

Creating moral spaces in environmental practice



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What is ethics?

- Ethics is a **conversation**
- It is the capacity to communicate about **our** preferred courses of action/inaction and a willingness to act on them.
 - There is a **'we'** to ethics
- Doing ethics is not just about making decisions, or finding the answer;
- it is about **creating a space** in the flow of events to have a conversation about what **value judgments** ought to shape our responses to situations

Getting ethics into the picture

- Acknowledge that it is already there to some extent,
- but often not at the same level of competency as our practice

- Need to promote 3 things ...

- **Legitimacy**
 - not being scared of the ‘E’ word
- **Literacy**
 - Knowing some ‘E’ words
- **Lucidity**
 - Being able to use ‘E’ words

• (after K. Goodpaster)



New models of ethical engagement

- *From*
- Quasi-regulation
- (ethics is not to law as margarine is to butter!)
- *to*
- **Transformative engagement**
 - creating moral spaces ...
 - personal & institutional ...
 - by creating and sustaining **relationships** that ...
 - *mutually* recognise needs and aspirations
 - Ethics builds and sustains communities



Professional ethics: what is a profession? 5 traits

- Professionals:
- licensed by the state to perform a certain act
- belong to organisations who promulgate standards and discipline one another for breaches
- possess esoteric knowledge or skills not shared by others in the community
- exercise autonomy over their work
- publicly pledge themselves to render assistance to those in need and as a result have special duties and responsibilities not incumbent on others who do not make that pledge.

- (based on Daryl Koehn, *The Ground of Professional Ethics*. (NY: Routledge, 1994)

Professional ethics

- **Imbalance of power** created by the expertise of the professional and vulnerability of the client
- To be counterbalanced by **a pledge to render assistance**
- Grounded in an obligation, founded on trust, that goes beyond what is required by others in the community

- Key questions in professional ethics

- **Who is the client?**
- How is my obligation to my client related to my obligations to other stakeholders and the community?
- What is the **shared good** that I am pursuing on behalf of my client?

Insights from applied ethics

- Ethics is not just about abstract principles to be universally applied
- Ethics involves **values & principles**, but also **identities** and **relationships**
- **‘In learning morality we learn who we are, to whom we are connected and what matters enough to care about and care for.’**
- Margaret Urban Walker
- *Moral understandings: a study in feminist ethics*, NY, Routledge, 1998, p. 201.



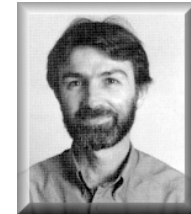
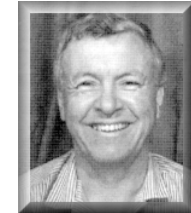
The new basic form for representing moral problems

- is not a theory or conceptual framework
 - but
 - a narrative (a story or history...
 - in a particular setting, with particular actors, unfolding over time)
 - an embedded account of ...
 - the adjustment of our situation to our values or of our selves to our situation
- Walker, Margaret Urban. 1993. 'Keeping moral space open: new images of ethics consulting'. *Hastings Center Report* 23, no, 2, 33-40.



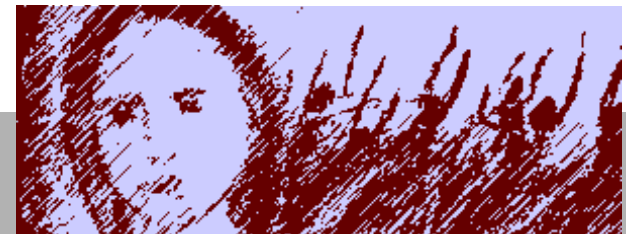
New dimensions to ethical engagement

- **Interpretative dimension: explore meanings**
 - what is going on here? What are the frameworks of the various participants? What do they think they are doing?
- **Identity dimension: appreciate particular constraints & possibilities**
 - is the richness, complexity and particularity of others being acknowledged – voices and stories
 - Do people have the power to choose? What constrains them?
- **Judgment dimension: explore ethical frameworks**
 - what values, principles, or virtues are important in this situation? Or are embodied in these stories?
- **Action dimension: do something about it**
 - what strategies for change are appropriate?
 - Are there possibilities to inform, educate, mobilise, mediate or resist?
- 'Mapping the applied ethics agenda', paper presented at the Third Annual Meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, Cleveland, Ohio, February 24-26, 1994



A broader set of ethical skills required

- Not just intellectual skills...
- but also skills of ...
- **perception** (noticing and attending)
- **communicating** (describing events and feelings)
- **responding** (listening, empathy, negotiating)
- aimed at ...
- seeking **shared understandings**



What becomes of our **cherished values** **and principles?**

- No longer major premises in a deductive argument, but ...
- **markers** of the moral relevance of certain features of our identities and relationships in particular situations
- of who we are
- of who and what we feel responsible for
- **shared point for departures** to explore what we ought to do

What do we talk about?

Values and principles revisited

- There are many to choose from
- e.g. the 'big four'

- autonomy,
- justice,
- not harming others
- doing good

Environmental practice (EIANZ Code of Ethics)

- Sustainable development
- Environmental protection
- Integrity of the natural environment
- Health, safety & welfare of the human community
- Personal accountability for data validity and analysis
- Discourage misrepresentation, dishonesty & bias
- Act collaboratively



Values and principles revisited (many to choose from)

- Caring for others;
- Honesty;
- Accountability;
- Promise-keeping;
- Excellence and self-improvement;
- Loyalty;
- Fairness;
- Integrity;
- Respect for others;
- Responsible citizenship
- **(CHAPELFIRZ)** (after M. E. Guy, *Ethical decision making in everyday work situations*, (NY: Quorum Books, 1990).
- courage, perseverance, hope, faith,
- truth, beauty, freedom and love (the Baz Luhrmann virtues!?)



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