

**TEACHING BUSINESS ETHICS THROUGH
POPULAR FEATURE FILMS:
AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH¹**

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ABSTRACT

Based on our experience in teaching ethics we have developed, tested, and presented in this article a program of instruction that rests on four pillars: popular feature films, a six-stage ethical decision-making process, the principles necessary to address ethical situations, and the classroom instructor. Taken separately, there is nothing new or unique in these pillars. Taken together, however, and to our knowledge, these four pillars, including the requirement that each student is expected to prepare a written abstract of the film *prior* to the classroom discussion of that film in which the student is expected to demonstrate a *practical* application of ethical principles to actual and concrete moral situations, constitute a new, unique, and tested way to teach ethics to undergraduate students of management and economics.

There are two fundamental types of wrongdoing. The wrongdoing that arises from ignorance and the wrongdoing that arises from a malevolent heart. In the first instance, the wrongdoer thinks he/she is acting properly. In the second, the wrongdoer knows that he/she is acting improperly and proceeds to act anyway.

To the extent that professional persons understand their ethical obligations through experience, mentoring, and instruction they are more likely to avoid the first kind of wrongdoing, and as they act upon those obligations serve as role-models for changing the malevolent heart or constraining its wrongdoing. In the end there is no instruction that eliminates all ignorance and changes all malevolent hearts because the personal rewards too often favor wrongdoing over rectitude (Kaptein, 2011). Our hope in sharing our own methods of instruction -- based on the four pillars of feature films, a six-stage ethical decision-making process, the principles necessary to address ethical situations, and the classroom instructor -- is that other instructors will find something useful in those methods that will help improve the critical thinking skills of their students so that they in turn are better able to make sound moral judgments.

DEONTOLOGY, CONSEQUENTIALISM, AND VIRTUE ETHICS

In the current business ethics literature there are two principal theories of ethical conduct that are foundational to teaching ethics: deontology and consequentialism. (Melé 2012, p. 27). Deontology is an enumeration of rights (what is owed *by* others) and duties (what is owed *to* others). Deontologically-grounded behavior is sensitive to enumerated rights and duties as moral requirements or prohibitions, *quite apart from the consequences either personally or globally.*

Immanuel Kant's first categorical imperative – “act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (Kant, 1785, p. 44) – is *the* foundational moral absolute because it applies to all rational human beings at all times. (McCormick 2005). Many years earlier, drawing on the law of nature that all human beings are equal, Thomas Hobbes asserted the law that “... no man require to reserve to himself any right which he is not content should he reserved to every one of the rest.” (Hobbes, 1651, p. 68). Recently John Rawls asserted that moral acts are the ones that we would incorporate in a social contract if we were unbiased (Freeman 2005). The acceptance of such duties as a full day's work for a full-day's pay, equal opportunity in hiring and promotion, and paying one's fair share are deontological in nature. So too is the condemnation of such practices as featherbedding, discrimination, and tax evasion. The U.S. Military Academy code of conduct for cadets -- “a cadet will not lie, cheat, steal or tolerate those who do” -- is deontological.

In contrast, consequentialist-grounded behavior conceives what is required and what is prohibited *strictly and only in terms of the consequences either personally or globally*. Consequentialism is basically related to the application of utilitarian philosophies, most of which consider Francis Hutcheson's greatest happiness of the greatest number, Jeremy Bentham's definition of happiness as the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain, and Henry Sidgwick's rational utilitarianism that offers the instinctive moral sense as the test of good (Medema, 2007). The teaching and widespread application of cost-benefit analysis in economics is consequentialist in nature. So too are the concept of Pareto optimality and John Stuart Mills' utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the

greatest number of people in which it is not just the quantity of happiness that is important but its quality, which was historically connected to non-economic domains by Alfred Marshall and Arthur Cecil Pigou (Bruni, 2004). George DeMartino's *The Economist's Oath*, which was published in 2011, is consequentialist in substance.

The need for professional ethics derives from the fact that when economists teach, advocate, recommend, design policy or institutions, give testimony in civil litigation, publish editorials, or apply their expertise in other ways in the public or private sector, they are taking actions that affect others in *consequential* ways. (DeMartino 2011, p. 13; emphasis added).

A third ethical theory – virtue ethics – has re-emerged in the last 20 years to assist in the ethical decision-making process through Alasdair MacIntyre's (1981) rediscovery of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. Whereas deontology focuses on duties and consequentialism on outcomes, virtue ethics addresses the moral character and the emotional aspect of the person engaged in making moral judgments (Hartman, 2008). In fact, virtue ethics is focused on the inherent character and absolute natural rights of the human person. (Roca, 2008; Melé 2009). Most recently, Domènec Melé (2012, pp. 227-244) has proposed uniting all three theories involving duties, consequences, and virtues into a single decision-making process that he labeled the "Triple Font of Morality." Under this unified approach, decisions are ethically sound in terms of the end sought by the person who is acting, the means used to attain that end, and the consequences and any situational factors. Melé (2012, p. 63) offers the following to illustrate how end, means, and consequences along with situational factors enter into a unified ethical decision-making

process. A gunman begins shooting at children leaving a school at the end of the day. A police officer arrives on the scene and must make a snap decision: shoot to kill, shoot to disable, wrestle away the gun. If in the police officer's judgment there was no way to stop the massacre short of taking the gunman's life -- the gunman was wearing body armour requiring a shot to the head, or the officer could not get close enough to disarm the gunman -- the officer's action is morally acceptable. In the language of police follow-up investigations, the officer's action is justifiable homicide. If, on the other hand, the officer could have stopped the gunman by wounding him or wrestling away his gun, killing him is morally unacceptable. In this example, stopping the massacre of the children is the end, killing or disabling the gunman, or forcibly taking the gun away, are the available means, and the need for immediate action, the gunman's body armor and distance from the police officer are the known situational factors.

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

The central goal of instruction in ethical decision-making for undergraduate students of management and economics is to develop the critical thinking skills required to function more effectively in the global marketplace and workplace. Because they rest on social values and principles that are enduring, these skills have a timeless quality in that once learned and put to use successfully they can be used again and again without fear of their becoming obsolete. To illustrate, the social value of equality -- all humans are created equal -- still instructs us powerfully today and tells us that the rules that govern us are to be the same for rich and poor, for men and women, for young and old, for white and black alike. The principle of private property -- a person has a right to whatever is created with

his/her own hands – is another example. However, while it is an irreducible and inalienable natural right, private property needs to be morally subordinated to the principle of the universal destination of the goods of the earth (Spieker, 2005). From time to time, however, we face values and principles that are in conflict and require resolution before any action may be undertaken in the workplace or marketplace. To illustrate, should a person who has built his/her own business from the start through hard work and the faithful practice of certain religious beliefs be required to operate that business in ways that are contra-indicated by those beliefs? ²

At times we encounter entirely new problems driven in part by technological advances such as how to limit employee use of company computers for personal business or how to behave as the work to be done is re-structured around new developments that call for more human capital (Vaccaro et al., 2009). The instructor's task is to sort out certain workplace and marketplace issues and to find a satisfactory resolution that preserves our fundamental values and principles. Powerful emotions quite often are stirred by the conflicts that can make finding a satisfactory resolution even more difficult. For that reason, there is a difference between knowing what to do and acting on that knowledge. The ability to articulate and defend one's ethical stance is what instruction in ethics is all about. A mastery of ethics transforms the student from thinking that is instinctual and superficial to thinking that is reasoned and profound. It is one thing to know that tax evasion, for example, is illegal. It's quite another to know why and when the prohibition on tax evasion is to be enforced or relaxed. Though we have never used Melé's expression "Triple Font of Morality" in the classroom, we have basically applied the same unified

approach that centers around duties, consequences, and virtues by replacing written case studies with full-length feature films to give students an opportunity to test and master the critical skills necessary to form defensible moral judgments in marketplace and workplace situations.

PILLAR I: POPULAR FEATURE FILMS

The following general values (cherished convictions) and virtues (good habits) are among those the student can expect to encounter: loyalty, courage, tolerance, community, fidelity, equality, benevolence, responsibility, freedom, integrity, discretion, perseverance, compassion. English-language feature films are used to present these and other values in conflict. In this regard, we do not argue that the passive viewing of a film is superior to the more active reading of a book. Rather, we assert that feature films have two huge advantages over written case studies. First, films more nearly mimic real-life experience than case studies because in a culture dominated by electronic media human beings are influenced more by what they see and hear than what they read. Second, with films, the student has to sort through many different life-like situations to find the moral situation(s). With case studies, that work in general has already been done.

Victoria McWilliams and Afsaneh Nahavandi (2006) use case studies their students develop and present in the classroom based on a current event involving ethical issues such as Martha Stewart's involvement in insider trading. Unlike our pedagogy, they do not discuss the process for making moral judgments, nor do they address the ethical concepts they use because those concepts are taught elsewhere in the curriculum. Sarah Laditka and Margaret Houck (2006) use case studies developed by their students based on their

personal workplace experiences but they do not address the process for making moral decisions, though they indicate that the cases reflected different student positions along a continuum of moral development. Further, they state that their experience with this methodology was based on teaching a graduate-level capstone course in health management that included no formal instruction in ethics and was part of a curriculum in which students had no opportunity to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to address ethical issues.

The student is expected to have viewed the film(s) scheduled for discussion at any given class period privately and prior to attending that class period. The student may rent or purchase these films and view them alone or with other students. Some of the films may be available without charge at the university library or public library. We recommend the following films, each one identified by the issue it addresses.³

Insurance Fraud: *Save the Tiger*

Coverup/whistle blowing: *Silkwood* and *Erin Brockovich*

Harassment: *Disclosure*

Public Corruption: *Marie* and *Witness*

Prejudice: *Gentlemen's Agreement* and *Philadelphia*

Worker Rights: *Norma Ray*

Blocking New Competition: *Tucker*

Work/Family Conflict: *Baby Boom*

Scam: *Tin Men*

Stock Market Manipulation: *Wall Street*

Land Use and Water Rights: *The Milagro Beanfield War*

Professional Ambition and Self-Promotion: *Working Girl*

Truth Telling and Personal Integrity: *Scent of a Woman*

Competition, Insecurity, and Obsession: *The Paper Chase*

Doubts about Career Success: *Jerry Maguire*.

The films we have selected are not intended to immerse undergraduate students in situations they are likely to encounter professionally. Rather, the films are intended to help students identify with clarity and address the issue of moral perception -- the first stage in sorting through any moral situation. Students who do not recognize the moral situation are not likely to think or act appropriately. Each student is expected to prepare a written abstract of the film to be turned in *prior* to the discussion of that film in the classroom, assuring that the student comes to the class prepared. A sample abstract that is inserted in our syllabus is presented in the appendix. The abstract is not a review of the film. It is instead a clear statement as to the issues raised and the final resolution of those issues as conveyed in the film. Hard copies of word-processed abstracts are preferred; handwritten abstracts are acceptable. The abstract is in effect the student's own written case study.

Our experiential method that employs feature-length film is similar to the methods used by others to teach ethics but differs in several significant ways. LaRue Hosmer and Nicholas Steneck (1989) used films and videotapes in teaching ethics to business, engineering, and law students. Their pedagogy differs from ours in four principal ways. First, all of their films and videotapes are documentaries. Second, their films and videotapes are viewed in class thus effectively limiting their length to 20 minutes and ruling

out the use of feature films. Third, unlike our students, theirs are not required to prepare a written abstract of the film assigned before the class meeting where that film is discussed. Fourth, our class size is much smaller than theirs – 20 vs. 115 students – allowing us to use the seminar method of instruction rather than the lecture method.

Russell Proctor and Ronald Adler (1991) urged the use of feature films in teaching interpersonal communication. They recognize that there are two ways to view films -- in class and out of class – with a preference for in-class viewing. We think that requiring a written abstract *prior* to the classroom discussion of the film provides the kind of control necessary to assure the students come to class prepared. As with Proctor and Adler, we found it helpful to have the film and projection equipment available in the classroom in order to review the film whenever the discussion indicated a need for clarification of the film's story line.

Jason Berger and Cornelius Pratt (1998) presented two feature films to upper-division students enrolled at two universities who were brought together in focus groups. Berger and Pratt were not teaching business ethics. They were determining the suitability of two specific films, neither of which appears on our list of films, to provide a pedagogical framework for finding solutions to ethical problems. In that regard, we and they are in agreement: films are effective instructional tools that can be selected by subject to provide the closest match possible to the degree programs in which the students are enrolled. The difference is that we have incorporated the feature films that we discovered work best in teaching business ethics.

Robert Lauder (2002) discusses certain feature films such as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *Wall Street* in terms of their potential for personal moral development but only hints at their use instructionally. IBS Case Development Centre (IBSCDC) encourages the use of movie-based case studies that derive from such feature films as *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Goodwill Hunting*, and *The Blind Side*. However, as with written case studies, the work of sorting through different life-like situations to find the moral situation(s) has already been done.

By using full-length feature films to teach business ethics, James Pilant agrees with us regarding the problem using documentaries or teaching films for this purpose. “They don’t work, that’s why ... A great film captivates. It pulls the attention” (Pilant 2010). Thus Pilant employs the first of the four pillars that are essential to our pedagogy, but it seems not the second or the third: the six-stage ethical decision-making process or the principles necessary to address ethical situations.

G.J. Rossouw (2002) recommends using films -- he doesn’t specify whether they are documentaries, teaching films, or feature films -- to teach behavioural competence and managerial competence, but not, as we do, to teach cognitive competence.

In any case, as instructors we attempt to achieve the following seven objectives:

- (1) provide greater sensitivity to the significance of values in the marketplace and the workplace;
- (2) identify specific values at issue in a given situation;
- (3) increase appreciation of the need to set priorities with conflicting values in order to resolve the issue(s) at hand;

- (4) broaden awareness that some values are specific to certain times, places, cultures, and individuals, and that others are more nearly universal and permanent;**
- (5) deepen understanding of the need to develop and make explicit a set of ethical standards and business principles for use in the workplace and the marketplace;**
- (6) enhance analytical ability in differentiating between common sense and critical thinking that is between norms and criteria that express those norms in measurable form;**
- (7) develop ease in articulating and defending one's own ethical norms in a business environment where conflicts and dilemmas are inevitable.**

MORAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Without some understanding of the complexity of the moral decision-making process, viewing and discussing these films will not achieve these objectives because they do not necessarily demonstrate why the action taken was morally right or wrong. Deciding whether the action was right or wrong requires an understanding of both the moral decision-making process and the principles that apply in the moral situation. The process is important because it is a learning process in which action taken contributes one way or another to personal moral development, depending on whether it is virtuous action or vicious.

Understanding the moral decision-making process helps the student progress beyond an instinctual decision that he/she may not be able to articulate convincingly to a reasoned decision that can be communicated effectively. One dominant tradition of Western culture is that thought precedes action and determines it. The scientific method, for example, is grounded in this convention. Ideally, the same may be said for thought and

action in ethical matters. (Blum 1991). Accordingly, we have constructed the thought process around five conceptually distinct and sequential stages: (1) perception, (2) discernment, (3) resolution, (4) assessment, and (5) decision. Before proceeding, two points should be noted. First, deficiencies in thought or moral reasoning or earlier mistakes tend to be incorporated in later stages (Bosco et al, 2010). Second, in the cognitive moral development field these five parts are addressed sequentially in various alternative models of moral decision-making. In practice, however, they often are dealt with simultaneously (Reynolds, Ceranic, 2007).

Our six-component model, which centers on the person, includes the five stages of *thought* in addition to *action*. This model resembles the Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development and James Rest's four-component model of moral behavior in some respects and differs in others (Myyry, 2003). Two points should be noted about the differences. First, Rest and Kohlberg are more concerned with how persons develop morally as they age and mature. We are more concerned with how the human mind processes ethical information at a given time faced with the behavioral and organizational constraints of a specific situation. Second, the bulk of Kohlberg's work focused on the moral development of children while our model reflects the accumulated experience of teaching ethics to university students.

PILLAR II: SIX-STAGE ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Stage 1: Moral Perception and Personal Knowledge of the Moral Good. In our model, perception is the first of five stages before moral action is initiated. Perception is defined as the ability to recognize that an ethical problem exists and that a person has some personal

responsibility to respond to that problem (Haidt, Graham, 2007). Perception varies from one person to the next in part because of differences in a person's knowledge of the moral good (Haidt, 2006) or in his/her own cognitive moral development (Blair, 2007). Given virtually the same external circumstances, persons with certain deficiencies in their cognitive moral development do not proceed past the perception stage of an ethical problem while others who are further along in their development move to the next stage.

Stage 2: Moral Discernment and Personal Ability to Think Logically. The second stage is discernment wherein a person states the ethical problem clearly. One must be able to think logically in order to discern, particularly in so-called ethical hard cases and dilemmas. As with perception, people vary significantly and observably in discernment (Doris, 2002; Hardy, Carlo, 2011). A champion or mentor can help discern the precise nature of the ethical problem a person faces. In any event, it is wasteful to proceed with an improperly or poorly specified problem because too often the outcome is deceptive. Presenting an ethical problem as a hypothetical case scenario, which is commonly done in teaching ethics, has one major shortcoming. In life, ethical issues are entangled and possibly hidden in many other matters both at work and at home (Bayles 1981). Further, the scenario may be so tightly drawn as to elicit responses to a highly specific issue in a controlled instructional environment without contributing to the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to deal with other issues outside the classroom. To act in a morally responsible manner, a person must be able to sort out the ethical questions from the rest of life. In this regard, the case method is wanting because the ethical issue already is set forth in explicit language.

Stage 3: Moral Resolution and Personal Ability to Think Analytically. The next stage is resolution wherein the complexities of the stated problem are tackled in order to arrive at a position that is personally defensible. At this stage, the ability to think analytically is crucial. Moral certitude is an important consideration in matters of resolution even when a person concludes that the problem cannot be resolved and therefore he/she need not proceed further toward action. By moral certitude, we do not mean knowing with the absolute certainty of the physical sciences. This is impossible in human affairs. Certitude means, instead, logically collecting and connecting all aspects of reality in a unitary perspective (Shaun, 2004). Thus, the morally certain person is able to defend a given resolution persuasively to others and to justify a specific resolution to one's own self, to that part of the intellect -- the conscience or inner voice -- that reminds us of the moral good.

Stage 4: Moral Assessment and Personal Ability to Assess One's Freedom. The fourth stage is assessment. Assessment questions a person's freedom to act in a specific moral situation (Leffel, 2008). Strictly speaking no real moral problem exists unless a person has some freedom to choose. To illustrate, prior to the development of sophisticated life-support systems in the care of very sick or injured patients no decision need be made about withdrawal of life support because none could be made. For any professional person this means that, insofar as technology presents choices that previously did not exist, new developments for example in finance such as credit default swaps and bundles of mortgage-backed securities introduce the double-edged sword of new freedoms and never-before-seen ethical problems. Assessment, in other words, can be technology-specific.

Stage 5: Moral Decision and Personal Knowledge of One's Duties. Decision is the fifth stage in the process of pondering an ethical problem. Decision questions a person's duty or obligation to act personally in the matter. Justice refers to the good habit of rendering to another that which is owed. A beginner can be supplied with a rudimentary knowledge of the basic elements of justice -- commutative justice, contributive justice, and distributive justice -- as they apply to the workplace and in the professions in just a few hours of formal instruction. As Ronald Anderson and others (1993) observe, the difficulty is balancing obligations that in a given situation make for conflicting demands. As with resolution, moral certitude is necessary before a person may act.

Stage 6: Moral Action and Personal Willingness to Follow One's Intellect. Action -- the sixth and final stage -- follows thought and is determined by it. In a narrow sense, at this stage, it is the free will rather than the human intellect that is engaged (Miller, Delaney, 2005). The question no longer is, "What is the good in these circumstances?" but, "Is one willing to pursue the good in order to make one's actions conform to the good (including the values of organizations such as one's employer)?" We see the moral good not only as the good of the individual or the good of society but also the common good -- a set of material and spiritual elements that function as the necessary conditions for the integral development of each person and the entire human community. Courage is the willingness to make behavior conform to the good even when it is personally dangerous. If the first five stages have been handled competently, personal courage probably accounts at least in part for differences among persons as to how they act in the same circumstances. The example that a champion or a person's mentor sets at this stage can be decisive because approval

and acceptance are basic human needs that certain actions, such as whistle-blowing, can undermine (Fisher and Price 1992)

The entire six-stage process is circular rather than linear. That is, a person's fundamental knowledge of the good is a prerequisite for sensing whether a moral problem exists and whether he/she has some personal responsibility in the matter. It also is determined by direct experience with the other stages, especially with the action stage. Given diverse experiences across the student population, the instructor should expect that some students are further along in their moral development and therefore their capability for making sound moral judgments than others. While cognitive moral thought precedes and determines action, we are convinced that action, in turn, conditions thought (Mattingly, 2012). Because continuous technological change provides opportunities for action that were not feasible before, and therefore forces action in situations where none was possible before, professional persons are compelled to continuously re-think the moral good and their obligations to others under changed circumstances.

PILLAR III: PRINCIPLES NECESSARY TO ADDRESS ETHICAL SITUATIONS

Principles are important because they are the tools needed to address ethical problems (Velasquez, 2011). It follows that any student of ethics should be expected to master certain tools -- we prefer to call them principles -- in order to address conflict in ethical affairs. Below we have listed several principles bearing on ethical issues that we have found helpful in teaching ethics to undergraduate students. In each case we identify these principles with the keywords associated with deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics in a unified approach to ethical decision-making: duties, consequences, and

virtues (Fontrodona, Argandoña, 2011). Because ethical decision-making cannot be reduced to a simple quantitative exercise, we offer no algorithm to help students sort through the different life-like situations in the feature films we have selected. In this matter, the skill and experience of the instructor is critical. Team teaching in which a specialist in ethics is paired with a specialist in management or economics can be helpful.

Principle of Commutative Justice. This principle sets forth the mutual obligation of the buyer and the seller in the marketplace and the employer and the employee in the workplace. Both parties have the same obligations: (1) to exchange things of equal value and (2) to impose equal burdens on one another. Any failure with regard to one or the other obligation by either party makes for an exchange that violates justice. "Knockoffs" are a violation of the principle of commutative justice that exceeds the legitimate diversity of utility-subjective evaluations of economic agents regarding economic gains and losses. A failure to meet one's obligations as set forth in this principle signifies that, even though both parties use one another in order to meet human material need, one uses the other to excess. That is, the one upsets the fundamental equality that must exist between both parties if free exchange is to take place again.

Principle of Distributive Justice. This principle sets forth the obligation of the person with superior responsibilities to those who are his/her subordinates. The superior's duty under distributive justice is to see that the burdens and the benefits are distributed among his/her subordinates in some equal fashion. This principle is violated whenever the superior discriminates along such lines as sex, age, religion, race, national origin. The person with the greater responsibilities has a duty to employ only those means by which the benefits

and burdens are shared among his/her subordinates in some equal fashion. Superiors do not neglect their duty under distributive justice when they distribute greater benefits to those subordinates who have shouldered greater burdens or have demonstrated an ability to shoulder greater burdens.

Principle of Contributive Justice. This principle sets forth the obligation of the individual to the group (whether the group is private, public, small, or large). Insofar as the individual derives benefits from belonging to the group, he/she has an obligation to maintain and support that group. A violator sometimes is called a "deadbeat," a "showboat," or a "freeloader."

Justice is one of the four cardinal or practical *virtues*. However, expressed in terms commutative justice, distributive justice, and contributive justice and applied to the workplace and the marketplace justice becomes a *duty* because without the faithful practice of these three principles the law of the jungle – the survival of the fittest and most ruthless economic agents – prevails (Roberts, 2012). The *consequences* are that order disintegrates and development is arrested or, worse yet, the world is divided into the haves and the have-nots.

Principle of Private Property. Persons have a right to what they create with their own hands. The thing that is created belongs to the person who produces it who cannot ignore the elementary exigencies of other members of the human community in accordance with the concept of solidarity connected to the principle of the universal destination of the goods of the earth (Benestad, 2012). Unlike justice, this principle is not based on a *virtue*. Nevertheless, as with the three principles of economic justice, respecting private property is

a *duty* in a market economy for the very same reason. Without it the *consequences* are that chaos prevails in economic affairs.

Principle of Association. Persons of similar skills have a right to form a workplace association in order to enhance their skills and thereby their own well-being. Note the connection with the principle of private property. Since humans have a right to what they create with their own hands, they also has a right to the means (an association with their fellow workers) whereby they can become more creative (skillful) and thereby better provide for their own needs and the needs of their dependents. Because a person has a right to enhance his/her own well-being, that person has a right to form a workplace association provided the association actually helps accomplish that end. However, a person cannot claim this right if the workplace association is harmful to the well-being of others. In the end, the right to form a workplace association derives from the natural right of all human beings to seek out the company and support of others in order to enhance their own development. This right is affirmed, for example, by the Wagner Act of 1935. (NLRA 1935). For that reason, respecting the right to form a union is a *duty*. Failing in this duty or undermining this right can have dire *consequences*: strikes, lockouts, boycotts, and violence.

Principle of Cooperation. A person at work with others on a common task has an obligation to moderate self-interest in order to accomplish that task. Note the connection between the principle of contributive justice and the principle of cooperation. The first is broader in application than the second. The second has special application in the workplace. In the workplace, work is the means by which persons meet their material

needs. Work is both individual and social: the value of what is produced depends in part on the amount and quality of work done and, if a person is involved in a common task, the amount and quality of the work of his/her teammates. Every worker has an obligation to do his/her best not only for his/her own end but for the sake of his/her co-workers and the end of meeting their material needs as well. If persons do not do their best for their teammates, they are in effect using those teammates as a means to fulfill their own ends. Under those circumstances, teamwork breaks down and work becomes more difficult. As with justice, moderation is a *virtue* (Danner, 2002). Further, as with commutative justice, distributive justice, and contributive justice, moderating self-interest becomes a *duty* because unfettered self-interest can have serious negative *consequences* when the positive-sum outcomes that originate in cooperation are replaced by the zero-sum results of enmity.

Principle of the Common Good. In deciding how to act in situations that will or may affect others for whom one has some responsibility, the person with superior responsibilities should choose the action that consists in the material and spiritual elements that are the necessary conditions for the *integral* development of each person and the entire human community (Maina, 2011). Note how this principle may be used to meet one's obligations under distributive justice. The end that matters ethically encompasses everyone who is affected by the means employed, whether the consequences are positive or negative. The means that produces the greatest (net) positive consequences is superior to all other means that might be employed in the same circumstances. There is no need to examine the means for their ethical content. Ethically speaking, the end is everything, the means is nothing. The principle of the common good reduces ethical decision-making to the

consequences of the action undertaken.

Principle of the Double Effect. When an action is morally ambiguous because it has two effects, one that is morally good and one that is morally bad, it is unethical to take action unless four conditions are met (Rossouw, 2003). First, the good effect is greater than the bad effect. Second, the bad effect is not intended. Third, the good effect is not the consequence of the bad effect; rather the two are intertwined in such a way that both proceed directly and inevitably from the means that are used. Fourth, the means itself is ethically good *per se* or is ethically neutral (Chappell, 2002). In terms of ethical decision-making, the principle of the double effect is chiefly a matter of *consequences* because it requires one to evaluate the effects of the action undertaken in order to arrive at a moral judgment. It is also a matter of *virtue* in that it forces one to also evaluate the goodness or wickedness of the act that produced those consequences.

Principle of Free Choice. If one is not free to act, one cannot be held morally responsible even when the action has effects that are morally bad. The use of a given means has ethical dimensions only when the person is free to choose that means or reject it. A woman, for example, is not unfaithful to her husband when she is attacked and raped because her freedom to choose was taken from her through superior force. In other words, for her to be unfaithful she must be free to choose to be unfaithful. Respecting this principle is a *duty* in economic affairs because negative *consequences* follow when one party to an exchange deprives the other of freedom of action. Specifically, by using force one party is able to deny the other party of the economic gain that is necessary for the successful completion of that exchange. For example, the monopolist extracts a higher price

because the buyer cannot purchase that product or service from another seller. The parties to any exchange are able to access the economic gains that originate from that exchange only when both are free to walk away from that exchange when the terms are not satisfactory.

Principle of Proportionate Force. In protecting one's own life or the life of another person against a life-threatening force, one may use whatever force is necessary provided it is proportionate to but not greater than the life-threatening force. In police affairs, the use of such force that leads to the death of the person using life-threatening force is called "justifiable homicide." In confronting an action that has life-threatening consequences, a person may employ whatever counter measure that is effective in neutralizing that threat. Even so, there must be a proportionality between the two opposing means (actions) so that whatever moral damage is done is held to a minimum (Dinstein, 2001; Brown, 2011). This principle is grounded squarely though implicitly in the *virtue* of moderation. Personal restraint is necessary in responding to the use of force. It is, in other words, a *duty* to restrain oneself in order to minimize the negative *consequences* of using force to protect oneself from the force being applied by someone else.

Principle of the Sanctity of Life. No one has a right to take another person's life. This principle has universal application, although its validity is most clear in the case of the innocent person. No one has the *right* to use means that would take another person's life (Paterson, 2003). The taking of life indicates that a judgment has been made to the effect that the life of the one who is killed is worth nothing or that it is worth less than the life or lives of others. That signifies, in turn, that most fundamentally all human beings are not

equal. It is the *duty* of all human beings to respect the right to life of every other human being that is based on the sacred dignity and equality of all humankind. With the exception of justified self-defense, taking the life of another human is the most severe form of slavery because it has the *consequences* of completely subordinating the will of the victim to the will of the perpetrator.

PILLAR IV: THE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTOR

The fourth pillar of an effective program of instruction in ethics is the classroom instructor. As with any other specialized instructional offering in the university curriculum, classroom instruction in ethics cannot be left entirely to the teacher with perhaps some sensitivity to ethical issues but no preparation in the specialized field of ethics to lecture effectively, impart the fundamentals of ethics to undergraduate students prudently, address their questions insightfully, and lead the classroom discussion intelligently. Minimally this means that the teacher involved has successfully completed at least some formal instruction in ethics and has displayed sufficient interest and competency in the topic to get published in the professional literature. Ideally instruction should be handled by two members of the faculty: one a specialist in ethics, the other a specialist in one of the business disciplines. As with all instructional endeavors, the key factors are the body of specialized materials mastered by the instructor and the skill that instructor has in effectively integrating those materials and conveying that body of knowledge to students. Regarding the course of instruction described in this article, we are unable to offer a detailed lesson plan for integrating the four pillars. Anyone who adopts our four-pillar instructional method must develop his/her own lesson plan.

A recent survey (NSSE 2012) involving 577 North American colleges and universities indicated that students spend on average 15 hours per week preparing for class or approximately one to two hours less than faculty expectations. Thus the business ethics instructor today faces the problem as to how to reach the typical student outside the classroom and hold his/her attention. In this regard, feature films offer considerable promise because they do what case studies cannot: by stimulating our visual and auditory senses they *dramatize* the issues and the consequences.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Though we have never employed Melé's "Triple Font of Morality" in the classroom, we have applied the same unified approach that centers around duties, consequences, and virtues to give students an opportunity to test and master the critical skills necessary to form defensible moral judgments in marketplace and workplace situations. Based on our own experience in teaching ethics at the undergraduate level, we have developed, tested, and presented a program of instruction that rests on four pillars: popular feature films, a six-stage ethical decision-making process, the principles to address ethical situations in terms of duties, consequences, and virtues, and the classroom instructor.

We recommend eighteen films that were identified and selected on the basis of their presentation of *different* ethical issues of significance in the marketplace or the workplace. For example, *Save the Tiger* addresses insurance fraud while *Tucker* exposes the problem of blocking new competition.

The following summarizes what is involved in the six-stage process.

1. Perception. Is there an ethical problem? Presumes *knowledge of the good*.

2. **Discernment.** Am I able to express the problem clearly? Presumes *ability to think logically.*
3. **Resolution.** Am I able to resolve the problem? Presumes *ability to think analytically.*
4. **Assessment.** Am I free to act in this matter? Presumes *ability to assess freedom.*
5. **Decision.** Am I obliged to act in this matter? Presumes *knowledge of one's duties.*
6. **Action.** Am I going to act in this matter? Presumes *willingness to follow one's intellect.*

As instructors, our attention focuses intensely on the second stage because unless a student is able to identify the ethical issue and state it clearly he/she likely will not be able to arrive at a proper resolution and may act inappropriately if he/she decides to act or may not act at all when acting is required.

With regard to the ethical principles necessary to address ethical situations, we enumerated and defined eleven principles including the three principles of economic justice -- commutative, distributive, and contributive -- along with the principles of the double effect and the sanctity of life.

We feel strongly that the ultimate purpose of teaching ethics is to help students develop the critical-thinking skills to be able to articulate and defend their own moral judgments and act accordingly in the workplace and the marketplace. Functioning "in loco parentis," we hope that our students never have to experience the kinds of terrible consequences that befell Karen Silkwood for reporting serious wrongdoing in the workplace. Even so, they need to learn that the real world sometimes rewards the unscrupulous and punishes the righteous, that taking a stand can be personally costly.

We would have liked to conclude citing clear empirical evidence demonstrating that student learning is enhanced when teaching is based on seeing, hearing, and doing (writing) rather than reading (case studies). However, the often-cited evidence that seeing, hearing, and doing are much more effective than reading, which originated with Dale (1969) and became known as the cone of learning, has been largely debunked (Fadel and Lemke, 2008). Even so, in that very same report, Fadel and Lemke assert that “significant increases in learning can be accomplished through the informed use of visual and verbal multimodality learning” and call attention to four studies published since 2001 indicating that “retention is improved through words and pictures rather than through words alone.”

Based on our personal experience in the classroom, we are convinced that feature films offer opportunities for learning, which are grounded in the visual image and spoken word, that are superior to case studies that are based on the written word alone, especially in a seminar where the student who has not prepared for class cannot fall back on skimming the text of the case study while the class is in session.

The traditional pedagogy for teaching business ethics hands the student the written case study and expects little in the way of student participation in a large lecture class. Our pedagogy requires the student to *write the case study* after viewing a feature film and expects much from that student in a small seminar setting. Simply put, students learn more and retain more when more is required.

Notes

- 1. We are most grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful suggestions. Nevertheless we alone are responsible for any errors.**
- 2. This question is at the heart of the current heated conflict in the United States regarding the Department of Health and Human Services mandate requiring private employer health insurance benefits plans to provide free preventive health services to women employees.**
- 3. Philosophy and Religion in Film: A List (no date) identifies “about 200 noteworthy films that deal with philosophical and religious themes,” including short lists of films under these headings: ethics, journalistic ethics, business ethics, and environmental ethics. None of the films enumerated above, which we employed successfully with our students, are to be found on that list.**

Appendix

Sample abstract of the feature film *MISTER ROBERTS*.

The critical ethical issue raised in this film may be stated as follows. For the first-line supervisor, which duty is the more important: duty to one's self, duty to one's subordinates, or duty to one's superiors (including, here, one's country)? A more instructive statement of the issue might be How is the first-line supervisor to balance the rightful demands of his subordinates and his superiors with his own personal needs?

The proper ethical balancing of the three duties of the first-line supervisor is a matter of prudential judgment. Even so, we are able draw some relevant conclusions which move us in the direction of a clearer understanding of the responsibilities of the first-line supervisor.

First, Mr. Roberts does not have an obligation in justice to seek a transfer to a combat ship and thereby expose himself to a greater risk of losing his own life. He can fulfill his duty to his country by remaining in his role as cargo officer. In other words, he is not required to completely subordinate himself to his country's demands. Even so, he may freely choose to seek combat duty and even risk his life in that role. Here, however, it is not justice that operates so much as love (of country, of shipmates).

Second, it follows that he does not have to completely subordinate himself to his superiors or to his subordinates. His own needs, in other words, do not have to be set aside completely to accommodate his superiors or his subordinates. Thus it is not the demands of justice that prompt him to trade his own prospects for a transfer for his subordinates' liberty. Rather it is an authentic love for his men, freely given and freely expressed. Given the command structure of the military and the fact that the balancing of duties is being done in wartime, Mr. Roberts is not free to leave and seek relief from the demands of an overbearing, ambitious, and manipulative superior by simply resigning. Further, he is not free to initiate a slowdown to protest the captain's orders since down the line someone's life may depend on the supplies that his ship provides.

Third, Mr. Roberts might have met his duty to his subordinates and to himself much more effectively by preparing Ensign Pulver as his replacement. Then he could have argued to the captain that he was no longer indispensable as cargo officer and that his request for transfer legitimately could not be held up. All of this could have been accomplished without Mr. Roberts failing in his duty to his superiors. To be precise, Mr. Roberts has not met his obligation in contributive justice to his subordinates to provide for their leadership after

his departure. This duty should have been more apparent to him given the great respect and affection he receives from his subordinates.

LESSON: perhaps the most demanding task of the first-line supervisor is the balancing of competing demands from above, from below, and from self, especially when a clear central value (such as the value of human life) is not at risk. This is what we mean by "prudential judgment". When this balancing of duties bears overly much on the first-line supervisor, escape through resignation is an appropriate and ethical decision.

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