

A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox

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Key Terms:

- **Values**—those things we care about. Those things that matter to us, those goals or ideals to which we aspire and by which we measure ourselves or others or our society.
- **Moral Values**—concerned with one specific kind of values in general. Those values that give voice to the needs and legitimate expectations of others, as well as ourselves
- **Ethics**— the study of moral values; reflection on how best to think about moral values and clarify, prioritize and/or integrate them.

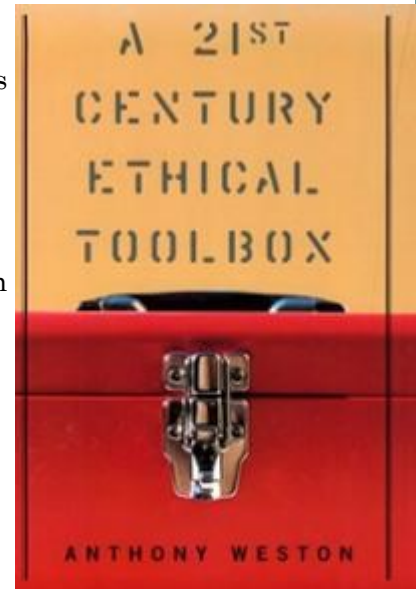
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Helping You Achieve Your Ethical Goals

A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox provides readers with a set of tools to help understand and make a constructive difference in real-life moral controversies. Thoroughly optimistic, it invites students to approach ethical issues with a reconstructive intent, making room for more and better options than the traditional pro and con positions that have grown up around tough problems like abortion and animal rights. This unique text does not treat ethics as a purely academic, historical or theoretical subject, but as a wide

ranging and ongoing set of challenges that calls for multiple and interwoven kinds of intelligence. It covers the skills that are more vital to making real progress in ethics, including paying careful attention to the values at stake on all sides of an issue; looking for creative opportunities within difficult problems; critical-thinking skills such as defining key terms and making sure to judge similar cases alike; and learning how to engage in constructive dialogue.



About the Author

Anthony Weston teaches philosophy and environmental studies at Elon University, North Carolina, and serves as Master Teacher in Elon's Global Studies program. He has published five other books, including *A Practical Companion to Ethics*, 2/e (OUP, 2011), *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 3/e (2000), *An Invitation to Environmental Philosophy* (OUP, 1998) and *Toward Better Problems* (1992), as well as numerous articles.



Section I—Getting Started

Ethics as a Learning Experience

“The Need for Open Minds”

It takes an open mind to learn and grow. Ethics concerns some of the hardest and most complex of our choices.

The firmest conviction in no way guarantees rightness. Every bad cause has firm convictions behind it too.

“The Role of Feelings”

Feeling right does not guarantee rightness. Feelings may alert us to moral problems. Often it’s feelings that really start moral revolutions—the arguments come later. Strong feelings may lead you in a certain direction—but not all feelings are just. Ethics asks us to challenge our feelings.



3 Easy Routes to A Closed Mind (and how to avoid them)

1) Dogmatism—

The tendency to lay down principles as incontrovertibly true, without consideration of evidence or the opinions of others.

Avoid this by:

Stop and try to really listen to the “other side”

Speak in an open-ended way. Avoid Bumper Sticker slogans

2) Offhand Self-Justification—

Do not defend opinions just for the sake of defending them—or shrug off arguments by dismissing them. Do not rationalize.

Instead:

attempt to explain or justify (ones own or another’s behavior or attitude) with logical, plausible reasons, even if these are not true.

3) **Relativism**—Relativists believe that no one standard is Right and that no moral code can be applied to every situation.

Relativism can be dangerous because it can lead to apathy or off-hand self-justification. It can also lead to avoidance of serious social issues such as pollution.

Ethics & Religion

For some, religion is essential to ethics. Others find religious ethics controversial, or worse. What does religion not contribute to your ethics? What are its limits? How does your religious faith influence the practice of ethics in your life?

Questions for Reflection:

- ◇ What events in YOUR life were occasions for ethical learning? What did you learn? What made that learning possible?

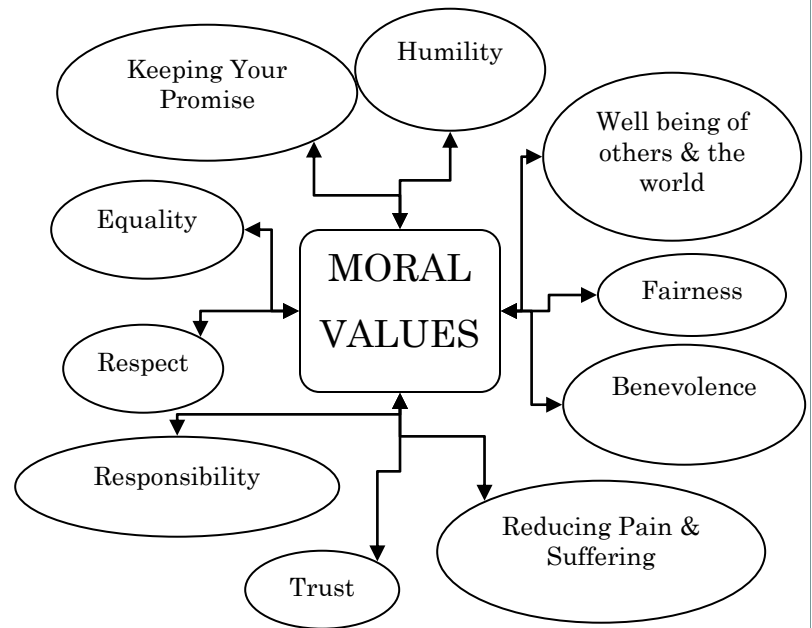
Section 11—Values

Definition: Our values are those things we care about, that matter to us; these goals and ideals we aspire to and measure ourselves, other or our society by.

Types of Values:

- ◇ Aesthetic
- ◇ Scientific
- ◇ Economic
- ◇ Instrumental

Moral values are distinct from those listed above.



Moral Values

Moral Values are those values that give voice to the needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as ourselves. Moral values connect us with the rest of the world (“the needs of others as well as ourselves”) and introduce the question of what others are entitled to ask from us and what we are entitled to ask from them and from our selves. This is also known as “legitimate expectations. In questions of moral

debate, keep these definitions in mind. What needs and legitimate expectations—both yours and others are at stake here? What are the parties to this debate trying to speak for?

Fairness

Be fair! Avoid dogmatism. Try to see matters from all points of view. Don’t try to decide who is right and wrong—but just try to figure out the values involved.

Emotion

Don’t downgrade emotion! Remember values are the things that we **care** about. Care is an emotion! But be careful not to act on pure emotion. Moral values are partly emotional and partly fact based.

Reflection:

What moral values are the most important to you?

Respect? Well-being? Fairness?

3 Families of Moral Values

Goods

Happiness and well-being: satisfaction, pleasure, the relief of pain and suffering, fulfillment. Social benefits (social, political or economic products, services or states of affairs that promote happiness and well being); reduced social cost.

Rights

Appropriate respect for the dignity or worth of each person. Fairness, justice, or respecting legal, civil or human rights. Treating others as equals, not acting as though they are somehow less than ourselves.

Virtues

Good personal character. Acting as a good person ought to act: responsibly, charitably, honestly, loyally. Living up to the best of what we are.

Reflection: Do all values fall into one or another of these categories?

Some Traditional Ethical Theories

Utilitarianism

A doctrine that the useful is the good and that the determining consideration of right conduct should be the usefulness of its consequences; *specifically*: a theory that the aim of action should be the largest possible balance of pleasure over pain or the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Theories of Right Action

What makes acts right (or wrong)? Why be fair? What treat others justly? Emmanuel Kant's basic principle of moral action, the "Categorical Imperative" states that one must always act so as to treat humanity, whether in yourself, or in another, as an ends, and never merely as a means.

Theories of Virtue

Aristotle's Virtue is the most influential account of virtue. He taught that everything in the world has a distinctive and essential function or activity. He emphasizes the role of one's character and the virtues that one's character embodies for determining or evaluating ethical behavior

Ethical theories have a practical aim—the help us deal with conflicts of moral values. These theories are limited tools. Each systemizes some of our moral values and can help resolve *some* conflicts of moral values, especially conflicts within families. In more values its important to remember that both sides have a point—or all sides. All sides speak for something worth considering and each side is right about something! Often this is forgotten when dealing with hot topics such as abortion, gay marriage or gun control.

Section III—Tools for Critical Thinking in Ethics

Finding the Facts

Moral disagreements are much more than differences about values. Many disagreements are about facts. Facts are so crucial in ethics that some philosophers have argued that facts, and not values, are actually at the crux of most moral disagreements. When deal with facts you must utilize a number of tools.

Tools for Fact-finding

- ◇ What facts are at issue?
- ◇ Find out what is relevant to the situation
- ◇ Get the facts and then re-evaluate your stance
- ◇ Sources—find facts from reliable sources. Look for thorough and careful coverage of



Watching Words

Tools for Effective Communicating:

1. Avoid Loaded Language—it can manipulate our feelings. Do not use exaggerated or depersonalized language. I.e.) Drunks who drive are callous and mindless—they are murderers jus the same as if they'd gone and knifed someone in cold blood.

2. Avoid Unclear Language—be precise—use language that everyone will understand. And be prepared to define terms if asked.

3. Avoid using contested terms. If a term does not have a clear definition avoid using it. Instead use

clear, commonly defined language.

Our language can make a big difference to how clearly we think and communicate—in general, and with ethics in particular.

Judge Like Cases Alike

Kant argued that the essence of moral judgement is that you must judge similar situations the same way. This can affect how you think about certain situations. It is suggested that situations such as capital punishment and abortion fit in this category. If your views are not consistent with this, Weston suggests 3 responses: 1) argue that the cases are not really alike—in that case, you need to figure out the morally relevant difference between the two cases and explain 2) change your judgement about the like case or cases 3) change your judgement about the original cases.

Section IV: Tools for Creativity in Ethics

Multiplying Options

Confronting ethical problems can be daunting. Often we feel that there are only two options to choose from and that we are in a “moral dilemma”. That is rarely the case in reality though. Often all that is needed is a little creative thinking. For creativity in ethics you must employ:

- Inventiveness
- Out of the box thinking
- Asking around and listening to others views and suggestions
- Brainstorming
- Random Association



Problem Shifting

Often in order to solve a problem, you must simply shift the problem. If you think of the problem in other situations, you may find a solution.

Tools:

- Open the problem
- Reframe the problem
- Think preventatively
- See the problem as an opportunity
- Don't settle for too little
- Expect more!

Section V: Putting Ethics into Action

Picking the Right Tools

Know what your goals are:

- Goal 1: Explore the Issue
- Goal 2: Get Unstuck
- Goal 3: Make a Case
- Goal 4: To Decide for Yourself

“If you don't know where you're going, you're not likely to get there!”

Dialogue: Learning by Talking

Talking is one chief way to put the ethical toolbox into action. To persuade, to negotiate, to learn. The way we use dialogue is key—we can talk more or less effectively. Effective dialogue reflects an ethical relationship: it reflects ethical attitudes towards others and a commitment to shared solutions.

How to Have a Fruitless Debate:

- ⇒ Take all the room you can. Talk loud and a lot. Worry only about your comeback, not what the other party is saying.
- ⇒ Separate and Polarize—exaggerate difference. Emphasize what you and the other party disagree about. Always assume the worst.



- ⇒ Use a lot of stereotypes towards the other party.
- ⇒ Exploit ALL weaknesses or openings. Always be against something, not for something.
- ⇒ Go for the quick kill. Talk in slogans and sound bites.

How to Have a Useful Discussion

⇒ **Slow Down & Listen.**

Speak calmly. Listen a lot. Avoid automatic comebacks (yeah, but...). Stop and take a deep breath. Work for better understanding. Ask questions and mean them. Expect that you have as much to learn as the other side.

⇒ **Connect.**

Seek common ground. Recognize complexity. Don't polarize. There is no simple yes or no to any discussion. Keep focus on the main points.



⇒ **Welcome Openings and Opportunities.**

Look for first steps and partial measures. Think constructively, make suggestions.

⇒ **Stay Engaged.**

The discussion is a collaboration in search of better understandings and creative ideas. Treat facts as tools. Keep exploring. Expect key questions to remain open. There is always more learning to do!

The Common Ground Approach

Often, searching for common ground, difficult as that may be, is the spirit of dialogue. The common ground approach can be difficult for some, as it can be seen as unthinkable to think of an issue from the other side, such as during concern about abortion, capital punishment, or assisted suicide. However, the common ground approach is actually inviting both sides to search for

what is genuinely shared between the two groups.

Elements of the Common Group Approach:

- Common ground is NOT a compromise.
- It encourages looking beyond labels and stereotypes.

- It encourages connective thinking.
- Encourages the sharing of personal experiences
- Encourages genuine questions
- Acknowledges shared membership in society.

Service: Learning by Helping

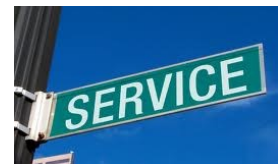
Ethics is about helping out. Moral values are those values that give voice to the needs and legitimate expectations of others. The point of ethics is to act.

Weston suggests that you learn much about yourself and the world you live in through service.

Service can be measured in many ways:

- * Helping a child who is lost
- * Collecting money for charity
- * Serving meals to the homeless
- * Providing mission service

Serving can come as a personal challenge—but most often, we learn the most about ourselves and the world from the situations that we find the most challenging.



Section VI: Contemporary Issues

This section take the terms, theories and tools that make up our toolbox and applies them to situations that are current and relevant in todays society.

These issues include:

◆ Sex

- ◆ Why sex matters
- ◆ Reimagining sex
- ◆ Retooling marriage
- ◆ Perversion
- ◆ Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality.

◆ Abortion

- ◆ Pro-choice stance
- ◆ Pro-life stance
- ◆ Statistics
- ◆ Economic Factors

◆ Business and Professional Ethic

- ◆ Professional codes of ethics
- ◆ Corporate Credo's
- ◆ Employees Rights & Responsibilities
- ◆ Building Ethical Business Practices

◆ Understanding Poverty

- Causes
- Reframing the problem

◆ Poverty and Welfare

- ◆ (brief) history of welfare
- ◆ Statistics
- ◆ Shared values
 - Need to respond
 - Respond effectively
 - Rights pro & con
 - The work ethic



Section VII—The Expanding Circle

This section is used to challenge the reader to look beyond the moral values and ethical dilemmas that are facing us as singular humans and include two very interrelated aspects of our lives.

- 1) Animals
- 2) The environment



Both sections challenge us to use the tools that we have learned and placed in our toolbox to examine our treatment of animals and the earths fragile environment which we are both entirely dependent on.

Can your personal choices regarding these issues be considered moral?

Critical Analysis

This book lays out the foundation for understanding values, moral values and ethics very effectively. There is a great deal of effort put forth explaining the evolution of these ideals and their practical applications to effective ethical problem solving today. However, the author lets several of his personal

bias' shine through in many aspects of this book, particularly the latter half. He presents a very singular view of religion, sex, homosexuality, poverty and welfare. Putting this aside, this is a very practical resource for learning about values, morals and ethics.

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JSGS 806 - Executive Leadership, Ethics and Trust in the Public Service

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