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Ethics versus Morals

A bit of semantics and etymology:

- Ethics from *Ethos* (ἔθος): custom, usage, character, way of life –the ethos of a way of living.
- Morality/morals from *mores* (*mōrēs*), the Latin translation of the Greek ethos. It also means habit, custom, conduct.

But, at least since Hegel in the 19th century, a division of labor has been established between morality and ethics.

Ethics

- The pursuit of the **good** and integral life that leads to individual flourishing that is in accord with the ethical standards of a community.
- Based on tradition and/or religious backgrounds.
- Exhibited in the character of the individual
- Historically specific, not universalizable, full of “expectations and values” that could be in conflict with other “comprehensive doctrines” (Rawls)

Morality

- The science of moral duty. The pursuit of moral norms that can offer guidance to communities. Not individual, but collective and communal.
- What must be done, or that which we have a duty to do. What is **just** to do.
- The norms that guide law and right.
- Transhistorical and overarching, not culturally specific.

The Study of Ethics

Working Definition:

- The study of the normative values and principles that guide human interaction with humans, non-humans and surrounding world
- The deliberative process of thinking through ethical values and principles, identifying them, analyzing them, prioritizing them, revising them, coming to understand how they inform our actions, embracing them, etc.
- The ability to identify and analyze ethical values embedded in the beliefs and practices of ourselves and others.

Ethics –a matter of opinion?

- Is there only one set of ethical values? Or one right ethical framework?
- If not, is it all just a matter of opinion?

Nihilism-Relativism-Absolutism- Pluralism

- Moral Nihilism
 - All values are forms of power and coercion
- Relativism
 - No universal values or obligations
 - Individual/cultural
- Absolutism
 - There are specific universal values/principles that apply to everyone without exception
- Pluralism
 - Values and obligations are valid, but there is more than one set and they may at times be in conflict

Is it all relative?

- Being relative does not mean that a standard is not *valid*
 - *E.g. speed limits, drinking age, marriage age*
- Certain ethical values *are* nearly universal
(Bernard Gert, Beauchamp, etc.)
 - Do not kill
 - Don't cause pain
 - Don't disable
 - Don't deprive of freedom or opportunity
 - Don't deprive of pleasure
- Relativists can't complain
 - If you think something is unfair, or outrage by a harm inflicted upon you or someone else, you are not a relativist. Relativist engage in performative self-contradictions when they are argue about the non-generalizability of ethical goods.

Absolutism

- Belief that some given set of values or principles are the only correct ones for all in every context that are dictated by God or Reason
 - Cannot be ruled out, but:
 - There is a difference between absolutism and universalism
 - Absolutism says an action (e.g. lying) is always wrong
 - Universalism (e.g. consequentialism) allows for contexts to be relevant
 - Most “absolute” values are exceedingly *general*
 - Demand loyalty to religion or faith

Pluralism

- There are multiple valid ethical values and principles (fact of human existence)
 - They are valid (obligatory) within their scope
 - These principles are about irreducibly different things:
 - Maximizing well-being
 - Respecting autonomy
 - Fidelity and reparation
 - Benevolence
- Rejecting relativism does not mean accepting Absolutism
- Recognition of ethical pluralism is a resource for ethical literacy and/or ethical fitness

Moral Theory

- **Metaethics:** the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological, presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice
 - Where do our moral standards and ethical frameworks come from?
 - What kinds of beings have moral standing
 - Moral Psychology and Moral Development
- **Normative ethics:** the exploration of the principles and values that determine right and wrong conduct
 - deals with comprehensive theories about the good life and moral obligations. (consequences of actions, duties, virtues we should follow, moral persona/character)
- **Practical or applied ethics:** Normative ethics applied to practical problems
 - E.g. bioethics, environmental ethics, business ethics, information ethics, animal ethics, computer ethics, legal ethics

Ethics vs. Law

“If it is not illegal, it must be ethical”

Ethics has to do with the free will of individuals.
It is about the autonomy of agents.

It is about what Rushworth M. Kidder calls
“unenforceable self-regulation”

Law has to do with what a society considers legal or
illegal, i.e. that which when violated incurs
penalty. It is what Kidder calls “enforceable
legal regulation.” It is about the heteronomy
of individual under a self-imposed sanctioned.

Ethics and Law

Let us do a little exercise. Let us collectively come up with answer to these questions:

1. What is ethical that is neither legal nor illegal?
2. What is ethical that should be legal(ized)?
3. What is legal that is neither ethical nor unethical?
4. What is legal that is unethical?

Ethical Literary: An achievement

It is a lifelong achievement

It is a set of skills that do not come naturally, but must be acquired

It is a virtue that must be practiced and modeled.

It is a way of living

It is an orientation

It is an aspiration

Ethical Literacy=Ethical Fitness

1. To recognize moral problems and to assess the complex issues that they raise;
2. To identify and appreciate underlying ethical values;
3. To evaluate moral problems from many perspectives;
4. To assess disagreements on and proposed responses to these problems;
5. To choose to act with wisdom and responsibility;
6. To be ready to confront ethical dilemmas

Ethical Literary: Components

- **Ethical Sensitivity:** Does a situation involve ethical issues, i.e. it is not illegal, ambiguous, and perhaps unenforceable. Ethical self-reflexivity.
- **Ethical Decision Making:** The ability to evaluate moral problems through an understanding of the major ethical frameworks.
- **Ethical Motivation/Imagination:** what are we trying to accomplish by doing something, does it require courage, and does it contribute to our sense of moral hope.

Ethical Sensitivity

- Ability to determine whether (how) a situation involves ethical issues—**ethics spotting**

This is where conflicting values may trumping each other

- Awareness of the moral intensity of the ethical situation

How wide and lasting are the consequences of acting in a certain

- Identifying moral values and virtues appropriate to situation

How is our moral dignity in jeopardy or undermined?

Via negativa: Ethical Insensitivity

- **Community Share Prejudices:** i.e.: economic cost/benefit analysis in car safety, non-consideration of the well being of non-humans; heteronormativity; Judeo-Christian assumption
- **Moral Blind Spots:** an action/practice does not belong to the geography of moral reason, assuming it is a shared ethical assumption, trauma
- **Habituating wrongdoings:** illegal downloading of music/video recordings

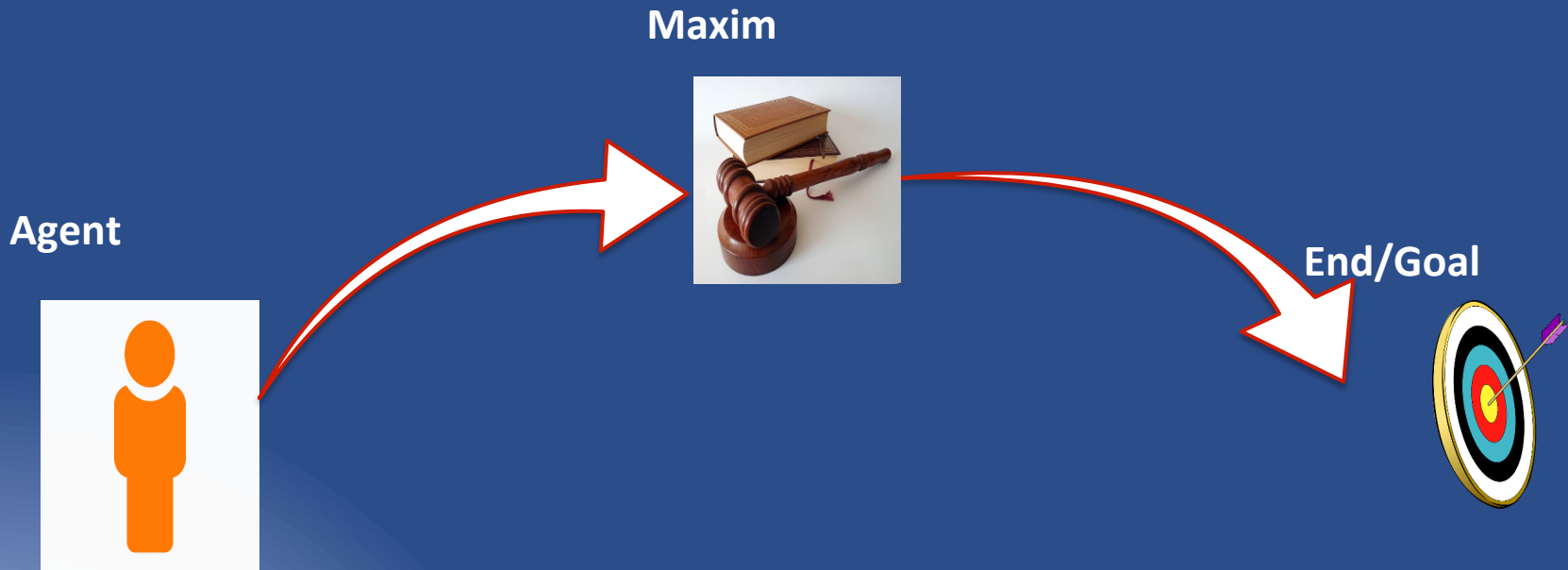
Ethics Spotting—Focusing this skill

- Are we proud or ashamed of the action? Does it “feel wrong”?
 - Emotions often reveal what is important to us, what we value, what affects us, but we have to be careful not to habituate bad behavior.
- Is such an action compatible with one’s basic ethical values?
 - Reflection combines with emotion to help us appreciate our values as well as those of others...
- Is the action compatible with key ethical principles?

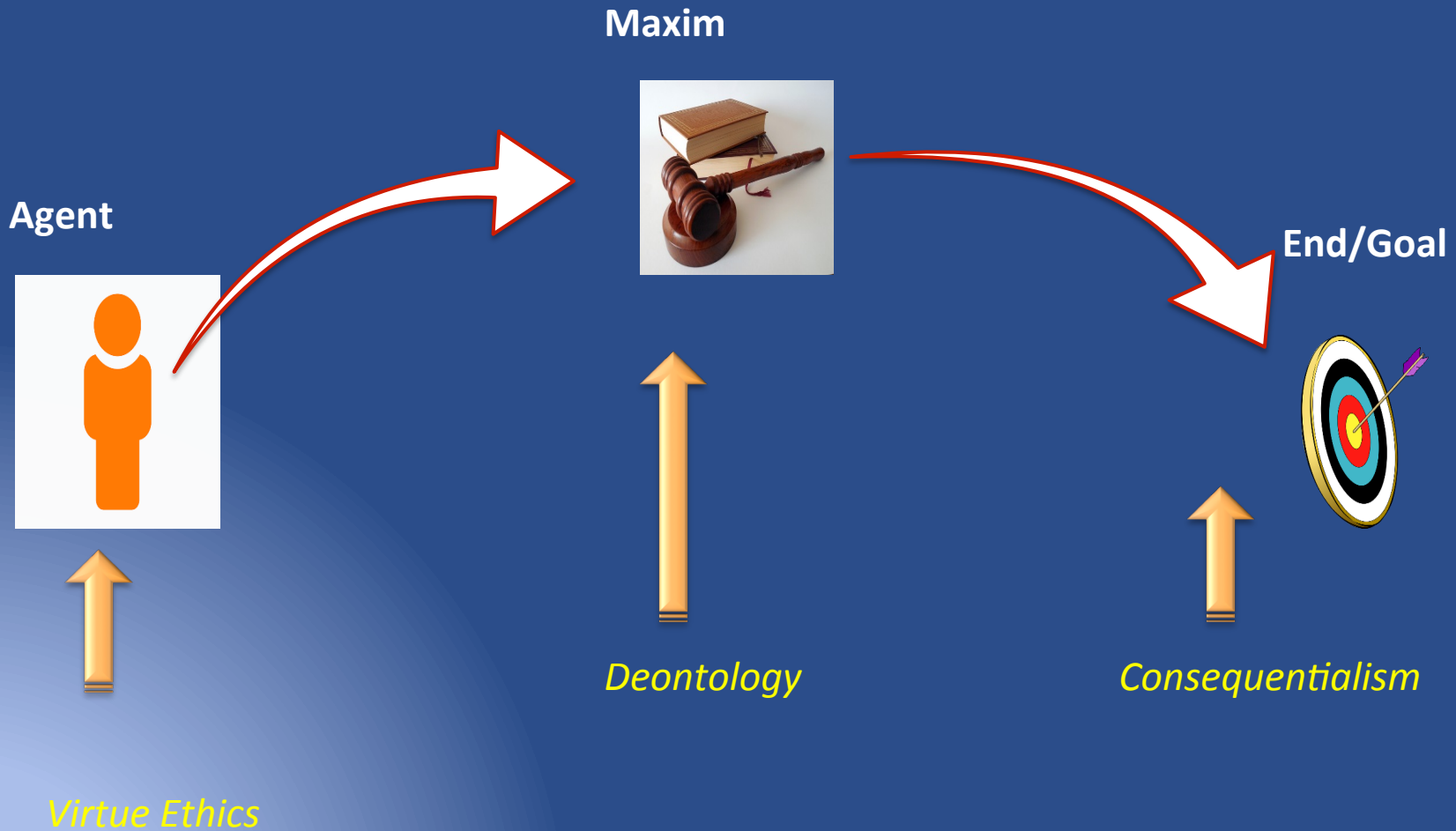
Ethical Decision Making

- Understanding various ethical frameworks and how they are relevant to specific situation
- Identifying and assessing facts that involve ethical challenge.
- Identify relevant stakeholders-affected individuals
- Identify and assess the values and virtues of individuals and group(s) to the ethical challenge
- Generate and evaluate options for actions.

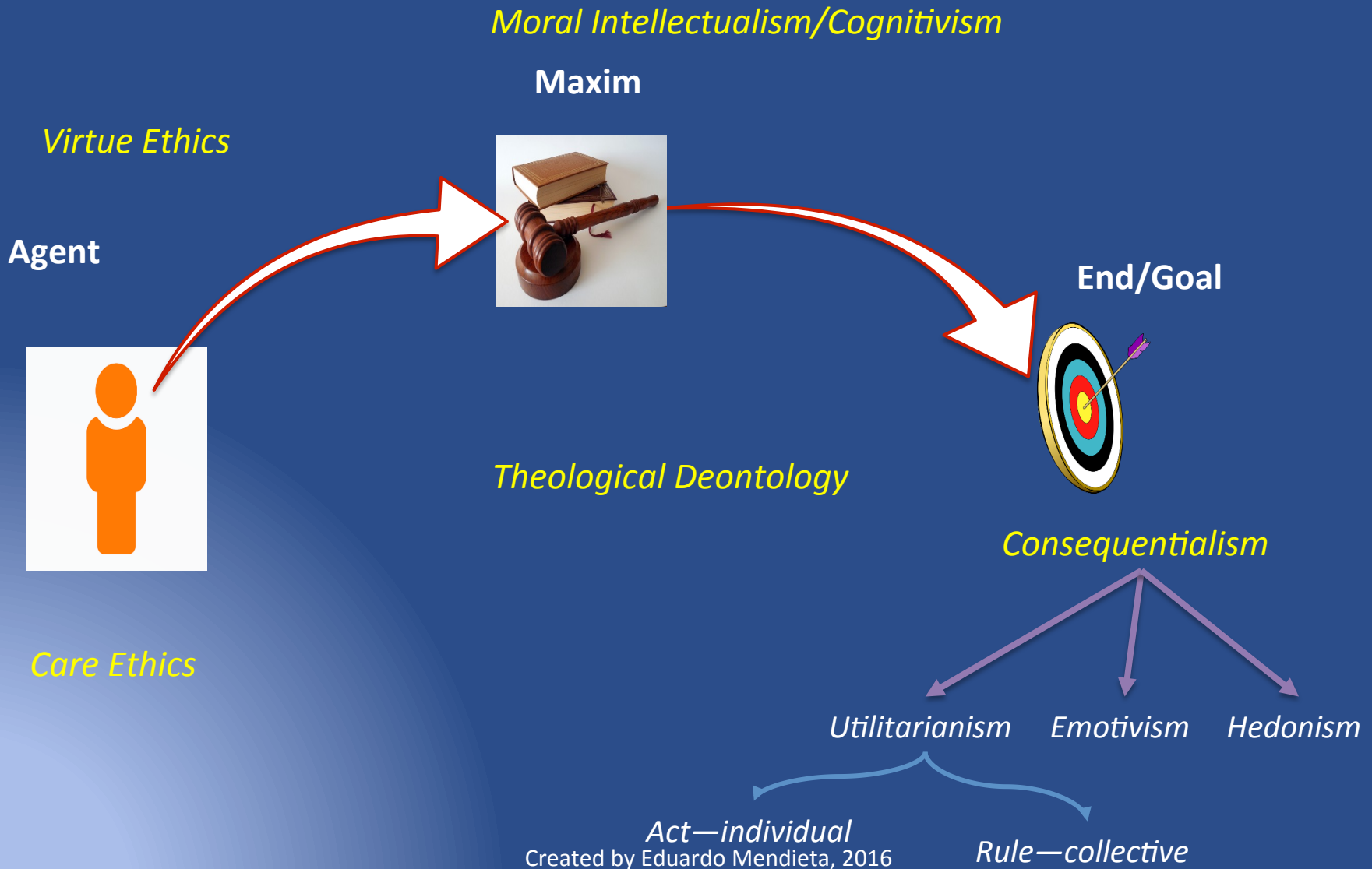
The Arc of Ethical Actions



The Typology of Ethical Theories



The Typology of Ethical Theories



Ethical Frameworks

1. Character Based Ethical Reasoning: Virtue Ethics & Care Ethics
2. Ends-based Ethical Reasoning: Consequentialism (Utilitarianism, Emotivism, Hedonism)
3. Rule-Based Ethical Reasoning: Deontology (Kantianism, moral constructivism).
4. Rights Based Ethical Reasoning: Legalism

Character Based Ethical Framework

This ethical framework argues that:

- we can neither control the consequences of our actions nor come up with a maxim, or generalizable principle of action.
- All we can rely is that we will be the right kind of person who will make the right decision at the right time. Prudential and virtuous character
- Ethical decisions are entirely dependent on the type of person we fashion ourselves into. Ethical fitness. Character determines ethical action.
- One ethical act does not make an ethical person

Duty Based Ethical Framework

This framework argues that:

- Duty Based Ethical thinking is a Rule-Based Ethical Reasoning:
- Deontology, *Gesinnungsethik* (ethics of conviction),
- Kantianism.
- The Categorical Imperative (its five versions)
Act in such a way that the **maxim** of your action can become a universal moral law

FIVE versions of the categorical imperative

Kant writes that:

“The categorical imperative is thus only a single one, and specifically this: *Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*” Ak 4:421. This is known as the **Formula of Universal Law**. Or, Formula of Universal Lawfulness, or Universal Legislation

But, this formula has four other variations

Formula of Law of Nature:

“Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature” Ak 4:421

Formula of the End in Itself:

“So act as to use humanity, both in your own person and in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end, never simply as a means” AK 4: 429

Continuing the other formulas

Formula of Autonomy:

“So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxim.” AK 4: 434

Formula of the Kingdom of Ends:

“So act as if you were always through your maxims a law-making member in a universal kingdom of ends.” Ak 4: 438

Ends-based Ethical Framework

This ethical framework is generally known as consequentialism, i.e. the moral worth of your action lies in the happiness, pleasure, utility it brings about, regardless of whether you intend it or not.

Utilitarianism is the best known form. The moral worth of your action depends on producing the greatest benefit for greatest number of people. Calculus of utility. There are two kinds:

- Act Utilitarianism: politeness and honesty
- Rule Utilitarianism: seat belts, smoking, child abuse

Care Ethics

- Cared Based Ethical Reasoning: Putting the physical and communicative/symbolic well being of others ahead of specific calculable ends and or abstract rules. Examples:
 - Golden Rule.
 - Reversibility, but also non-reciprocity.
 - Non-symmetry
 - Other based –ethics of Alterity

On the Moral Self

All these moral frameworks work on a series of assumptions about the moral self:

1. Calculable and accountable
2. Transparent & Isomorphic
3. Present to itself and others –“presentist bias”
4. Commutable
5. Unencumbered
6. Out of time –always already itself.
7. Dispassionate & Selfless

Rights Based Ethical Reasoning: Legalism

The moral worth of our acts depends on whether we are fulfilling our legal duties and respecting the rights of each individual. This framework is agnostic/abstemious about:

- Ethical motivation
- Universalizable general norms
- The boundaries of the moral are the boundaries of the enforceable

Rights

We speak of rights in my different ways:

1. Natural Rights (in accordance with Natural Law)
2. Moral Rights
3. Human Rights
4. Constitutional Rights
5. Subjective Rights
6. Political Rights

Are rights created?

If we compare the relationship between human rights and constitutional rights, or natural rights and political rights, we immediately notice a major problem:

Rights are protected and respected, but why?

Are government in the job of “protecting” rights and not “inventing” them?

But don't we “create rights” in order to protect something that we think rights enable claims to both a thing and a certain ability or power?

Rights are relationships

If we look at Wesley Hohfeld's definitions, we find that rights, as relationships, can be thought of in four ways:

1. Claim with the correlative Duty
2. Privilege –an entitlement to both action or non-action, with no claim on the part of another
3. Power with the correlative liability
4. Immunity with the correlative disability

Rights—another definition

“Rights are *entitlements* (not) to perform certain actions, or (not) to be in certain states; or entitlements that others (not) perform certain actions or (not) be in certain states.

Rights dominate modern understandings of what actions are *permissible* and which institutions are *just*. Rights structure the form of governments, the content of laws, and the shape of morality as it is currently perceived. To accept a set of rights is to approve a distribution of *freedom* and *authority*, and so to endorse a certain view of what may, must, and must not be done.” By Leif Wenar, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. My italics.

Robust Ethical Framework-

Per Nancy Tuana

- What would be the **consequences** of our act?
- Is the **intentional** of the act relevant to the moral worth of the action?
- What **duties** are relevant to this situation and are there competing duties/rights?
- What would a **virtuous** person do? And do my own values/virtues enter into play?
- Does my decision nurture the overall **moral well being and dignity** of others and/or my community?

Identifying Relevant Values

- Moral senses/categories:
 - (1) Harm/Care
 - (2) Cheating/Fairness
 - (3) Betrayal/Loyalty to In-group
 - (4) Subversion/Respect for Authority and Hierarchy
 - (5) Degradation/Purity&Sanctity
 - (6) Liberty/Oppression

Jonathan Haidt
Social and Moral Psychologist

Relevant Moral Values

Values operate at different levels:

- Individual
- Societal
- Professional
- Global

They are not all moral, although they do overlap:

- Economic
- Aesthetic
- Scientific

Moral Motivation+Imagination +Action= Agency

“The link between literacy and action is as crucial to moral literacy as it is to reading literacy. If education leads to the *ability* to read but not to the *will* to read, then education has failed.” (Tuana, 169)

Moral Literacy is not simply a cognitive skill; it is also a motivational skill. To will to act in certain ways and to be attuned to the need to spot, think, evaluate, and be ready to act ethically.

Moral Agency

Moral Purpose: That our actions can and will have moral efficacy and have communal effects. Ethics in life, leading the ethical life.

Moral Courage: To live by an ethics code, in accordance with certain values that requires that we go beyond generalized expectation. That we are ready to uphold our moral dignity

Moral Hope: That ethical challenge is possible and that living in accordance with our moral character is both possible and can bring about moral beneficence.

Moral Agency-In summary

- The ability to experience compassion
 - Imagine ourselves in the situation of the other--'feeling with' another
 - Not what we would feel or believe in that situation, but what another given her/his values, beliefs, character is undergoing
- Develop sensitive attunement to complexities of the situation
- Understanding the positions and value orientations of others
- “Think outside of the box” and considering creative alternatives
- Personal “ownership” and habituation of ethical behavior
 - includes: sense of responsibility for actions, desire to cultivate virtuous habits, desiring justice

A Step-Process of Ethical Decision-Making

1. Identify the nature of the ethical issue(s)
2. What facts are at issue?
3. Reflect on relevant relationships
4. Identify stakeholders
5. Identify underlying values
6. Consider consequences
7. Identify relevant rights/duties
8. Identify the virtues that are relevant in this scenario
9. Use moral imagination
10. Formulate options for actions
11. Act....
12. Reflect and reevaluate

Thank YOU!



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