Basic Moral Orientations - Overview

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On what basis do we make moral decisions?

- "Do what the Bible tells you"— Divine Command Theories
- "Follow your conscience"— The Ethics of Conscience
- "Watch out for #1"— Ethical Egoism
- "Do the right thing"— The Ethics of Duty

"Do what the Bible tells you"

Divine Command Theories

Being good is equivalent to doing whatever the Bible--or the Qur’an or some other sacred text or source of revelation--tells you to do.

"What is right" equals "What God tells me to do."

"Follow your conscience"

The Ethics of Our Inner Voice

- Conscience tells us what is right or wrong
- Often has a religious source
- May be founded in a notion of human nature
- Is often negative in character, telling us what is not right

"Watch out for #1"

Ethical Egoism

- Says the only person to look out for is yourself
- Ayn Rand, The Ethics of Selfishness
- Well known for her novel, especially Atlas Shrugged
"Do the right thing"
The Ethics of Duty
- Begins with the conviction that ethics is about doing what is right, about doing your duty.
- Duty may be determined by:
  - Reason
  - Kant: Do what any rational agent should do
  - Professional role
  - A physician’s duty to care for the sick
  - Social role
  - A parent’s duty to care for his or her children

"Don't dis' me"
The Ethics of Respect
- Human interactions should be governed by rules of respect
- What counts as respect can vary from one culture to another
  - Examples:
    - Can you think of some?
    - What is it that merits respect?

“...all Men/Women are created ...with certain unalienable Rights”
The Ethics of Rights
- The most influential moral notion of the past two centuries
- Established minimal conditions of human decency

“Make the world a better place”
Utilitarianism
- Seeks to reduce suffering and increase pleasure or happiness
- Demands a high degree of self-sacrifice—we must consider the consequences for everyone.
- Utilitarians claim the purpose of morality is to make the world a better place.

“Hey!, that's not fair”
The Ethics of Justice
- Begins early in the family with fairness to all family members
- What is fair for one should be fair for all.
- Treating people equally may not mean treating them the same.

“Be a good person”
Virtue Ethics
- Seeks to develop individual character
- Assumes good persons will make good decisions
- Developed by Plato and Aristotle
- Provides a way of integrating all the theories
# Classroom Application

## Your Initial Moral Orientation

How important are each of the following in your life?

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