

ETHICS
Theory and Practice



Ethics: Final Project

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Final Project

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HU245-04: Ethics

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Introduction

Ethics and what it means to me

What is ethics and why is it important? When I think of ethics, I think of what is basically right and what is basically wrong. What I have come to learn through this course is that it really is so much more. Many moral ideas and ethical concepts are not in black and white, and ethical and moral dilemmas do not necessarily have such simple solutions. Some common circumstances where ethics can be applied are abortion, death penalties, discrimination, killing animals for food, and recycling, just to name a few. And, the discussion of ethics is not new; ethics has been contemplated by great men (and women) young and old, ancient and modern. The philosopher Kant's "Duty Ethics" included several ethical principles including his belief that nothing was good in itself except good will. And, George W.F. Hegel's work in social-cultural determinism stated that we were not responsible or even have the ability to control the period of time we are borne in. From Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, to Aristotle and Confucius, morality and ethics have been examined throughout history; and this essay discusses such topics as well.

The content of this paper is laid out in three main sections: analytical skills building, knowledge acquisition, and practical application. Analytical skills building will summarize the many skills that I was able to fine-tune and sharpen throughout this course. Knowledge acquisition will demonstrate the knowledge I acquired through displaying my own personal work, as well as containing what I learned from each section. Practical application will show real life scenarios and my knowledge put into action.

Analytical Skill Building

What skills did I gain throughout my Ethics studies?

In this ethics course I acquired new skills as well as sharpening skills like analytical thinking, writing, reading, and online correspondence. For the analytical skill we were asked to read case studies, formulate opinions based our own experience and text book reading. There were many instances where the case study rolled over into discussion questions and discussion questions rolled over in into the seminar. We looked at the case studies in detail, and provided solutions or arguments for or against a particular topic. In writing, we were always writing in discussion questions and student responses. I utilized good writing skills to formulate responses to all the main discussion questions as well as responding to student questions. In reading, we were asked to read case studies, textbook readings, discussion questions and discussion threads, email, and extra reading material like flash cards or further readings. The content was at college level and I felt like it was really challenging. The best part of the class is the online correspondence. The online seminars, discussion threads, and email were a part of the online correspondence. You really got to think in class and hear the professor teach and respond to students' questions. The online portion is really skill all by itself that I was able to acquire.

One good example of analytical thinking was a discussion thread where we were asked to respond to a question on morality and return ethical details one way or the other:

Question: Are there certain moral absolutes that we all should live by?

No, I do not believe so. My beliefs fall along the theories of Ross, who believes that there are next to zero absolutes, and moral relativists that believe it is all relative

We as humans love attaching labels and boundaries to everything, including morality. When will we learn that the complexity of our uniqueness is infinite? What's "bad" and what's good" is so very obviously relative to one's culture, societal norms, and the individual's personal experiences. Moral absolutes really have no place in the America of today or tomorrow. You really want something to ponder about what's right and wrong? I think many (not all) of the "bad" things people do are really our own shortcomings as a society, at least American society. Think about it. Most of what we consider to be bad: stealing, lying, cheating, even murder are symptoms of a society coming apart at the seams. For example, let's take an inner city neighborhood (one of many examples). The schools aren't that great, with severely underpaid teachers, an education system that is below C level, children go to broken homes with one parent (who of course is an alcoholic or drug user). What do you think the chances that child will not steal, lie, cheat, or even commit murder one day? It's so easy to say someone is doing something wrong, and as the consequentialist would say, there are consequences for one's actions. What about when a society fails the people? What about when society is to blame for the problems it is plagued with? What are the consequences then? I find it very interesting that the best we can come up with is taking a person who has "done something bad" and slamming them with consequences, without factoring in the person's experiences and most of all, societal conditions, as they were.

The analytical skills I used most were reviewing a case study or reading discussion questions and responses, and then thinking about my response based upon what I had read in my textbook, other discussion threads and professor correspondence.

Knowledge Acquisition

Why did I acquire so much new education through this Ethics course?

I learned about many new ethical concepts such as: the meaning of morality, bioethics, affirmative action, allowing someone to die, business ethics, and many others. I would like to discuss just a few topics that will demonstrate the quality of conversation and some of the knowledge obtained through academic discussions, live seminars, and instructor correspondence.

What is morality? Morality is what is good or what is right as it is determined by the majority. Morality is our guiding light as humans. Do moral rights only belong to the majority? I answer this question in an important discussion thread that we covered about morality:

Why don't we determine moral right and wrong by seeing what the majority of people believe? That is, why don't we use prevailing social opinion?

And this was my response:

"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the *Republic* for which it stands..."
I could be wrong, but I believe we live in a republic not a democracy. The difference is every single person has rights that are afforded to them by the United States Constitution, and those rights are not divisible by what the majority says, in fact it is just the opposite. In a democracy, fifty-one percent determines the rights of the other forty-nine percent, which is not the case in America. If we were to use prevailing social opinion as our ethical system to determine morality, it would not take very long before the minority, whoever they may be, would be severely oppressed by a system that does not provide equality to everyone at all times. Don't get me wrong, our government actually does try to be "democratic" on certain issues, and we all know where that ends up (usually in a filibuster or somewhere in a gray area).

What I learned about morality is that it just does not belong to one large group of people. It is everyone's responsibility as humans to do what is right, ethical, honest and sincere.

What is Bioethics and what does it have to do with abortion? This is cited from an

important discussion question:

As defined by our book, it is “life ethics”. The specific Bioethics topic I would like to cover has to deal with abortion. There are many important social and ethical questions surrounding abortion, thus over time has formed large, opposing groups with valid arguments on both sides. The two main forces at work here are pro-life and pro-choice, and if I had to choose one or the other, I would choose pro-choice. The pro-choice position is the definitive statement that it is a woman’s decision and her choice of whether to have an abortion or not, and that no one should be able to take that power from her. I believe in many scenarios that ethical egoism and utilitarianism could be fulfilled by allowing women to have one hundred percent control over their own bodies.

Ethical egoism seeks after self-interest, and for those that chose to have an abortion, the self-interest variable will have been met. In the way of utilitarianism (those that would seek what is best for everyone involved), take under consideration that unwanted children heavily burden the education system, our healthcare system, as well as can contribute to overall poverty, crime, and violence in the long term; it would be better for everyone if abortions were accepted as a common resolution of personal choice. There are also women’s rights and privacy to be factored into the pro-choice equation. I believe if we are to maintain freedom, privacy, and sensitivity to the bioethical issue of abortion, along with supporting the uniqueness of each abortion itself, pro-choice is the only choice.

What I learned about Bioethics is that issues like abortion do not necessarily have simple solutions. With one decision you could be saving a life and enforcing the right to life concept, but you could also be infringing on someone’s rights of personal freedom and privacy.

Another great knowledge acquisition was the study of affirmative action. Affirmative action is a practice that serves us in issues of equality relating to religion, race, color, and gender. It forces businesses and organizations to provide equality across the board when it comes to career opportunities, fair treatment amongst personnel, as well as overall interest in social classes perhaps not always in their best interest. In class, we had a case study where a university student named Katie Sampson, who also was an African-American, wanted to do-away with the

affirmative action policy at the school.

This was my response to that discussion question:

I do agree that affirmative action policies create a form of reverse discrimination. However, America is quite well-known for its past transgressions, especially when it comes to discrimination in the workplace, and we need laws to address such business practices. I have had many jobs throughout my career and sometimes I witnessed a “status-quo” person being hired instead of the most qualified. And I asked myself is this fair? Should quotas be filled? And the answer is simple, the answer is *yes*. Why you ask? Because American business isn’t about the little man, at least not anymore, it’s about the rich and powerful, and the only way we can keep them honest is to force them to recognize that hiring practices should be honest, fair, and most of all diverse.

Through affirmative action we can accomplish just that. If you walk into a law firm where there are hundreds of lawyers, and you happen to notice they are all white males in their mid-30’s, I can almost guarantee you that the rich and powerful are leveraging their weight against the social classes as they were.

As far as Katie Sampson is concerned, I DO THINK that her proposal should be rejected. Affirmative action combats discrimination and it is America’s atonement for its past sins. I don’t believe Katie has the right to take that away from those who may need it most.

What I learned about affirmative action is that it has been created to protect anyone that may be discriminated against for many reasons including racism and other prejudices. I have learned it is a good policy to have in place.

Practical Application

How what I learned is applicable to real life?

Throughout the ethics class, we discussed real questions and contemplated the many possible solutions. There was one assignment in particular that I thought was very applicable to real life, and that was a letter to our state governor to explain why capital punishment is ethically wrong.

This is an example of a practical situation as cited from my own work:

Dear Governor Rick Scott,

This letter comes to you with great intentions, expectations and with the highest regard for American society; you can tell just how great a country is by how well they treat the poor and less fortunate as well as how they process and maintain their criminal justice system. I would like to express my deepest concern for capital punishment and offer possible solutions to a system that currently does not appear to be working. The reasons why capital punishment is ethically wrong are: it is ineffective as a deterrent (murders happen whether or not there is capital punishment), it does not bring back the victims (capital punishment would be an act of revenge in this case), there is always the possibility of executing an innocent man or woman (this would be a grave injustice), and the denial of rehabilitation of the criminal (even if the criminal cannot be rehabilitated, they may still have something valuable to offer society).

We all have heard of the arguments against capital punishment, but what about the solutions? I believe we should do what is best for everyone involved, including the criminals (a utilitarian approach). I believe crime in America has roots in the socio-economic problems that plague the poorest of neighborhoods, as well as corporate tyranny, capitalism run amuck, monetary greed, and corrupt politicians. We need to clean up America one neighborhood at a time, as well as balance the wealth, education, and healthcare of this great country (all of these elements would lead to less crime, crime that is punishable by capital punishment). We should change capital punishment to life without a chance of parole, at least until we evolve morally and ethically and can step into the future knowing more about crime, why it happens and what role we play in it. Let us do what is best for everyone.

What I learned about capital punishment is that to murder someone for their crimes is not really much better than the murderer themselves. I learned that we as humans have much to learn in

the way of social justice, the reason why crimes actually happen, and rehabilitation.

Another great example of practical application is a discussion thread I participated in concerning business ethics. Allen Lopez posts a satirical website resembling employee abuse at his own company:

Would firing Allen Lopez violate his civil rights?

The simple answer is yes it would. Allen's fictional company, though bearing a resemblance, does not give the company any rights. If Allen had named the company at the website, then of course that would have been a problem. Government and corporate America already exert so much control over our lives; I'm wondering what will be next? Will they tell us we can't smoke, drink, or even eat fast food while off the clock? If I were the one making the decision of whether the company could take action against Allen or not, I'd tell them to get real and slam the door in their face.

Do employers have an ethical duty to grant employees constitutionally protected civil liberties like the freedoms of speech and expression or are there legitimate business reasons for an employer to limit or abridge its employee's civil rights while at work?

For as long as I can remember, I have been pro-employee. The company protects the company, and as far as the employee is concerned, the employee protects themselves. With that said, companies' offer no more rights than they have to; most companies provide what is required by law, and they take away everything else. Are there legitimate reasons to limit an employee's civil rights at work? Perhaps (maybe in rare situations), but employers tend to get carried away and make irrational and rash decisions merely on a whim. They say things like "It's to protect the company", all while profits soar and employees get the blunt object. I believe if someone's fictional story on a website can bring down a company, then that's a company that shouldn't have its doors open anyway. Business ethics is an oxymoron for sure. Businesses should do more for their employees, including increasing civil liberties, like freedom of speech, even within the workplace.

While not at work?

The only reason I can think of why a company would not allow full civil liberties at work is control. They want to be able to control general employee population (they don't want mobs forming against the company). The problem with that, especially in Allen's case, sometimes there are legitimate reasons why employers and businesses need to listen and make changes. Allen went to management, he tried going through all the right channels and he got shut down. Some employers want machines, voiceless, faceless, and obedient machines.

Which ethical principles or questions are important to consider when deciding whether

"business interests" provide legitimate grounds for abridging civil rights?

The real problem I see with this is that business interests aren't definitive. Business interests are what they say they are, and can change frequently. I mean you have the obvious which is the competitive edge, which is just another way of saying profitable. So, it all really comes down to the numbers, to the bottom line (we've all heard this). The almighty dollar is why they abridge civil rights. Pretty sad. America has built an empire around capitalism, with the façade of civil liberties, justice, and equality. If you really want to see just how free you are, get between a company and their bank account.

Many topics we covered in class could easily be applied to real life. From the death penalty to affirmative action, each topic we reviewed was also tied to real life circumstances; many of the students posted their own experiences, including myself.

Conclusion

Why is ethics important? Ethics is important because it is the fabric of humanity. We are all connected through our daily interactions with one another. And if you lie, cheat, steal, murder, discriminate, or fail to do the right thing or the moral thing, you could easily hurt those around you. There were many topics we covered from abortion, the death penalty, and discrimination, to killing animals for food and recycling. Each topic was taught in detail by our instructor and then reviewed and studied by me.

The three main points highlighted in this paper were analytical skills, knowledge acquisition, and practical application. My analytical skills were sharpened as I read case studies and discussion threads, and posted responses backed-up by our textbook and research. Knowledge acquisition came very easy as we made our way through each unit, attending seminars, answering discussion questions, and posting student responses. As far as practical application, there was not a single topic that we covered that did not have someone's personal experiences to relate to the subject.

Overall, the ethics course was fantastic and I learned a lot about the world I live in. I was able to discuss important topics that every great mind should contemplate. The open forum, online experience, and course content only added to the academic learning process. The question I will leave you with, "Can the study of ethics possibly create a better human being?"

References

Thiroux, J, & Krasemann, K. (2009). Ethics: Theory and Practice. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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