Basic Moral Orientations Overview

Lawrence M. Hinman, Ph.D.
Director, The Values Institute

University of San Diego
On what basis do we make moral decisions?

- “Do what the Bible tells you” -- Divine Command Theories
- “Follow your conscience” -- The Ethics of Conscience
- “Watch out for #1” -- Ethical Egoism
- “Do the right thing” -- The Ethics of Duty
- “Don't dis' me” -- The Ethics of Respect
- “...all Men are created ...with certain unalienable Rights” -- The Ethics of Rights
- “Make the world a better place” -- Utilitarianism
- “Daddy, that’s not fair” -- The Ethics of Justice
- “Be a good person” -- Virtue Ethics
"Do what the Bible tells you”
Divine Command Theories

- Being good is equivalent to doing whatever the Bible--or the Qur’an or some other sacred text or source of revelation--tells you to do.
- “What is right” equals “What God tells me to do.”
“Follow your conscience”
The Ethics of Our Inner Voice

- Conscience tells us what is right or wrong
- Often has a religious source
- May be founded in a notion of human nature
- Is often negative in character, telling us what is not right
"Watch out for #1” Ethical Egoism

- Says the only person to look out for is yourself
- Ayn Rand, *The Ethics of Selfishness*
- Well known for her novel, especially *Atlas Shrugged*
"Do the right thing"  
The Ethics of Duty

- Begins with the conviction that ethics is about doing what is right, about doing your duty.

- Duty may be determined by:
  - Reason
    - Kant: Do what any rational agent should do
  - Professional role
    - A physician’s duty to care for the sick
  - Social role
    - A parent’s duty to care for his or her children
"Don't dis' me"
The Ethics of Respect

- Human interactions should be governed by rules of respect
- What counts as respect can vary from one culture to another
  - Examples:
    - spitting in the sand
    - showing the soles of one’s shoes—Richardson
- What is it that merits respect?
“...all Men are created ...with certain unalienable Rights”

The Ethics of Rights

- The most influential moral notion of the past two centuries
- Established minimal conditions of human decency
“Make the world a better place”

Utilitarianism

- Seeks to reduce suffering and increase pleasure or happiness
- Demands a high degree of self-sacrifice—we must consider the consequences for everyone.
- Utilitarians claim the purpose of morality is to make the world a better place.
“Daddy, that’s not fair”
The Ethics of Justice

- Begins early in the family with fairness to all family members
- What is fair for one should be fair for all.
- Treating people equally may not mean treating them the same.
"Be a good person" Virtue Ethics

- Seeks to develop individual character
- Assumes good persons will make good decisions
- Developed by Plato and Aristotle
- Integral to the Jesuit tradition
  - *The Spiritual Exercises*
- Provides a way of integrating all the theories
### Classroom Application

#### Your Initial Moral Orientation

How important are each of the following in your life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious Commands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfishness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences for Everyone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Virtues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>