. TO WIN: The first player to have no Dilemma Cards left is the winner.





Scruples Dilemma Cards

You have a difficult writing assignment in a class, which is due tomorrow, and you haven't even started. While doing some research you find a paper on the Internet that covers exactly what you had intended to. You are guaranteed that you will not be caught. Do you turn this paper in?

You are staffing the door at a party sponsored by your student organization and have been checking IDs faithfully all night, as your organization agreed to do. A person in one of your classes arrives at the door without an ID and proceeds to pressure you for several minutes to let them in anyway. Do you let them in?

Pets are not allowed in the residence hall. You, as an RA find out that one of your residents found an abused, malnourished cat and is nursing it back to health. You believe they are doing a good thing. Do you make them get rid of the cat?

You are having problems with someone on the leadership team of your organization. You are uncomfortable confronting this person but if someone else on the team feels the same way you would be able to talk to them as a pair. Should you ask others if they are also having a problem?

You have a difficult assignment due tomorrow that you just did not have time to do. Do you give your professor an excuse (i.e. you are sick, grandparent died) in order to get an extension?

A large amount of damage is done to your senior house during a small gathering one weekend and you know who did the damage but they refuse to come forward. If no one is found responsible you and your housemates will be responsible for paying for the damage. Do you report the person responsible?

Just before a test you see someone programming a calculator when the professor has just said this is not allowed. Do you speak to the professor about this?

Underage RAs sign a contract that they will not drink. At a Superbowl party a friend offers you a beer. There are no residents around. Are you an RA at this time?

You are a writer for the newspaper. While writing an article on a certain person, this person offers you a gift. Do you accept the gift?

You are at a party and see someone who you really don't like passed out in the bathroom. They seem seriously over-intoxicated and as if they might have alcohol poisoning. Do you try to assist them?

You are the treasurer of a student organization. No one will notice if you borrow some money that you really need and pay it back in two weeks when you get paid. Do you do it?

A friend works as Event Staff and there is a party you really want to get into but it is sold out. You are contemplating trying to pressure your friend to get you in, even though they could get in trouble for doing so. Do you show up at the party and try to get in?

A person works for you in a high-stress understaffed job. They do a good job but cause conflicts with coworkers. Firing this person further understaffs the team, but increases morale. Do you fire this person?

Two members of your organization have a personal conflict which affects the group, and you feel strongly that one is right and one is wrong. They ask you to tell them which is right. Do you?

An eighteen year-old friend is falling into a pattern of substance abuse. You've talked to them with no change. Do you now go to their parents?

You catch a person you work with, whom you really don't like, breaking several rules and policies. They ask you not to say anything to your supervisor. Do you report them?

You are broke and see someone drop a twenty dollar bill in the mall. They do not notice that they dropped it. Do you keep it?

As an orientation leader, you give a tour to parents. One of these parents tries to give you a tip for a job you are paid to do. Do you accept it?

Your friend is performing in a show on campus. He is really excited for you to see him perform. On the night of the show, you lay down to take a short nap and sleep through the performance. Do you lie and tell him it was great and you loved it?

You are the president of an honor's society and a student who is ideal for membership next year turns in their application late. You have just turned down someone else because the deadline has passed but that person wouldn't have made it anyway. Do you accept this application?

You need a sealed letter of recommendation for grad school and ask one of your professors. When they give you the letter to include in your application, it is sealed in a plain white envelope. You could easily open and read it and put it in a new envelope. Do you read it?

A Clerk at a store accidentally gives you ten extra dollars in change. Do you return it?

You catch a good friend at work stealing some office supplies and other small items. Your friend doesn't know you know. Do you report your friend?

The person you are dating applies for a leadership position in your organization. There is someone else who is more qualified but you don't want to upset your partner. Do you hire the more qualified person?



Scruples Answer Cards

MAYBE

NO

YES

MAYBE

NO

YES

MAYBE

NO

YES

MAYBE

NO

YES



Ethics Case Studies

Case One - You are the president of the Student Organization for Free Speech and Non-Conformity (SOFSN). Brian, one of your organization's members, has done incredible things since joining your organization at the beginning of the year. He has found new sources of funding, new ways to recruit members, and been very successful in one big program of which he was in charge. You know that Brian has a lot more to offer, and lately you have been encouraging him to consider taking one of the officer positions for next year. However, it has recently come to your attention that Brian is badmouthing your rival organization, The Student Organization for Traditionalism (SOFT). Although your organization has very different ideals from that organization, you know that what Brian is saying about them is not true and is just rumor. Allison, the president of SOFT, has come to you asking why Brian is saying these things. Although you have many differences with Allison, you do respect her and consider her a friend. Allison tells you that several of their new members have stopped attending their meetings, and she thinks it is because of the things Brian is saying. Brian seems to be something of a radical for free speech, and you worry that if you confront him, he will accuse you of being a hypocrite and end his involvement with your organization. Or worse, he may ask the other members to remove you from your position, because you are not supporting his free speech. What are you going to do?

Case Two - You are the chair of the planning committee for the Annual Service Day on your college campus. This is a major yearly event where over half of the students on your campus get involved with community service. It is seen as one of the most important traditions on your campus, and you feel a lot of pressure to make it as successful as it has been in past years. However, you have recently been having some problems with three of your committee members; Sam, Lex, and Jodi. All three are valuable members of your team, and you will fall behind if you lose any one of them. Furthermore, if you lose more than one, you will not meet some important deadlines. However, these three work closely together and have not been getting along. Sam and Lex used to date one another, and, although they are on fairly good terms, Jodi has recently been showing an interest in Lex. Lex is interested in Jodi, but is worried about hurting Sam's feelings. Sam has come to you and told you that if Jodi continues working on the committee, a conflict cannot be avoided. Sam is not comfortable and wants to leave the committee. Lex has told you that if Sam leaves, they will not be able to finish the projects they have been working on together. Sam is not comfortable working alone with Lex and wants Lex to quit too, if Sam quits. To further complicate issues, although Jodi is a great worker, it has come to your attention that the only reason Jodi is working on the committee is to get to know Lex. Further, if Lex is not on the committee, Jodi probably will quit too. With the event only a few weeks away, what will you do?

Case Three - You are the captain for the Student Organization for Extreme Badminton. Your biggest annual event, the regional extreme badminton tournament, is coming up in just a couple of weeks and planning is well underway. You already have over 150 players from several schools around your region who have paid their entry fees and made travel arrangements to your school. An alumni from your organization who now owns a T-shirt printing shop told you a couple of weeks ago that if you buy the tournament T-shirts (a major part of your costs) from them that "some other sort of sponsorship" could be arranged. However, the T-shirt shop owner's prices are a little higher than some other sources and sometimes the work of the shop is mediocre. You have elected to go with another shop that is cheaper and provides better quality. However, a couple days ago, one of your major funding sources fell through, and without the money, you will not be able to pay for the costs of the tournament. You are the only one who knows about the funding problem and the under-the-counter sponsorship offer from the first T-shirt shop. With all the red tape of the university, you know that no one else will find out that the money is not in your account until after the tournament. You could switch your T-shirt order, and you know it would be easy to make up a source for the under-the-counter funding you got from the alum. In addition, you wouldn't even have to deal with the time pressure, as no one will know that you don't have the funding and will have at least a couple extra weeks to find some additional funding. What do you do?

