

Gilligan was not alone in emphasizing the relational aspects of morality, but she was the first to identify gender differences associating relationships with a feminine ethic of care. Earlier in the twentieth century, French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas developed a moral philosophy of "the Other" following his experiences during World War II. Born in Lithuania, Levinas emigrated to France as a very young man and studied phenomenology with Heidegger and Husserl in the 1920s. For Levinas, the violence of the Holocaust, including his own imprisonment by the Germans as a French prisoner of war and the loss of his family, radically altered his views as a philosopher. He became extremely critical of the western philosophical absorption with the self and one's own being, insisting on the ethical primacy of the Other as the foundation of freedom. Levinas was influential in the development of French existential phenomenology and, especially, in the deconstructive movement associated with Jacques Derrida.

Emmanuel Levinas: I speak of responsibility as the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity. For I describe subjectivity in ethical terms. Ethics, here, does not supplement a preceding existential base; the very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility. I understand responsibility as responsibility for the Other, thus as responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as face.

Philippe Nemo: How, having discovered the Other in his face, does one discover him as he to whom one is responsible?

Emmanuel Levinas: In describing the face positively, and not merely negatively.... Positively, we will say that since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having taken on responsibilities in his regard. It is responsibility that goes beyond what I do. Usually, one is responsible for what one does oneself. I say ... that responsibility is initially for the Other. This means that I am responsible for his very responsibility. (Levinas, 1985, p. 86)

It is important to distinguish between the moral concern for others and the moral concern for relationships. Although Immanuel Kant's places the burden of moral agency firmly on individual conscience in a social context of duty, his analysis of moral reasoning is based on the primacy of human autonomy. His categorical imperative is not about the duty to uphold the integrity of relationships; it charges each individual with the moral duty of upholding the value of autonomy for every other human being.

Now I say: man and generally any rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, but in all his actions, whether they concerns himself or other rational beings, must always be regarded at the same time as an end.

Accordingly the practical imperative will be as follows: Do act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only. (Kant, 1788, p. 155).

Concern for the relationships that constitute community, however, is a fundamental concept of traditional morality. The moral systems of traditional societies often reflect similar views in their privileging of relationships of kinship and community over rational rules. Rule-based morality, dominant in Western societies, strives to preserve and protect the integrity of rules that put people on a more equal footing in situations of moral consequence. Relationship-based morality, probably a more pervasive approach in terms of the number of people in the world, strives to protect and preserve the integrity of relational systems: families, communities, organizations. On the other hand, the relational moral systems of traditional societies may place heavy burdens on individuals within a relational network of social hierarchy based on gender, ethnic, or class. Western moral philosophy, moreover, includes a strong ethic of human rights based on the assumed intrinsic value of each human being. Economist Amartya Sen, who won the Nobel Prize in 1999 for his work on ethics and political economy, has examined the ethical foundations of economic inequality on a global scale, particularly in traditional societies.

Traditional family relations in many societies have called for asymmetric sacrifices by some family members of the family, e.g. women. The survival of these traditions has often been helped by the acceptance of a particular type of "ethic" in which gross inequalities in living standards may not be consciously recognized and presented for assessment and acceptance. The issue of perception is a central one in understanding sex bias in traditional societies, and an ethical challenge to the traditional moralities call for some cognitive arguments. (Sen, 1987, p. 20)

Another aspect of relational morality is the community and culture within which we develop our understanding of morality. This "received" morality is the system of values, rules, and standards of moral judgment we internalize as members of a society. Although as adults we may question or challenge specific aspects of this received morality, we continue to function throughout our lives as members of a culture (and often several subcultures) whose values we share. Morality is rarely a completely private or independent concern.

Since all morality involves consideration of human relationships and their attendant moral claims and obligations, this workbook includes a selection of varied perspectives on the relational aspects of morality.

A relational view of morality suggests that:



- Morality is socially situated
- Morality involves multiple moral communities with competing moral claims
- Morality is a creation and consequence of human relationship

What are your thoughts about the relational views of morality?

MORALITY IS CONSTRUCTIVE

The basic concept of constructivism is that human reality is constructed as a search for meaning; reality is the set of “mental models” we create to make sense of the world and function effectively in it. This view differs radically from the longstanding platonic notion of reality as a fixed universe that humans come to understand only incrementally and incompletely. In the constructive view, the process of constructing and adjusting mental models continues throughout life in response to ever changing experience. Morality is therefore understood as a dimension of the mental models constituting our subjective reality.

Constructive theories of human meaning and knowledge emerged from the Kantian synthesis of rationalism and empiricism in his theory of human thought as the mediator of experience through the construction of interpretative patterns, or “schema.” Constructivist ideas are found, however, in the ancient philosophies of Lao Tzu (sixth century BCE), the Buddha (560–477 BCE), and Heraclitus (540–475 BCE). Modern Western theorists often trace constructivism to the sixteenth-seventeenth century thought of Giambattista Vico, and then to Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer

(nineteenth century), and Hans Vaihinger (nineteenth-twentieth centuries). Vico emphasized the role of myth and imagination in human social adaptation. Since Kant, philosophers have challenged the notion of "objective" knowledge of reality, asserting instead more or less verifiable subjective interpretations of reality. Observing that humans interpret the world around them subjectively rather than know it objectively, Martin Heidegger postulated human meaning as a "hermeneutic," or interpretive process.

Recent theorists have emphasized the role of cultures and communities in shaping the mental constructs through which individuals create meaning. Anthropologist Anthony Cohen points out the importance of symbols as "elastic" interpretive schemas that can be used to fit the circumstances of the user, permitting a process of meaning creation that is simultaneously individual and collective.

The vehicles of interpretation are symbols, which are by their very nature malleable, maneuverable, manipulable by those who use them. It is this character of symbols which permits them to be shaped to the interpretive requirements or inclinations of their users, and which reveals as misguided the representational theory of symbols as 'standing for' other things ... the interpretation and meaning assigned to symbols is usually not random; they reflect a pattern of meaning and interpretation characteristic of other members of a cultural group. Meaning, therefore, is simultaneously a highly individualized phenomenon and a social process that resists uniformity and codification. (Cohen, 1994, p. 17)

The implications of constructivist theory for morality are evident. Even people who comfortably embrace a normative moral code are constrained when trying to enforce or impose it in a political environment of free will and conscience. Furthermore, strategies of moral containment are less effective even within tightly boundaried homogeneous groups when members are free to leave and influenced by the broader social environment of plurality and individuality. Nevertheless, some normative moral meaning is necessary for a society to create and sustain markets, social institutions, and self-governance. Even normative meaning is subject to change, however, when diversity, mobility, and individualism establish conditions of constant change. In this context, an understanding of how humans create and negotiate effective moral frameworks is perhaps more essential than their specific moral content. (How does one argue the compelling merits of a moral standpoint from outside its conceptual framework?) Viewed as a creation of the uniquely adaptive human brain, morality is continually reinvented, consciously and unconsciously, as an amalgam of reason, emotion, practices and social context.

A constructive view of morality suggests that:



- Morality cannot be known objectively or absolutely;
- Moral meaning is created subjectively in a culturally context; and
- Morality is both normative and negotiated in a social context.

What are your thoughts on the constructivist views of morality?

MORALITY IS POLITICAL

One of the most transforming insights of the last century is that social relations are, in fact, power relations or, as Kate Millett said, “The personal is political.” While we normally think of the political sphere as the domain of public, civic, and government concerns, it is also clear that the separate demarcation of public political and private “depoliticized” zones of human affairs is in many respects a fiction. The term, “political,” is rooted in the Greek *polis*, or city-state. It was through the public institutions of the polis that Greek citizens (free, ethnically pure, male property owners) collectively resolved the challenges of urban living. Citizens were the judges, legislators, warriors, teachers, athletes, and business men who were also the masters of private households comprised of women, children, slaves, and various lesser individuals who were not actors in the public sphere and depended on their masters for personal protection because they had no civil rights.

By contrast, the modern “life of the polis” involves everyone, at least in principle. We have also come to understand that ordering the life of the polis is a complex endeavor reaching into every sphere of life. Why do we have laws about who can be considered a married couple? Why do individuals think they have a right to change the law to accommodate their unconventional preferences? How do we as a society

manage the tensions between the larger society and the individuals and groups who constitute the society? Modern cultural theorists have demonstrated that we manage this essentially political process in many ways that are more social than legal or regulatory.

French philosopher Jean-Claude Ruano-Borbalan addresses the deep political tension at the nexus of individual liberty and social order: When does personal freedom go too far in transgressing the conventions of society? When does social constraint go too far in limiting the individual's power of self-fulfillment?

Whatever the fields of inquiry (political spaces, organizations, individual relationships), power relations have been greatly transformed over the past half-century: authoritarian and hierarchical forms have been replaced more and more by negotiated and cooperative forms of power.

The question of power is essential for each person: Who decides collective interests? Should I submit to arbitrariness, to violence?, etc. Michel Foucault ... has shown that relationships of power are everywhere—in individual strategies, knowledge transmission, sexuality, or physical gestures. Robert Dahl ... expresses what has become a canonical definition of power ... "that an individual exercises power over another individual to the extent to which he secures from him the behavior, actions, or views which would not be there without his influence." Such a definition considers neither the means of power (terror, persuasion, etc.) nor the goals (passion, ideology, etc). Claude Riviere sees power as "the capacity to lead to effective actions" or "to produce the intended effects whether on things or individuals)." (Ruano-Borbalan, 2002, pp. 1-2, 13)

American educator John Dewey considered these questions as the crux of morality in the proper ordering of individual freedom and collective political will in a democracy.

Democracy as a moral ideal is thus an endeavor to unite two ideas which have historically often worked antagonistically: liberation of individuals on one hand and promotion of a common good on the other. The famous motto of the French Revolution, "Liberty and Equality," represent the values which belong to individuals in their severalty, their distinction from one another; "Fraternity" represents the value that belongs to them in their relations with one another. All history proves, however, that there is not automatic equation of liberty and fraternity with each other. How can fraternal relations be secured without putting individual freedom under restraint? History proves also that liberty and equality do not automatically tend to generate and support one another. Granting liberty to all has a tendency to produce inequalities, since those who have superior capacities or superior opportunities, rise, while those of inferior capacity remain stationary or sink. It has been frequently remarked that the American nation is more interested in equality than in liberty, and willingly places great



restrictions of freedom of action if it thinks thereby to secure a greater amount of social uniformity.

From an ethical point of view, therefore, it is not too much to say that the democratic ideal poses, rather than solves, the great problem: How to harmonize the development of each individual with the maintenance of a social state in which the activities of one will contribute to the good of all others. (Dewey & Tufts, 1932, pp. 94-96)

Some cultural theorists argue the omnipresence of power relations embedded in every aspect of social life. In this view, politics is not found only in the formal structures of government, but in the structures of family, social, professional, and even personal life. Two influential twentieth century European social theorists, Michel Foucault and Theodor Adorno, extended the moral analysis of power into broad cultural spheres not usually associated with the political. French philosopher Michel Foucault insisted that the dynamics of power are inescapable in the conventions of socialization.

Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated within it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (Foucault, 1977, p. 217)

German philosopher Theodor Adorno observed the political dynamics of the culture industry, particularly as it was commodified for mass consumption.

As a focus of regression, mass culture assiduously concerns itself with the production of those archetypes in whose survival fascistic psychology perceives the most reliable means of perpetuating the modern conditions of domination. Primeval symbols are constructed on the production line. The dream industry does not so much fabricate the dreams of the customers as introduce the dreams of the suppliers among the people. This is the thousand-year empire of an industrial caste system governed by a stream of never ending dynasties. In the dreams of those in charge of mummifying the world, mass culture represents a priestly hieroglyphic script which addresses its images to those who have been subjugated not in order that they might be enjoyed but only that they be read. The authentic images of the film screen as well as the inauthentic ones encountered in hit melodies and the well-worn written phrase appear so rigidly and so frequently that they are no longer perceived in their own right but only as repetitions whose perpetual sameness always expresses an identical meaning.... The

secret doctrine which is communicated here is the message of capital. It must be secret because total domination likes to keep itself invisible ... nevertheless it is directed at everyone.... The neon signs which hang over our cities and outshine the natural light of the night with their own are comets presaging the natural disaster or society, its frozen death.... It depends on human beings themselves whether they will extinguish these lights and awake from a nightmare which only threatens to become actual as long as men believe in it. (Adorno, 1991, pp. 94-96)

In a more directly political approach to morality and politics, German philosopher Vittorio Hösle, currently at the University of Notre Dame, proposes a “world ethos” that synthesizes the classical view that political philosophy requires an ethical foundation, and the more contemporary view that ethical arguments are themselves political. In a similar vein, Peter Singer’s (2002) book, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, identifies major challenges (environmental sustainability, poverty, globalization) that currently affect every human being on the planet, but cannot be resolved effectively via traditional nation state political structures. Like Hösle, Singer argues that these challenges—and the means we as a human community use to address them—are essentially political *and* moral.

A political view of morality suggests that:

- Morality has a political function;
- The exercise of power is a moral endeavor; and
- Politics and power relations inform morality.

What are your thoughts about the political views of morality?



Ultimately, each individual decides what approach to morality best suits the challenges unique to his/her life. You can use this workbook as an opportunity to articulate a moral compass that will help you live and lead with your values. New York University law professor Derrick Bell describes how his morality of *ethical ambition* anchors his life:

Let's face it. We live in a system that espouses merit, equality, and a level playing field but exalts those with wealth, power, and celebrity, however gained. Tremendous disparities in income and opportunity are generally accepted. Those disadvantaged by the system who should challenge the status quo are culturally programmed to believe that those who work hard, make it; and for those who don't make it, well that's just the breaks. Our nation's leaders, with few exceptions, are committed to getting ahead regardless of the cost to others. They may espouse ideals of social justice and equality on celebratory occasions, but then support or refuse to challenge policies that enhance the power of the already powerful.... It is hardly surprising that Americans as a people experience so much ambivalence about what we want out of life.

I have not found a life map or simple five-step plan with which to guide myself safely through the many disappointments and delusions of modern life. The temptations are many, and come in all manner of seemingly innocent forms. Recognizing them for what they are and then rejecting them is a continuing challenge. Experience has taught me that the recognition-and-rejections process, never easy, can be made feasibly by modifying ambition's drive with a carefully nurtured ethical component. Through ethical ambition, I have found it possible to avoid compromising myself at every turn to get ahead. (Bell, 2002, p. 56)

EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF MORALITY

Derrick Bell touches on one of the most troubling aspects of morality: the gap between moral rules and actual behavior. Sometimes people believe that the best way to close that gap is to impose tougher rules or to argue about the rules. While discipline and rational argument both have a place in a robust, rigorous morality, understanding the gap between rules and behavior invites inferences about human moral consciousness drawn from the previous discussions.

Human self-understanding includes spiritual, material, individual, and social dimensions of *identity* and *agency*. Identity, the understanding of who one *is*, is based not only on our actual material characteristics and capabilities (e.g., gender, stature, intelligence, athletic ability), but also on how these characteristics and capabilities are interpreted and assigned meaning in a culture (e.g., social hierarchies). Agency, the understanding of what one *does*, the material or physical expression of our iden-

tity, is similarly based on both our natural attributes as well as how these attributes are culturally interpreted.

THE PHYSICAL AND THE METAPHYSICAL

From the moment of birth (and before), the meaning of the human encounter with the world is mediated through the physical body. This encounter is further mediated and interpreted by thought and feeling. Even if religion were viewed wholly as a social phenomenon and the metaphysical domain were considered sense and essentially neural, humans inhabit a physical space that does not completely contain or define them. Human cultures and individuals reflect the diverse imaginings of metaphysical existence. The physical and metaphysical domains of both individual and collective human experience are distinct, although the boundary is porous. The differentiation of physical and metaphysical domains of the model does not represent a dualistic understanding of the material and nonmaterial world.

The concept of legitimacy is important for both identity and agency because of the way humans are materially and socially enmeshed in their cultural surroundings. Identity and agency therefore are negotiated in an ongoing symbolic dialogue whereby the individual may challenge, test, or comply with social expectations to establish a sense of power and legitimacy about who s/he is and what s/he is about. Some of this process is explicit (*You cannot practice medicine without a license.*), but much of it is subtle and symbolic (*What did she mean when she looked at me that way?*). Moral consciousness is deeply intertwined with the process of socially negotiated identity and agency through symbolic messages about what is good, bad, right, wrong, honorable, and shameful. Formal religious institutions actively engage people in symbolic systems that reinforce moral identity and agency in the process of reinterpreting them. Nonreligious people also create symbolic vehicles for engaging in a process of cultural conversation about moral meaning. When they do so they are employing a spiritual approach to morality, but it is not necessary for this spirituality to be associated with religion or even a deity. Spirituality as a human capacity is not necessarily contained or exercised within the structures of formal religion, but it flourishes in exploration of the moral domain.

SPIRITUALITY AND RATIONALITY

Human consciousness has actually been variously differentiated as a cognitive, or rational domain distinct from an emotional, or intuitive domain. While this categorization may not adequately reflect the complexity of the experiential fields of meaning and may appear dualistic, it does serve the analytical purpose of managing complexity by differentiating between modes of thought and behavior sometimes associated with the left brain (analytical rational, empirical, linear, objective, and

transparent) and the right brain (intuitive, creative, imaginative, affective, subjective, and opaque). The intent of differentiation is to emphasize a holistic understanding of both rational and spiritual modes of meaning, thought, and behavior. Thus the terms “spiritual” and “rational” can also be applied to physical experience. The ritual dimensions of human behavior can be differentiated from the rationally intentional. Although rituals are often associated with religion, Foucault has demonstrated that human create personal rituals (“technologies of the self”) to navigate and negotiate in their surroundings. A rock concert, athletic event, or graduation can be experienced as a spiritual ritual or as a rational event.

MORAL IDENTITY AND AGENCY

Moral identity and agency represent both individual and collective understanding of moral consciousness and the capacity for moral choice and action. The terms, “identity” and “agency,” include distinct aspects of moral consciousness of the self. For the individual, identity refers to a person’s self-understanding as a moral agent; agency refers to a person’s sense of purposive role and intentional actions as well as the freedoms and constraints informing his presence and actions in the world. In a broader cultural sense, the terms “identity” and “agency” define vehicles used to create meaning, generally differentiated in metaphysical (ideas, knowledge, codes, rules, narratives, etc) and physical (behaviors, art forms, architecture, material space) domains. Because we are material and spiritual beings, the boundary between them can be experientially porous and difficult to define. *Where does my intelligence exist? What is the boundary between my feelings and my body?* It is understood that agency includes signifying phenomena, that identity can be active, and that identity and agency are mutually informing. The cultural function of ascribed legitimacy and validation is also important in understanding both individual and collective understanding of moral consciousness and acts.

What are your thoughts as you apply this discussion to your own experience of morality?

The Moral Compass

EFFECTIVE LEADERS CULTIVATE A MORAL COMPASS

- A moral compass is the reflective, intentional adoption of values and behavior as a framework for realizing the good in oneself, in others, and in the social and material environment.
- A moral compass is reflected in character, decision making, relationships, and the impact on the social and material environment.
- A moral compass is anchored in a wisdom tradition of religion, philosophy, or culture.



Your initial reflections on the concept of a moral compass:

What about the concept of a moral compass would you immediately affirm? Why?

What about the concept of a moral compass would you like to challenge? Why?
