



**KAPITAŁ LUDZKI**  
NARODOWA STRATEGIA SPÓJNOŚCI

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# **Ethical Method of Reasoning, presented by George R. Brown, MD, MPA**

**Prezentacja multimedialna współfinansowana przez  
Unię Europejską w ramach  
Europejskiego Funduszu Społecznego w projekcie pt.  
*„Innowacyjna dydaktyka bez ograniczeń - zintegrowany  
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- ✓ Students should be able to reason about ethical issues

## **1 The moral point of view**

- A. What is ethics?
- B. The world of ethics
- C. The universal experience of duty
- D. Moral experience is universal, but some moral perceptions and judgments vary
- E. Universality and variability of human morality
- F. Moral statements





# Outlines & Learning Objectives (con)

## 2 The nature of moral judgments

- A. Three types of sentences
- B. Surface grammar and depth grammar
- C. Moral criteria and moral judgments





## Outlines & Objectives (con)

### **3 An ethical method of reasoning**

- A. First step: Fact deliberation
  - i The case
  - ii Deliberation about the facts
- B. Second step: Value deliberation
  - i Identification of the moral problems
  - ii Choice of the main problem
  - iii The values at stake
- C. Third step: Duty deliberation
  - i Reflecting on the most challenging cases
  - ii Reflecting on other cases
- D. Fourth step: Testing consistency
- E. Fifth step: Conclusion





# An Ethical Method of Reasoning

## Decision-making and ethics

- Ethics is both a theoretical and a practical discipline.
- The language of ethics refers to duties and values.
- One goal of ethics is to determine right decisions, and in order to do that, it is necessary to go step by step, analyzing, first, the facts of the case, second, the values at stake, and third, the duties.



## The Case

A Jehovah Witness refuses a blood transfusion for himself in line with his Sincere religious beliefs but at the same time asks for help in saving his life.

- The two main values at stake here are respect for his spiritual wellbeing on the one hand, and respect for his physical wellbeing on the other.
- We might at first think that we cannot maintain respect for both of these values in this situation.
- If we are correct then we shall have choose between the extremes and sacrifice one value for the other believing that we are doing wrong whichever option we take.



## Case & Dilemma

- This would constitute a moral dilemma.
- Our view might be that the best outcome of the treatment is the survival of the patient whereas his view might be that surviving at the cost of being damned forever would be the greatest possible personal disaster.
- Our first moral duty is to endeavor to respect all values at stake as much as possible.
- Ideally we need to find a way of saving the life of the patient without ignoring his religious beliefs.
- That is, we need to carefully examine our initial belief that we have a genuine dilemma on our hands.





## Case & Solutions

- There are numerous possible ways of respecting both values in such cases.
- For example, around 12% of Jehovah's Witnesses do not fully agree with the Watchtower's blood doctrine.
- One intermediate course of action is, therefore, to evaluate individual beliefs in respect to blood among Jehovah's Witnesses patients.
- Some of them accept some form of blood or blood products. If we find that our patient is firmly opposed to this option there are other possibilities.
- One is the use of bloodless surgery techniques.



## Case & Resolutions

Another is the use of transfusion alternatives, like volume expanders, and oxygen therapeutics (Perftec, Hemopure, Oxygent, PolyHeme, Perfloran).

And yet another course of action is avoiding the use blood or any substitute unless the need really arises.

Thus in the case under discussion the apparently contradictory ethical demands on the clinician can both be satisfied.

Failure to reflect on these matters could result in serious harms to the patient whichever of the two apparent options is taken.



# First step: Fact deliberation

## i The case

- The deliberation process begins always in the same way, with the presentation of a problem or a case, which is often difficult from the moral point of view.
- The goal of the ethical method of reasoning is always the same, to help people to resolve these kinds of problems, taking wise actions or decisions.



## First step: Fact deliberation (con)

### ii Deliberation about the facts

- In order to resolve a moral conflict, the first thing we must do is to make a careful analysis of the facts of the case, lowering the uncertainty in this field as much as possible and also correcting misperceptions.



## Second step: Value deliberation

### i Identification of the moral problems

- The analysis of a case starts when somebody thinks that he or she has a problem and thinks it is a moral problem.
- Such cases are often more complex than they at first appear. People ask about a problem, but this does not mean that this is the only problem the case presents.
- It is necessary, therefore, to identify and describe the different moral problems we are able to find in the case, to enable full and unambiguous discussion.



## Second step: Value deliberation (con)

### ii Choice of the main problem

- After the identification of all ethical problems at stake in the case, we must choose one among them, which is to be discussed in the next steps of the analysis.
- Problems should be discussed one by one. Only after the discussion of one can we begin the debate about another, and so on.
- If we mix different problems, reaching a conclusion will be impossible.



## Second step: Value deliberation

### iii The values at stake

- We have been talking until now of ‘problems’, and ‘moral problems’.
- We have not given a precise definition of this expression.
- ‘Moral problems’ are always concrete, specific. They are not abstract.
- When someone has a moral problem, it is because he or she does not know which moral value should be respected in the situation.



## Third step: Duty deliberation

- A conflict of values can be solved in different ways, and our duty is to identify and choose the best one, that is, that which promotes best the fulfillment of positive values, or that infringes least upon the values at stake.
- Therefore, we must identify the different possible courses of action of the case.
- And the easiest way of doing that is identifying first the extreme courses of action.





## Third step: Duty deliberation (con)

### i Reflecting on the most challenging cases

- It is important for the doctor to be sensitive to the whole range of ethical values in dealing with clinical cases.
- Such sensitivity, however, will often present challenges which would otherwise not occur.
- These challenges are ethical in nature in that it is the tensions between respect for various values which make it difficult to decide what should be done.
- The most problematic for the doctor to deal with will be those where it seems that whichever alternative course of action is taken he will be doing wrong by failing to respect an important value.



## Third step: Duty deliberation (con)

### ii Reflecting on other cases

- Most moral problems which face doctors in treatment decisions are less dramatic than the apparent dilemmas such as the case cited above.
- They usually take the form of numbers of ethical values calling for attention and making demands on practitioners.
- These call for careful consideration but do not suggest that the practitioner is presented with an impossible task to find an acceptable solution.



## Fourth step: Testing consistency

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- It is important that moral reflection is consistent.
- Special pleading involves giving undue weight to one or more considerations because it is in the interest of the decision maker so to do.
- This will always prejudice the decision and undermine the proper role of reason in ethical reflection.
- We can use a number of techniques to guard against such inconsistency.



## Fifth step: Conclusion

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- The desired outcome of all these reflective activities is to arrive at wise decisions.
- Practical wisdom, the art of making well-thought decisions is the moral virtue par excellence.
- Well-thought decisions are not necessarily universally agreed decisions. Serious and responsible people can disagree on ethical matters.
- However it has been said that the unexamined life is not worth living and in medicine it is certainly true that the morally unreflective life is to be deplored.



## Final Thoughts

### We can use a number of techniques to guard against such inconsistency

- i. We can avoid such bad practice by referring to some external measures such as the Law.  
Though the law does not solve ethical problems it does usually reflect the moral values of citizens.  
On some occasion laws might be unjust and not serve us in this way.
- ii We can also ask ourselves the question:  
Would I behave in this way if it was to become generally known that I had done so?  
An honest appraisal in these terms would draw our attention to our disregard for the principle which has been extremely important in the history of ethics, namely to act in such a way as to be able to wish that mode of behavior be a universal law.



## Final Thoughts (con)

- iii We should not be hasty in drawing conclusions in moral reflection.  
Once presented with moral problems in practice doctors experience a considerable injection of emotions.  
Such feelings are not unimportant but they might cloud any immediate judgment and stimulate rash decisions.  
Using the time that is available, which might also involve consulting with colleagues, allows these emotional rushes to recede somewhat and facilitate wiser decisions.



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