

Youth Ethics Series Curriculum
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Overview:

This curriculum is designed to guide middle and high school students in thinking about ethical issues and integrity. The curriculum time frame is 6 one-hour sessions to be spread out over a period of six weeks. It is designed to fit easily into existing history, civics, literature, student government or other curriculums.

The standards listed below are based on the Colorado Department of Education Civics Standards for high school, but a similar series of lessons could easily be adapted to fit into Colorado Language Arts Standard 6, which asks students to consider literature as a record of human experience.

Additionally, Colorado Model Content Standards for history and economics can be addressed using the YES curriculum.

Learning outcomes: exposure to this curriculum should enable students to

- Distinguish ethics from obedience to authority
- Apply three main ethical frameworks to issues in personal life
- Apply three main ethical frameworks to issues in public life
- Develop a conception of integrity

Colorado State Content Standards Addressed:

Source: Colorado Department of Education

Civics Standard 4:

Students understand how citizens exercise the roles, rights and responsibilities of participation in civic life at all levels – local, state, and national.

RATIONALE:

Citizenship in the United States brings with it rights and responsibilities both at the personal and public levels, including the responsibility to be informed regarding matters of public policy. Citizens who know about and exercise rights and responsibilities ensure that the constitutional republic* of the United States is preserved. Informed voting is commonly perceived as the major way in which citizens can participate in government. Students should understand the many other ways that they can participate in civic life* on an ongoing basis. Understanding and commitment to exercising the roles and skills related to citizenship, students can help influence and shape public policy* and contribute to the maintenance of our way of life.*

As students in grades 9-12 extend their knowledge, what they know and are able to do include:

- evaluating whether and when their obligations as citizens require that their personal desires and interests be balanced with the public good;
- evaluating what to do when individual beliefs or constitutional principles* are in conflict;
- identifying the scope and limits of rights (*for example, all rights have limits*);
- explaining considerations and criteria commonly used in determining what limits should be placed on specific rights (*for example, clear and present danger, national security, public safety*);
- evaluating different positions on contemporary issues that involve rights of citizens (*for example, restricted membership in organizations, sexual harassment, school prayer, refusal of medical care*);
- describing and evaluating historical or current examples of citizen movements to ensure rights of all citizens.

Essential Question:

How is my personal integrity connected to my role as a participating citizen in a democracy?

Guiding Questions:

What does it mean to act with integrity?

Do we hold public officials to a higher standard of integrity than we do ourselves?

How can we use our knowledge of ethics to make decisions in our personal lives?

How can we use our knowledge of ethics to make decisions in the public sphere?

Colorado Model Content Standards

History

History develops moral understanding, defines identity and creates an appreciation of how things change while building skills in judgment and decision-making. History enhances the ability to read varied sources and develop the skills to analyze, interpret and communicate.

Economics

Economics teaches how society manages its scarce resources, how people make decisions, how people interact in the domestic and international markets, and how forces and trends affect the economy as a whole. Personal financial literacy applies the economic way of thinking to help individuals understand how to manage their own scarce resources using a logical decision-making process of prioritization based on analysis of the costs and benefits of every choice.

Discussion format:

A **Socratic seminar** is a useful format for discussions that lend themselves to multiple points of view and can be adapted for use in a variety of subject areas and grade levels.

- Prior to a seminar, students are asked to engage in a common reading, or to respond in writing to a provocative prompt that does not have one right answer.
- During the seminar, a leader poses the question to be examined, and then can become a participant.
- Hand raising is discouraged during a seminar, as discussion should naturally flow as different group members share their thoughts.
- Active listening is essential to a successful seminar, and participants are encouraged to respond to what others are saying instead of just waiting their turn to add an opinion.

Some helpful tips for using Socratic seminars in classroom settings can be found online:

http://www.studyguide.org/socratic_seminar.htm

<http://www.journeytoexcellence.org/practice/instruction/theories/miscideas/socratic/>

<http://www.ncsu.edu/literacyjunction/html/tutorialsocratic.html>

Notes on terminology:

- The terms “moral” and “ethical” are used more or less interchangeably today. However, it may be useful for teachers and students to know that the term “ethics” is the wider notion. It comes from the Greek word “ethos” which translates roughly as *character*. This places emphasis on how decisions are made by a person. The goal of ethical decision-making is to lead a good life, and since human beings live in social groups, this requires thinking about what is good for other people as well as oneself.
- By contrast, the term ‘moral’ comes from the Roman word ‘mores,’ which refers to social customs or norms (this term is still used by sociologists today). This places emphasis on following agreed upon rules. It is a somewhat narrower notion, which refers to the specific moral values or principles embraced by a person or group.
- More generally, ethics is theorizing about morality: asking questions and justifying conclusions about what values and principles we ought to follow. It is not essential to adhere to this usage, and again, in non-theoretical discourse the two terms are often used interchangeably. But it can sometimes prove useful in analyzing a particular text or comment. We use the term “ethical” throughout this curriculum to emphasize the need for reasoned decision.

Handouts used in YES workshops

YES Curriculum Introduction
Handouts used in YES workshops
Pre-workshop survey
Outline of Lessons

Workshop 1: Introduction

The Ring of Gyges article
Ring of Gyges writing exercise

Workshop 2: Aristotle and Virtue

Aristotle article
Aristotle writing exercise
Workshop Two: Virtue Ethics
Study Notes on Virtue Ethics

Workshop 3: John Stuart Mill and Utilitarianism

J.S. Mill article
Workshop Three: Utilitarianism
Study Notes on Utilitarianism

Workshop 4: Kant

Kant article
Workshop Four: Kant, Rights and Duties
Study notes on Kant

Workshop 5: Integrity

Workshop Five: Integrity
Study notes on Integrity

Workshop Six: Socratic Seminar, Putting it Together

Workshop Six: Socratic Seminar, writing exercise

Post-workshop questionnaire

Name _____ Date _____

Yes or No: How do you choose?

Pre-workshop Student Survey

1. What is the difference between ethics and obedience to authority?

2. How do you identify ethical issues and resolve ethical conflicts?

3. How do you think politicians identify ethical issues and resolve ethical conflicts?

4. How do you define integrity?

5. What do you hope to learn from participating in this series of workshops?

Please continue on back if you have more to say -- Thank you!

Outline of Lessons

Prior to the first lesson:

- Ask students to respond to this prompt/quickwrite:

Name a time in your life when you feel you acted with integrity. Be specific, and give reasons for why you think your actions were ethical.

- This prompt will be used as a pre and post test to gauge how students view their own personal decisions.

Week 1

- Contemporary reading or issue: Instructors should choose a recent case of ethical wrongdoing where the person got away with it for awhile and seemed to benefit for awhile. (For example, the issue of politicians who campaign on ethical/moral issues, and then are caught breaking their own moral code).

- Possible seminar discussion topics based on contemporary reading or issue: What, specifically, was wrong with the behavior? Would it have been wrong if the person had not been caught? Would it have been wrong if the laws didn't condemn it? Is the action worse because the person was hypocritical? Should this person care about ethics? What is the relationship between hypocrisy and ethics

- Classical reading: the Ring of Gyges, from Plato's Republic (Book 2, 359e-360b).
The passage tells the story of the shepherd Gyges, who finds a magic ring that will make him invisible. Gyges uses the ring to do a number of immoral things, because he can get away with them. According to the story, anyone would act like Gyges if they had a ring.

- Writing Prompt: Suppose you had Gyges ring? How would your behavior change? Would it change at all? Why or why not?

- Possible discussion questions based on classical reading and written response:

1. Would Gyges ring really enable him to get what he wants (is the story plausible)? For example, could an invisible person really seduce someone?
2. What is the relationship between ethics and some external authority (law, social custom, God, etc.)? The magic ring seems to make Gyges free from social constraints, but does that make his actions ethical?
3. What is the relationship between ethics and personal feeling/desire?
4. What reasons do we have to be ethical, even when (or especially when) no one else knows what we are doing? (This question leads to the discussion of ethical frameworks in subsequent weeks.)

General teaching notes:

- By the end of the discussion, students should see that being ethical requires something more than simply obeying rules laid down by some authority. The truly ethical person would obey legitimate rules of conduct even when no one was looking. And the truly ethical person would also disobey illegitimate rules (Rosa Parks provides a good example here).
- Similarly, students should begin to see that in order to become ethical people, they must be able to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate authorities, ethical and unethical rules. The three general frameworks explored in the next 3 weeks give them critical reasoning tools for making these kinds of decisions.

The Ring of Gyges, Plato, *The Republic*, Book II (Paraphrased by Tom Gengler, ©2009)

Here's the starting point: those who practice justice do so against their will. People simply don't have the power to be unjust. There's a way to prove this point. Let's say that there are two main groups of people: the just (those who do the right thing) and the unjust (those who do not do the right thing). If you give both groups the power to do whatever they want, then and only then will you be able to really tell who is just and who is unjust. Let's give these two groups the power to do whatever they want, and THEN let's see what they do! Do you see how this works?

If you give the two different kinds of people the ability to get what they desire, by whatever means, this will really tell you what people are like. When you get right down to it, it's only the law that keeps people doing the right thing. If you take away the law, the true nature of people will come out, and you will be able to see it in plain sight.

The power to do as you wish, without being afraid of the law, was given to a man named Gyges (pron. *guy-jeez*). Gyges was a shepherd who lived a long time ago in ancient Greece. He served the King of Lydia – a province of Greece. Gyges had the power to do as he wished by using the powers of a very special ring. Here's the story.

One day there was a great storm and an earthquake opened up the earth right where the place where Gyges was feeding his flock. Amazed, he descended into the opening, where, among other marvels, he saw a hollow bronze horse. Oddly, this horse had doors. Gyges stooped and looked in through one of the doors. Inside he saw a large dead body. The body appeared to be human and having nothing on but a gold ring. He took this gold ring from the finger of the dead body and climbed back up out of the opening.

That night he and the other shepherds met together. It was their custom to do so, because they needed to send their monthly report about the flocks to the King. Gyges wore the gold ring into the audience room of the king. As Gyges sat there he fiddled with his ring and turned it a special way. When he did this he discovered that he instantly became invisible. Immediately his fellow shepherds were surprised and talked about Gyges as if he had disappeared.

Gyges was astonished at this. So he tried turning outward, and instantly he reappeared. He did this several times and found out that he could make himself disappear and reappear. When he became convinced that he could completely control whether he was visible or invisible, he hatched a terrible plot. He figured out a way to be sent to the King's court. When he got there he turned the ring and disappeared. With that he seduced the Queen. Later, with her help, Gyges and the Queen conspired against the King, killed him, and took over the kingdom.

Now imagine that there are two rings like this. If those who are just (who always do the right thing) put on a ring like this they will do the wrong thing, just like Gyges. No one is so just and so upright that they would do the right thing even with such a ring. No person could keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with anyone at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would. With such a ring all people would act like a god and do as they wished.

With such a ring, therefore, the actions of the just and the actions of the unjust would be the same.

So we can affirm that this test proves whether a person is just or not. Because it is not a person's willingness to do right, or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, that proves whether he really is just.

Rather, justice comes from the refusal to act unjustly even if a person knows he or she can get away with it.

For, if a person thinks he can get away with something, that's the heart of unjust action.

When you get right down to it, all people believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable to them than justice. Anyone who agrees with this argument (position) will say that they are right.

If you can imagine anyone obtaining this power of becoming invisible (by using a ring like Gyges') and never doing any wrong, most people would think such a person with a ring of invisibility to be a wretched idiot. After all, who would not use such a ring to their advantage?

People might praise him in public, or in newspaper articles, but in private they would think him a total fool.

People would remain hypocrites, keeping up appearances with one another mainly because they would be afraid that the person with a ring of invisibility might take advantage of them.

In other words, people would say something like this to each other, "wow, if I had a ring of invisibility, I'd could use it to get what I wanted, at least once." But really, they would fear that someone with such a ring would do the same thing to them.

Aristotle on the definition of human happiness and its relationship to virtue (Excerpts from *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 1 and 2, translated by W.D. Ross, McGraw Hill 2006, p. 500 and p. 502. Paraphrased by Tom Gengler, ©2008)

Here's how the quality of a person's life is measured:

1. it is partly the activity of a person's soul
2. a person's actions must result from proper reasoning
3. a good person does activities that are good and noble
4. all things are done well and with proper excellence

If these are in place, then a person is living a life of excellences (virtues), a life of quality, and will stand a good chance of leading a complete life. One of the measures of a complete life is how much happiness a person experiences. And just as one day does not make an entire season, neither does one day of a life of virtue/excellence make up a life of virtue/excellence. A virtuous life lived over time leads to a life of virtue.

Happiness is an activity of the soul that results from perfect virtue. If that's the case then we need to look at what virtue really is since it is the source of human happiness. Most people are in search of what's good, and everyone knows at some level that a "good life" and happiness must relate, otherwise how could life be "good" without happiness? Have you ever thought of it that way?

Here's a distinction: virtue/excellence is of the soul; happiness is an activity of the soul.

Here's a definition: virtue "is a state of deliberate (chosen) moral purpose, consisting in a mean (not necessarily the exact middle) determined by a person using proper reasoning. A person using prudence – that is common sense – would come to this definition.

A "mean" is something that lies between two vices. On one side is the vice of excess, say excess eating. That would be gluttony. On the other side is the vice of excess deficiency, say starving.

These excesses should be avoided because one goes too far (gluttony) beyond what is right, and the other (starving) falls short. A person's body is made to need just so much food so that a "proper" diet is the mean between too much food and too little. This applies to action, as in the example of eating, and also to emotion. What would examples be of too much anger, on one hand, and too little, on the other hand?

Virtue itself is a mean (it means "in the middle"). As far as things we should pursue most, virtue IS the thing to pursue most if you want to be a virtuous person.

So what about things that are wicked in nature? These are things like malice, shamelessness and envy (as far as emotions), and adultery, theft and murder (as far as actions). These are intrinsically (that is in their very nature) wicked, and even a little bit of them is as bad as a lot.

Whether these things are felt or done in excess or just a little, they're all wicked in nature. 'It is never possible to be right in them; they are always sinful.' For example any adultery at any time is always wrong. The same goes for murder.

YES Workshop Two: Virtue Ethics (Tom Gengler ©2008)

- Contemporary reading or issue: some example involving courage (acts of civil disobedience, behavior of soldiers in wartime, the treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo, etc.).
- Classical Reading: Aristotle on excellence and the golden mean.
- Thinking Prompt: draw or describe an ideally virtuous person. What traits of character does your person have? Are there other good traits that wouldn't fit in your person's character, but would fit in some other person's character?
- Potential discussion questions based on reading and written response (with notes underneath each):
 1. What is a character trait?
 2. What makes a character trait "good" or "bad?"
 3. How does character develop?
 4. What is the relationship between character and action?
 5. Is courage always a virtue?

Study Notes on Virtue

- The distinguishing characteristic of virtue-based ethical thinking is its focus on inner character traits rather than actions. It focuses on the question “what sort of person should I be” rather than the question “what kind of actions should I do.” These two questions are of course not unrelated, but the unique position of a virtue thinker is that you cannot do the right thing unless you have the right motivations. A useful contrast here is with people who donate money to charity anonymously, vs. people who donate money but insist on having their name on the building. If the first action is better it must be because the anonymous donor is the kind of person who cares more about helping others than about being recognized as a benefactor.
- Today the term “virtue” often carries connotations of sexual modesty and being “prim and proper.” Students should be alerted that the original word in ancient Greek mean “excellence.” So, when Aristotle talks about virtues, he is talking about specific character traits human beings need to be “excellent” people in various areas of human life. Courage is the trait we need to be “excellent” in response to danger, justice is the trait we need to be “excellent” in making decisions about what people deserve or are entitled to, etc.
- In par. 1, Aristotle points out that a “good” (ethical) person is someone who reasons well throughout a complete lifetime. He is not saying the emotions aren’t relevant too, but only that reason is the capacity that lets us figure out which emotions we ought to trust or follow and which we should not. In paragraph 2, he connects being virtuous to being happy. In other words, he answers the question “why be ethical” with “because developing the virtues makes your own life better – the virtues are character traits you need to live a happy life.
- Also note that Aristotle points out that it takes a lifetime (“one swallow does not make a summer day”) to develop a virtuous character. We are constantly making progress toward good character, but the task never ends. He also emphasizes the role of reason in helping us choose which desires to gratify, which to try to ignore or redirect, etc. And finally, he points out that all of our character traits must be “integrated” – they must fit together. There may be lots of different patterns that are equally good, but a person who has lots of conflicting character traits cannot be an ethical one.
- When students read the word “mean,” they often think Aristotle is advising them to lead an “average life.” The third and fourth paragraphs show this isn’t quite right. With respect to motivations, Aristotle’s point is that for many emotions, desires, etc, there is something that’s “too much” (i.e., being rash or foolhardy) and something that’s “too little” (i.e., being timid). The virtue of courage develops as people learn what is the right amount of desire to face up to danger (hence the role of reason again). But his point is that some desires should never be gratified (such as the desire to commit adultery). To act on those desires is always too much, and again, it is reason that tells us this. So it is a combination of reason and emotion that enables a person to “hit” the Golden Mean and develop true virtue.

- Note that the Golden Mean also applies to action. Courage in a petite young woman would lead to very different action than courage in a 200 pound football player. Suppose a fight breaks out in the hallway. It might well be foolish for the woman to try to break it up, but courageous for the football player. Both of these people could be fully virtuous even though they act differently.

- Related to this last point, you might want to ask your students to consider whether it makes a difference whether their ideally virtuous person (response to the writing prompt) is male or female, old or young, etc. The key thing is to help them to see that even though we can identify lots of different patterns, not just *anything* can count as good character.

- Finally, if students express frustration that the Golden Mean is too vague, note that both Utilitarianism and Rights&Duty-based thinking give more concrete rules about how to decide exactly what to do. Aristotle would say that those rules try to provide more precision than is possible (he says we should treat them as rough rules of thumb). But non-Virtue thinkers would say that Aristotle is too wishy washy. You can see both approaches in debates today, if you look for them.

Excerpts from John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2: What Utilitarianism Is (Library of Liberal Arts Edition, 1957, pp. 10-17. Paraphrased by Tom Gengler, ©2008)

The foundation of Utilitarianism is the belief that morals are based on something called the “greatest happiness principle.” According to this principle 1. actions are right in proportion to the amount of happiness they promote, 2. actions are wrong in proportion to the amount of unhappiness they produce.

“Happiness” is defined as “pleasure and the absence of pain.” “Unhappiness” is defined as “pain and the absence of pleasure.” A lot more needs to be said to give a completely clear understanding of the Utilitarian theory, for example, what things would be included in the categories of pain and pleasure, and how closely we can really define these. But even if we answered all the questions about what causes pleasure and pain, the foundation [think of how we defined the word “proof” in our discussion of logic] of the theory itself would not change. That foundation [or premise] is that *pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things that we should desire as ends in themselves*. Or, to state it [the premise] another way, *All desirable things* (which are as numerous in Utilitarianism as in other ethical theories) *are desirable either 1. for the pleasure inherent [in their nature, part of them] in them, or 2. as a means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.*

But isn't there a difference in the quality of pleasures? Isn't one more valuable than another? Wouldn't *quality* of pleasure – think of an example here – be worth more than just the *quantity* of pleasure? Here's how Utilitarianism would decide: if you have two pleasures, the more desirable pleasure is the one that all or almost all of those who have experienced it decidedly prefer, regardless of any moral obligation to prefer it. Another measure is this: if you have two pleasures, the higher one is the one that those who are competently acquainted with it put far above the other, even though they know that it results in a greater amount of discontent, or unhappiness [an example would be requiring people to go to school]. This is the case even if the other choice [say not going to school] would yield happiness of a greater amount. Attending school results in a superior pleasure (one of quality) than not attending school, which might result in a great quantity of temporary pleasure, but would result in ignorance and its consequences.

It is indisputable [he means “incapable of being argued against”] that the being who has low capacities for enjoyment will find himself/herself more easily satisfied than the being whose capacities for enjoyment are high. A highly gifted person will feel that his/her search for happiness, given the way the world is, will be imperfect. But s/he can learn to live with the world's imperfections, and bear with them, and these imperfections will not make him/her envy the person who is not conscious of these imperfections. And this is because some people are simply not capable of understanding what the higher pleasures are, or the nature of the imperfections of the world. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. If the fool or the pig disagree with this position, it is only because they just know their own side of the matter. The person who has the higher capacity for the enjoyment of higher pleasures knows both sides.

According to the greatest happiness principle the ultimate purpose of our actions (taking both ourselves and others into account) is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, in terms of both quality and quantity. And again, the best standard of the quality of pleasures is the judgment of those who have experience with these pleasures AND who have the intellectual ability to make this judgment (so you could say both intelligence and experience).

The pursuit of the highest pleasures and the avoidance of pains are the goals of human action according to Utilitarianism. These goals are also its standard of morality. Here's how Utilitarianism defines that standard: “the rules and precepts [standards or rules of morals] for human conduct” are *that all mankind, and all sentient [feeling] creation should pursue the highest pleasures and pursue the avoidance of pain.*

YES Workshop Three: Utilitarianism (Tom Gengler ©2008)

- **Writing prompt:** Describe an example of utilitarian thinking you have used or can imagine using. For example can you think of a situation where you might have to act for the greater good even if some are harmed? (Discuss first in your groups before you start writing.) Take about 20 minutes for this exercise. Use a separate sheet of paper and turn in to your teacher when you are finished.

- More questions on Utilitarianism. Jot down brief answers under each question.

1. What is happiness? Is Mill right to describe it as “pleasure and the absence of pain?”

2. How can we measure happiness? If we aren't sure which pleasures are more valuable, should we ask someone who has experienced both?

3. Is happiness all that matters? Are there limits on what we can do to promote it?

4. How is the greatest happiness principle different from majority rule (that is, the majority makes the rules)?

5. Since animals can feel pleasure and pain (not exactly in the same way as humans) should animals be treated ethically also? Do they have rights? Why or why not?

Study Notes on Utilitarianism

Hard ethical choices

- Virtue based thinking is sometimes criticized for not being very helpful when we face a difficult ethical choice (it tells us to be just and courageous, but it doesn't give us very concrete advice about what justice and courage require us to do in particular cases). Utilitarianism has an answer to this and every other conflict: you should do the action that will *maximize overall happiness*. This is called the "principle of utility" – this is where the name of the theory comes. At the end of the article Mill emphasizes that this single principle can guide us in every ethical decision. What do you think?

Results vs. character

- Notice that Mill is focused on the **outcomes** of our choices and actions, rather than the **inner character traits** that produce them. This is the big difference between Utilitarianism and Aristotle's virtue-based ethics. In Utilitarianism it doesn't matter what your inner character traits are: all that matters is that you do things that maximize pleasure and minimize pain for everyone affected (including yourself).

Best Theory?

- Utilitarianism claims to be the best ethical theory for public policy decisions because it insists that everyone's interests count equally. This is an important point in Utilitarianism. It is easy to think that when Mill talks about happiness that he means just our own personal happiness. Mill does NOT say we should do the actions that promote only our own happiness – he says we should do the action that promotes the greatest happiness overall (this does include us). Is this a good idea?

Whose happiness?

- We might say that it's impossible to know what makes someone else happy. Mill says two things about this: 1. first, we all know a great deal about what in general produces pleasure or pain in human beings. 2. Mill provides a "test" for figuring out which pleasure is "higher" in situations where we might be in doubt (see the article). We should ask someone who has experienced both. What are your thoughts?

Pleasures of the mind may help us choose

- Related to this issue of comparing pleasures, it's important to see the point of the famous quote "Tis better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied."
- Mill's point is that even an unhappy Socrates still has more total pleasure in his life than the most satisfied pig in the world. Socrates has the "higher" (though often frustrating) pleasures of engaging in political debates, thinking about difficult philosophical questions, eating and drinking well, etc. The pig may have no frustration, but it only has the "lower" pleasures of rolling in mud and eating slop. In other words the higher pleasures are those of the mind and refined appetites, rather than physical pleasures, as animals enjoy. Do you think Mill is right about this comparison?

Final point

- One final point: it is important to see that maximizing overall happiness is not quite the same as majority rule, for two reasons. First, majority rule tells us to do **what the most people want**. But people often want things that will make them unhappy in the long run. (What kind of things might these be?)
- Utilitarianism tells us to do what really will make us happy (a good example is forcing kids to go to school – seriously!). Second, maximizing overall happiness means producing the greatest total amount of happiness possible. Consider a case where your actions will affect 3 people. Option A will make 2 of those people a little bit more happy, and the third person a little bit less happy. Option B will make 2 people a little bit less happy, and the third person incredibly happy. Majority rule says choose option A – it's what the most people want. But Utilitarianism says choose option B – it's what produces the biggest increase in overall happiness. (a useful example here is slavery: even though slaves are typically in the minority, their unhappiness is extreme; by contrast, though slaveowners clearly benefit, their happiness does not seem great enough to outweigh the great suffering of slaves, especially since other ways of organizing society might make the upper class equally well off while making the lower class slightly better off (a poor wage earner is probably still happier than a slave).)

OK, the final, final point

All that being said, it is important to see nothing is absolutely forbidden by Utilitarian morality. If it turned out that slave-ownership really did maximize overall happiness (that there was no other form of social organization that could produce greater or equal amounts of happiness), then a Utilitarian would have to say that slaveowning was the right thing to do. This is an important contrast with both Virtue Ethics and an ethics of Rights and Duties. Thoughts?

Excerpts from Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, reprinted in Nina Rosentand, *The Moral of the Story*, 5th Edition (McGraw Hill: 2005, pp. 285-6. (Paraphrased by Tom Gengler, ©2008)

The moral worth of an action does not come from its effect [think of Utilitarianism] nor from a principle that says our motives are tied up in the effects of our actions. For all effects (your own happiness and increasing the happiness of others) could be brought about through other ways besides your own efforts (other causes) and wouldn't have required the will or the effort of rational beings. Say, for example, excellent weather for long periods such that crops and animals grew in abundance, so that food was plentiful and there was no terrible weather. It is only in a rational being that the highest good is found, the kind of good that does not change.

This is evident because it is only a rational being that can think about the law in a completely objective and rational way. In other words, the "perfect law" that a rational being would come up with using flawless logic (i.e. without fallacies) is one that is based on principle and not on the effects (results) such a law would have. The good that dwells in a person is the good that follows from this principle of "perfect law," and not thinking about what kinds of results this law might have.

Think of it like this: what kind of law is there that guides our will (where we make choices) in such a way that we expect no particular effect or result? Here's an example. Say you saw someone beside the road with a flat tire. Which is better, expecting to be paid back by the person BEFORE you even helped them, or helping them BECAUSE it was the right thing to do?

Here's the test for what can become universal, or "perfect" law: Can I make my action universal? Say you want to steal something from someone. Can you make your action universal? If stealing were allowable, then everyone would steal from everyone else, and there would be no ownership and nothing would be private. See how this works? Plain old ordinary reasoning has always come to this conclusion, because it makes total sense.

Say you are under stress and make a promise you know you can't keep. Say, for example, "yeah, I'll make it to tomorrow night's meeting," when you know you don't plan to. You just say "yes" to get the person off your back for a while. But are you really able to figure out all the consequences of making a promise you know you can't keep, or are pretty sure you can't keep?

People will lose confidence in you if you're always making promises and not keeping them. What's more, the disadvantages in being seen as lacking integrity and truthfulness might be huge, and get totally out of hand. The more prudent way would be to act in accordance with the principle above: only do things that can be made universal, and make it a habit of not promising something you can't do or don't plan to do.

But what's the real driving force behind always acting on the principle that all actions should be universalizable? Is it duty, or fear of consequences? If you're acting from duty (that is, following the principle that your actions are OK only if they can be made universal) then you are following the universal guide to proper decision making in ethics. If you're just thinking about the EFFECTS of your actions, then you're trying to be a lot more clever than you ever will be, and are gambling with stakes bigger than you or other people

In such situations someone is bound to get hurt. Breaking promises might be OK in the short run, but in life we all need trusted friends, and nothing is more important in friendship than honesty, and honesty is the bedrock of integrity. Lying cannot be made universal, or there would be no truth, and no one could ever believe anything.

Can you imagine that? In fact nothing I (Immanuel Kant) am saying here could be believed. Think of it like this: if someone said to you, "I am lying to you," how would you know they were lying, since a person who says they are lying has to be telling the truth about whether or not they are lying. Otherwise, how would you know?

Even young people, without a lot of experience in the world and not yet prepared for all that life might bring, can still use this principle of asking if something can be made universal. This principle has won out over the centuries, even though many people have acted against it by stealing, lying and cheating. But if the whole world stole, lied and cheated, there could be no world to steal from, lie to, or cheat. Isn't that amazing!

So duty comes from respect for this principle of universal law. This universal law is also the most practical, which means that it works. As for motives – what drives us to do things and not do other things – they too must yield to this duty, because this duty comes straight from a purely good will. The worth of this purely good will is higher than anything else.

3. What seems right about the “golden rule?” How is this rule related to Kant’s idea of the categorical imperative?

4. Are there ever exceptions to moral duties? If so, how do we make sure we aren’t just making special exceptions for ourselves?

5. Is there something wrong with being inconsistent? Can it be ethical to be spontaneous? Can it be dangerous to be spontaneous?

Kant is not easy reading. Here are some tips on Kant's terms.

- When Kant talks about the "representation of the law" this means the principle you are consciously acting on. He says in the second paragraph of our handout that since humans are "rational beings" (creatures with the capacity to reason about what to do, rather than just acting on instinct or impulse), we can think objectively and rationally about our actions. For example, I might say "I'd like to lie in this situation" but I would also know "I'm supposed to tell the truth" and can't know what the consequences of a lie would be. Also, we do not like being lied to.
 - Kant's main claim about ethics is: "always act in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." The word "maxim" means the *general principle upon which you are planning to act*. So, what if my maxim is "I will tell a lie"? We need to test this maxim by asking if it could be a "universal law." By "universal law" Kant means a principle that all human beings act on in all situations all the time. Kant explains that it is impossible to make "I will tell a lie" a universal law. So Kant concludes that lying is always unethical – thus we have an ethical duty to ALWAYS tell the truth. Do you agree?
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- Towards the end of the article Kant points out that it is always in a person's power to figure out what his or her duties are, because all the person needs to do is figure out whether his/her "maxim" (the principle being acted on) could be a universal law. His general conclusion is that being ethical is a matter of acting on "categorical imperatives." Ethical principles are *categorical* in the sense that we must always obey them, no matter the circumstance or our personal desires. And although they are imperatives (commands) they are not dictated to us by some outside authority. They are dictated by human reasoning. Put another way they are commands we can follow because they are completely rational.
- Another way of putting all this is that if you can universalize your maxim, then it (the maxim) contains a universal moral principle. So we don't have to use Kant's "universalizability" test each and every time we think about doing something. Once we've come up with a list of universal principles (don't lie, don't steal, etc.) we can just make sure we never violate them.

- Many think that Kant's ethics is too strict. It helps to remember that there may be duties that only apply to specific situations (though lying does not seem to be one of these, in Kant's view). For example, the duty of confidentiality which lawyers (and other professionals) have to their clients arises because of the unique relationships lawyers and clients are in, and the unique role that lawyers play in society. It is useful to discuss why protecting confidentiality is not the same as lying, and why a witness to a crime does not have any duty to protect confidentiality of the criminal. Jot down your thoughts about this.
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- Some students of Kant think that in some cases the consequences of an action can make it OK to violate a general moral principle. (Telling genuinely "white lies" for the sake of compassion is a frequent example.)

A **virtue ethicist** would allow for "white lies" because compassion is a character trait that we all need. What would be an example of a "small lie" that a virtue ethicist would allow?

Against Aristotle Kant points out that if we allow ourselves to tell white lies we may find ourselves being tempted to tell not-so-white lies (like lies for personal gain, e.g. padding a resume or plagiarizing), and may find ourselves unable to overcome the temptation. Doing this will have a bad effect on our character.

A **utilitarian** would allow a "small lie" because such a lie might result in more happiness than the truth, and have little or no risk of harm.

Even though the **utilitarian** can explain why lying for personal gain is wrong he cannot explain why lying for the sake of overall happiness is wrong. Can you think of any lies that have been told for the sake of "overall happiness"?

Since there seem to be flaws in virtue ethics and in Utilitarianism, Kant is so rigorous in his thinking. This is Kant's reason for basing everything we do on things that can be universalized. If something can be universalized, it's either always right and must be done, or always wrong and should never be done.

YES Workshop Five: Integrity (Tom Gengler ©2008)

- Integrity means “uprightness of character; probity; honesty” and “undivided or unbroken state, completeness.” In this workshop we’re thinking about **what integrity is** and **why it’s important**. We’re also looking at integrity through the eyes of the **ethical theories** we’ve studied, how it relates to the **way we make decisions**, and **what kind of decisions** we make.

Integrity Quotes

Pick two of the following quotes. Write a paragraph on each, describing what you think is the **central idea** of the quote, and **how it relates to the way you make decisions**. Keep these paragraphs for our next workshop, and be prepared to say what you’ve written.

"I cannot find language of sufficient energy to convey my sense of the sacredness of private integrity."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"A single lie destroys a whole reputation of integrity." Baltasar Gracian

"There can be no friendship without confidence; and no confidence, without integrity." Unknown

Questions based on reading and discussion. Jot down brief answers under each question.

1. What does it mean for a private individual to act with integrity?

- How would Aristotle decide if a person had integrity?

- How would Mill decide if a person had integrity?

- How would Kant decide if a person integrity?

Can a person act with integrity even if s/he does something unethical?

2. Can a person be ethical in some ways but still lack integrity?

3. Can a leader be considered effective even if s/he does not act with personal integrity?

4. Is there a difference in integrity between private life and public life?

Study Notes on Integrity

- Most understand Kant as saying that having “integrity” means being reliable or trustworthy. It’s very useful to ask whether integrity is the same as honesty. Most say that integrity and honesty are not the same things. What do you think?
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- Many say that having “integrity” means “acting on principle” or “being true to what you believe.” Most understand that this is probably not enough. At the very least, we should see that if “being true to what you believe” is all that counts, then Hitler had integrity. The general point here is that integrity is based on the structure of our character (how it fits together, how reliable it is), but integrity also is based on the **content** (what it’s made of) of our character. What would this content be?
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- To better connect integrity with what we’ve already read and discussed so far remember that:
 - **Aristotle** (Virtue) writes that integrity means having an “**integrated character**” – that is a character where none of your traits conflict each other, or if they conflict slightly, you have the wisdom to choose among them. You’re a whole person who lives virtuously, acts within the mean between extremes, and does so consistently.
 - **Mill** (Utilitarianism) says integrity is acting reliably on the **principle of utility**. This means that people know that your actions are ALWAYS guided by doing what leads to the greatest overall happiness.
 - **Kant** (The Universalizable Principle) argues that integrity is **always acting on universal moral principles** (maxims that can be universalized). In other words, can your actions be made universal? Do you remember how this principle works?

Preview of Sixth Workshop

In our last workshop, called a “Socratic Seminar,” you will be able to talk about anything that has come to your mind during these workshops. Take some time now to write down a question or two you have about integrity, or anything we’ve read or talked about so far. (You may use the back of this sheet.)

Here are some examples that you may use:

“Should a person of integrity obey an authority that they think is corrupt?”

“What should an ethical person do if they wish to disobey authority?”

“Should I hold public officials to higher standards than I live by?”

Name _____ Date _____

Yes or No: How do you choose?

End-of-workshop Student Survey

Avoid writing the same answer here as you did the first time. Think really hard here, remember what you've learned, use the handouts, talk to those at your table, and answer carefully. The main thing is what you write, not how much. Please write legibly.

1. What is the difference between ethics and obedience to authority?

2. How do you identify ethical issues and resolve ethical conflicts?

3. How do you think politicians identify ethical issues and resolve ethical conflicts?

4. How do you define integrity?
