

## *Communication Ethics*

Stacy Murray is a communications major at a large state university. Last week the professor in her required senior seminar presented a variety of ethical theories for student consideration. Stacy had always regarded philosophical discussions as a waste of time, but after today's experiences she's not so sure. During the last twelve hours she has faced the following four situations in which lying seemed an attractive alternative:

1. The department chairman came in at the end of Stacy's morning TV production class to gather students' anonymously written evaluations of their instructor, who is under review. Stacy likes the young man who is the instructor and knows that he cares about students, but as a teacher of media technique he is hopelessly disorganized and inept. Should she ignore or downplay her instructor's defects so that he won't be in danger of losing his job, or should she tell the truth?
2. During a quick lunch in the student union, Stacy was approached by a student she knows slightly from her senior seminar. He told her he headed a group of students tutoring inner-city children every Tuesday night and asked her to volunteer. Stacy has always thought of this student as a bit of a jerk, and she is wary of being in the city after dark. Because she doesn't want to voice either of these feelings, Stacy is tempted merely to say that she is too busy.
3. The telephone rang while Stacy was having dinner with her roommate, Michelle, in their apartment. As Stacy reached to pick up the phone, Michelle blurted out, "If that's Sean, tell him I'm not here." Of course the next words Stacy heard were, "Hi, this is Sean. Is Michelle there?" As unfair as her roommate's plea might be, Stacy knows that a truthful answer will lead to a fight with Michelle.
4. When Stacy got back from studying at the library that evening, the graduate student in the next apartment asked her over for a beer. She accepted. Ordinarily Harold is a nice guy, but that night he was acting belligerent because he'd had too much to drink. When he

started talking about taking his car out for a drive, Stacy was able to sneak his keys off the desk and put them in her pocket. A few minutes later he asked accusingly, "Did you take my keys?"

Ethics has to do with the gray areas in our lives. When moral decisions are black and white, knowing what we should do is easy. We may not live up to our convictions all the time, but there's no question in our mind what we *ought* to do. I've described four situations in Stacy's life which many people would regard as close calls. The scenarios cover a broad range of issues involved in the question of verbal deception. The option of no response becomes increasingly difficult with each successive story. Lack of candor in Stacy's daytime dilemmas could be considered shading the truth, whereas the alternative to honesty in both evening situations is a boldfaced lie. The first two dilemmas are forced upon Stacy by the actions of others, while the last two are caused in part by her own actions. (She didn't have to answer the phone or pocket the keys.) It's also obvious that some of the situations are more serious—have the greater potential for harm—than others.

The ethical theories outlined in this chapter offer guidance to Stacy on how to communicate with integrity in each situation. All but the final theory fit into one of three distinctive approaches to moral decision making. The first two theories look at the consequences of behavior. Can a lie end up doing good or preventing harm? The next three theories focus on the rightness of an act regardless of whether or not it benefits the people involved. Is falsehood ever fair or just? Is it always our duty to be honest? The next group of three theories concentrates on the inner motives and character traits that make a person moral. Is the desire to tell the truth a virtue? The final theory raises the possibility that men and women could (and perhaps should) have separate ethical standards. As we work through the various theories, see which one makes the most sense to you. What theory gives you the greatest clarity as to whether or not Stacy is meeting her ethical responsibilities?

## ETHICAL EGOISM: EPICURUS

Cynics maintain that people care only about themselves, that everybody is looking out for number one. Ethical egoists say that's the way it *ought* to be. Everyone should promote his or her own self-interest. The boundaries of an egoist's ethical system include only one person.

Writing a few years after Aristotle's death, Epicurus defined the good life as getting as much pleasure as possible: "I spit on the noble and its idle admirers when it contains no element of pleasure."<sup>1</sup> Although his position is often associated with the adage "eat, drink, and be merry," Epicurus actually emphasized the passive pleasures of friendship, good digestion and, above all, the absence of pain. He cautioned that "no pleasure is in itself evil, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail annoyances many times greater than the pleasures themselves."<sup>2</sup> The Greek philosopher put lying in that category.

Epicurus wrote that the wise person is prepared to lie if there is no risk of detection, but that we can never be certain our falsehoods won't be discovered. He would appreciate Stacy's desire to avoid embarrassment for herself in the student union and to keep the peace with Michelle by lying to Sean. But what if both of them find out later? As for the ugly scene with a drunken Harold, she'd do better never to have gotten involved.

A few other philosophers have echoed the Epicurean call for selfish concern. Thomas Hobbes described life as "nasty, brutish and short," and advocated political trade-offs that would gain a measure of security. Adam Smith, the spiritual father of capitalism, advised every person to seek his or her own profit. Nietzsche announced the death of God and stated that the noble soul has reverence for itself. Egoist writer Ayn Rand dedicated her novel *The Fountainhead* to "the exaltation of man's self-esteem and the sacredness of his happiness on earth."<sup>3</sup>

Modern society needs no encouragement to seek pleasure. Bobby McFerrin's egoistic advice, "Don't worry, be happy," won a Grammy award by capturing the spirit of our age. Of course, the advice of McFerrin, Rand, or Epicurus is suspect. If their counsel consistently reflects their beliefs, their words are spoken for their own benefit, not ours.

Despite the pervasive nature of egoism, most ethical thinkers denounce the selfishness of the principle as morally repugnant. How can one embrace a

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philosophy which advocates terrorism as long as it brings joy to the terrorist? When the egoistic pleasure principle is compared to the life of someone like Mother Teresa, ethical egoism seems to be no ethic at all. The egoist would say, however, that the Nobel Peace Prize-winner is leading an ethical life because she takes pleasure in helping the poor. If charity becomes a burden, she should stop.

## UTILITARIANISM: JOHN STUART MILL

British philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill shared the egoist's concern for outcomes, regarding an act as good or bad depending on its consequences. He applauded the Epicurean view that pleasure in life is the only consequence that matters. But Mill took great exception to Epicurus' preoccupation with his own pleasure:

As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. "To do as you would be done by," and "to love your neighbor as yourself," constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality.<sup>4</sup>

Mill urged readers to seek the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Utilitarian morality requires a hedonistic calculus similar to the moral transformations described by social exchange theory (see Chapter 16). Picture Stacy staring at the blank teacher-evaluation form as she tries to compute the positives and negatives of telling the truth. At least she has a few moments to think through consequences before writing her thoughts, a luxury she won't have that evening when the phone rings at dinner or when she is challenged by Harold.

She imagines that her instructor will be hurt by an honest evaluation; he may even lose his job. She worries that he might read the forms and recognize her writing. On the positive side, students for years to come would be happy to have a better instructor. Stacy has to balance one man's deep hurt against the smaller joys that many students would feel. Utilitarianism permits one person to be sacrificed for the good of the group, even if punishment is undeserved.

The example points up a number of problems with judging the utility of an act. Mill would ask us to cast a wide net when computing pleasure and pain, but it's impossible to figure out all the consequences ahead of time. Stacy may overlook the long-term effect that lack of candor may have upon the larger society. Although white lies and half-truths are a social lubricant, continual soft-pedaling on classroom evaluations can erode administrative confidence in student opinion. Then again, the sting of truth may cause her teacher to seek a vocation where his people-oriented skills will be highly rewarded.

There's no doubt that the principle of utility is difficult to apply in specific

cases. Stacy would find it hard not to give an extra force to her own outcomes, unintentionally sliding back to an egoistic mentality. But there are ways to compensate for self-serving bias. Sissela Bok recommends adopting a "principle of veracity" which gives an initial negative weight to lies.<sup>5</sup> The administration of a utilitarian ethic may get complicated, but the ideal of caring about what happens to all people has a long-standing place in ethical discussion.

## THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE: IMMANUEL KANT

German philosopher Immanuel Kant took an entirely different approach to ethics than did Epicurus or Mill. They cared about consequences; he was concerned with the demands of reason and the moral law. They regarded an act as good or bad according to how things turned out. Kant heads the list of philosophers who define an act as right or wrong—regardless of the outcome. Kant's ethical stance is the model for Kohlberg's highest level of moral development. His condemnation of any type of lie is total:

Truthfulness in statements which cannot be avoided is the formal duty of an individual to everyone, however great may be the disadvantage accruing to himself or another.<sup>6</sup>

Stacy may be able to dodge the truth by not turning in a class evaluation, refusing to answer the telephone, or telling her unattractive classmate only of her fear of getting mugged. However, confronted with Harold's direct question and penetrating stare, Kant would say that she has a moral obligation to tell the truth ("Yes, I took your keys"). Some would suggest that Harold forfeits the right to a straight answer by his drunken condition; Kant would hear none of it. Harold doesn't cease being human because his behavior is unpleasant. Stacy's lying to Harold would violate human dignity, both his and hers.

If Stacy were an egoist, she would focus on her fear that an honest answer might result in Harold's slapping her around. If she were a utilitarian, she would also worry that when Harold hears the truth, he will grab the keys and drive off into the night. Perhaps she should lie to keep someone from being killed. But Kant regarded violations of ethical duty as a fate worse than death, no matter whose life is at stake. In the words of a sports-minded colleague who teaches ethics, "Kant plays ethical hardball without a mitt."

Kant came to this absolutist position through the logic of his *categorical imperative*, a term which means "duty without exception." He stated the categorical imperative as a universal law: "Act only on that maxim which you can will to become a universal law."<sup>7</sup> In effect, he said we should ask the question, "What if everybody did that?" If we can't live with the answer, we have a solemn duty not to do the deed.

Stacy needs to ask herself the question, "What if everybody lied?" The answer of course is that if some words are false, all words may be false. Language is stripped of any consistent meaning. Promises would not be kept,

trust would disintegrate, anarchy would reign. Since no rational being can live in a state like that, Kant's verdict is clear. Lying is always wrong! Case closed. Kant doesn't waffle on moral issues.

## SELF-EVIDENT DUTIES: W. D. ROSS

British philosopher W. D. Ross agreed with Kant in one respect—ethics is a matter of doing our duty. In 1930 he published *The Right and the Good*, which recognized six basic duties:

1. Fidelity—to do no harm to others
2. Reparation—to make amends to those we have hurt
3. Gratitude—to repay those who have helped us
4. Justice—to treat people as well as they deserve
5. Beneficence—to help others when we can
6. Self-improvement—to better oneself

Kant's categorical imperative equates duty with right reason. We are obliged to do what reason dictates. Ross said we don't need a rational method to discover duty—right actions are self-evident to anyone who desires to be good. He regarded the six duties as commonsense morality that we know by intuition. His assumption gains credence when we compare the duties he listed with the Four-Way Test of Rotary International:

Is it the truth?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better friendships?

Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Kant claimed that all duty is absolute. He couldn't conceive of a situation where universal obligations would fundamentally conflict. Ross, on the other hand, regarded duties as conditional. He could imagine times of tragic moral choice when to fulfill one obligation on his list above is to violate another. In those cases people should act so as to fulfill their higher obligation. The six duties are ranked in order of importance. The ones higher up are "most stringent" and take precedence over those lower down.

Ross puts telling the truth at the top of the list. Whenever we enter into conversation with another, there's an implied promise that we won't lie. Stacy wasn't forced to sign up for the TV production class, talk to the fellow at lunch, answer the phone, or walk into Harold's apartment. Communication carries a "trailing duty" of fidelity.

Stacy is caught in the middle between Sean and Michelle. It's true that she has a duty to help Michelle when she can (number 5) and to show gratitude for past favors her roommate has done (number 3), but the more binding duty to avoid hurting Sean (number 1) takes precedence. Michelle might protest

that a white lie would help rather than hurt everyone involved, but Ross would say that in our hearts, we know that's not right. There's really no way to argue with an intuitionist.

Most ethical thinkers are bothered that Ross seems to appeal to sentiment rather than reason. And cultural relativists scoff at the idea that people have a universal inborn standard of right and wrong. For example, ethical egoism seems little more than a concern for personal face restoration that springs from an individualistic, low-context culture. By the same token, utilitarianism parallels the concern for face-giving that is typical of a collectivistic, high-context culture.

In response to these criticisms, intuitionists use a "test of publicity" to make sure they aren't being guided by individual whim. One president of a Fortune 500 company described the test this way: "I try to act as if everything I do will be published on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*. Most likely it will." Readers can generally agree on what's right and wrong.

## JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS: JOHN RAWLS

John Rawls' theory of justice doesn't depend on intuition to determine what is right. The modern American philosopher assumes that, given a fair procedure for reaching a decision, rational people would agree to give each other equal amounts of liberty—as much freedom as possible. But differences in status, power, wealth, and intelligence give some privileged members of society unequal clout when the moral ground rules of society are hammered out. As both Stuart Hall and Cheri Kramarae suggested, the "oughts" of life get crafted to serve the vested interests of those who represent the dominant ideology (see Chapters 30 and 37).

In order to discover ethical rules that would promote freedom for everybody, Rawls creates the fiction of an ethical discussion held before we enter the world. Everyone would be required to agree on binding rules of behavior before they had any idea of which place in society they would occupy. It's his way of defining an ethical system that won't leave anyone out. Rules could not be tailor-made to serve selfish ends because it's hard to be self-serving when you don't know which "self" you'll be.

"I assume that all parties are situated behind a veil of ignorance," Rawls begins, and then goes on to describe people's fear that they might be poor, powerless, or oppressed. Freedom without real opportunity would be meaningless. Behind the veil of ignorance, rational people would craft rules of justice that would protect themselves in case fate were to put them at the bottom of the societal heap. The disadvantaged need justice. Those on top can take care of themselves.

Rawls' theory of justice protects people who are in a "one-down" position (see Rogers and Farace, who are discussed in Chapter 15). He would assume that Stacy has an ethical obligation to use her gifts to help raise the reading level of kids in the underclass. She is wrong to dismiss the request, and lying

about her reasons merely compounds the injustice. Since the force of a lie is more easily sustained by those who have power, ethical rules developed behind the veil of ignorance would maintain equality by condemning deceit.

Perhaps Rawls is asking us to do the impossible. Despite a willingness to pretend being born among the downtrodden, our ethical sensitivities may be tainted by being brought up in a class of privilege, in a country of power. Even in our imagination, it's hard to go behind the veil. But Rawls' idea of the greatest benefit for the least advantaged seems to offer the strong points of utilitarianism without sharing the drawbacks. Rules devised behind a true veil of ignorance would be scrupulously fair.

## THE GOLDEN MEAN: ARISTOTLE

The theories discussed up to this point are concerned with ethical *behavior*. Does an *act* produce good or bad? Is it right or wrong to *do* a certain deed? This focus undoubtedly springs from our western bias toward action. Many ancient Greek and eastern philosophers have spoken of ethics in terms of character rather than conduct, inner disposition instead of outer behavior. Hebrew and Christian scriptures praise "the pure in heart."

Aristotle took the Greek admiration for moderation and elevated it into a theory of virtue. When Barry Goldwater was selected as the Republican party's nominee for president in 1964, he boldly stated: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice . . . moderation in the pursuit of justice is not virtue."<sup>8</sup> Aristotle would have disagreed. He assumed virtue always stands between two vices.

Consider the issue of risk taking. At one extreme is cowardliness—the cringing fear that comes from paying too much attention to danger. On the other extreme is foolhardiness—a rash disregard of possible tragic results if things turn bad. The virtue of courage occupies the middle ground. The same analysis holds for matters of money, sex, and power.

<i>Extreme</i>	<i>Golden Mean</i>	<i>Extreme</i>
Stinginess	Generosity	Wastefulness
Frigidity	Sensuality	Lustfulness
Weakness	Assertiveness	Aggressiveness

Aristotle sees wisdom in the person who avoids excess on either side. Moderation is best: virtue develops habits that seek to walk the middle way. He calls that path the "golden mean."

In regard to communication, Aristotle held that "falsehood is in itself mean and culpable, and truth noble and full of praise."<sup>9</sup> This doesn't suggest that a person must voice every unspoken thought. The golden mean for Stacy might look like this:

<i>Extreme</i>	<i>Golden Mean</i>	<i>Extreme</i>
Lie	Truthful statements	Tell all
Secrecy	Self-disclosure	Soul-baring

Stacy can (1) express reservations about her instructor's ability without being cruel, (2) admit her fears but not tear down the fellow who is doing the commendable task of tutoring, and (3) tell Sean on the phone that this is not a good time to talk to Michelle. Some would regard this moderate approach as "peace at any price" or "don't rock the boat." Aristotle calls temperate behavior a virtue.

## DIVINE WILL: AUGUSTINE

Augustine said, "Love God and do what you will." Rather than encourage license, the statement reflects the fifth-century Catholic bishop's belief that people who truly love God will desire to bring all their actions into line with His will. Augustine drew a distinction between symbolic citizenship in the city of Babylon and the city of Jerusalem. Residents of the former are lovers of pleasure, the world, and themselves. Inhabitants of the latter are lovers of God who desire to submit to His law. "Let each one question himself as to what he loveth," Augustine wrote, "and he shall find of which [city] he is a citizen."<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary adherents to divine will morality may be less metaphorical, but they are equally convinced that ethics is a branch of theology. Along with the players in the rock opera *Godspell*, they pray the centuries-old prayer to

See Thee more clearly,  
Love Thee more dearly,  
Follow Thee more nearly,  
Day by day.<sup>11</sup>

Augustine believed that those who sincerely desire to follow God will have no difficulty discovering His will for their lives. The Bible presents the law of the land for residents in the city of God. Speech was given to humans by God so that they could make their thoughts known to each other.

To use speech, then, for the purpose of deception, and not for its appointed end, is a sin. Nor, are we to suppose that there is any lie that is not a sin because it is sometimes possible, by telling a lie to do service to another.<sup>12</sup>

The Ninth Commandment is clear—"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

On the basis of his essay "On Lying," Augustine would urge Stacy to tell the truth in each situation, no matter how painful the human consequences. Unlike Kant, Augustine does recognize gradations in the seriousness of lies. Lies aimed to help others aren't as bad as those which aim to hurt. Deception to keep Harold off the road would be less wrong than false charges against Stacy's instructor made for the purpose of getting him fired. But all lies hurt our relationship with God. "If any lies . . . steal upon us, they should seek not to be justified but to be pardoned."<sup>13</sup>

There are two obvious questions to be posed to the person who takes a divine will position: (1) Are you sure you have the right god? (2) Are you certain you know what that higher authority wants? The *Bible*, the *Koran*, the *Tao-te Ching* aren't always explicit about what is pleasing in every situation. Even devout believers can disagree about what Stacy should do in each case. But there is general agreement among believers of various faiths that obligation to God parallels the guidelines summarized in the Hebrew scriptures:

He has showed you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God.<sup>14</sup>

### DIALOGIC ETHICS: MARTIN BUBER

Martin Buber was a Soviet Jewish philosopher and theologian who immigrated to Palestine prior to World War II and died in 1965. His ethical approach focuses on relationships between people rather than on moral codes of conduct. Often referred to as "Kant with a heart," Buber used poetic language to convey the importance of our attitude toward another person: "Each should regard his partner as the very one he is."

Buber believed that true dialogue between persons is the essence of ethics. He constantly referred to the "between," the "interhuman," the "transaction," and the "mutuality" available through dialogue. Monologue creates an I-It relationship that treats the other as a thing. Dialogue creates an I-Thou relationship in which the other person is seen as created in the image of God. He agreed with Kant that people are ends, not means. We have an ethical responsibility to use things and value people rather than the other way around.

Buber used the image of the "narrow ridge" to picture the tension of dialogic living. On one side of the moral path is the gulf of subjectivism where there are no standards. On the other side is the plateau of absolutism where rules are etched in stone: "On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where I and Thou meet, there is the realm of the Between."<sup>15</sup> "Living the narrow-ridge philosophy requires a life of personal and interpersonal concern, which is likely to generate a more complicated existence than that of the egoist or the selfless martyr."<sup>16</sup> Like Bakhtin's dialectical tension that is the "deep structure" of interpersonal relationships (see Chapter 17), Buber's narrow ridge is not a golden mean that rejects the extremes. Dialogic relationships recognize and embrace opposites: "Life is usually lived in the midst of the unity of contraries."

Although a dialogic ethic doesn't tell Stacy what she should do, Buber did say that people who desire to live uprightly with each other will put aside concerns for creating a favorable impression or sustaining an image. Truth comes from the spontaneous transparency of self with others, whereas warped communication puts all its energy into "seeming." If Stacy desires

genuine dialogue, she will concentrate instead on "being." This means an honest disclosure of her anxiety about tutoring in the ghetto, a sensitive confession of her prior prejudice toward the student who asked her to tutor, and a willingness to listen to his hopes and fears. An I-Thou relationship with Harold involves discarding any sense of superiority she might feel because of his condition.

Buber may have called for moral heroics that simply can't be sustained in casual relationships. Consider the traffic jam which would result from an attempt to have an I-Thou relationship with a tollbooth collector. But his dialogic stance is the forerunner of Rogers' principle of congruence (see Chapter 3) and Maslow's self-actualized human being (see Chapter 10). Buber's emphasis on the person-in-relationship elevates open communication to a virtue.

## A DIFFERENT VOICE: CAROL GILLIGAN

Carol Gilligan is professor of education in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*, presents a theory of moral development which claims that, when they confront moral dilemmas, women tend to think and speak in an ethical voice different from that of men. Gilligan's view of gender differences parallels Tannen's analysis of men as wanting independence, women as desiring human connection (see Chapter 36). Gilligan is convinced that most men seek autonomy and think of moral maturity in terms of *justice*. She's equally certain that women desire to be linked with others and regard their ultimate ethical responsibility as one of *care*.

Gilligan says that men who are serious about ethics tend to echo the call of Kant, Ross, and Rawls to fulfill one's duty, be fair to others, and do the right thing. If it was Stan rather than Stacy who faced the four moral dilemmas posed at the start of the chapter, he'd likely make his ethical choices on the basis of personal rights, group obligations, or universal laws. For example, he would probably conclude that he ought to be honest on the class evaluation form regardless of the consequences for the teacher.

Gilligan contrasts women who care with men who are fair on the basis of the quantity and quality of feminine relationships. Individual rights, equality before the law, fair play, a square deal—all these ethical goals can be pursued without personal ties to others. Justice is impersonal. But sensitivity to others, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and peacemaking all reflect interpersonal involvement. Care comes from connection. Stacy can't respond to demands for the truth about the location of her roommate or the car keys of Harold without considering the responsibility she feels to prevent pain and alleviate suffering. She'll probably value Mill's concern for others' welfare and Buber's insistence on genuine I-Thou relationships more than insistence on abstract justice.

Although Gilligan's theory is more descriptive than proscriptive, the underlying assumption is that *the way things are* reflects *the way things ought to*

*be.* Most ethical theorists are disturbed at the idea of a double standard—justice from some, care from others. Moral philosophy has never suggested different ethics for different groups. Every other theory covered in this chapter assumes a moral standard that applies to everyone. But readers of both sexes report that Gilligan's theory resonates with their personal experience. She even holds out the possibility that the voice of justice and the voice of care could eventually blend into a single human sound. If so, the result might be a caring law that resembles the Golden Rule—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

## DIFFERENT METHODS FOR DISCOVERING THE SAME TRUTH

By this time your eyes may glaze over at the variety of approaches available to those who are willing to consider ethical responsibility. Students typically have one of three reactions to the multiple options presented by ethical theorists. One response is to throw up their hands in dismay and vow not to worry about what is good, right, or noble. That's unfortunate. Even if we decide not to worry about ethics, we still are involved with ethics every day. Each choice we make has a moral component. Choosing not to select an ethical first principle is a decision to let our actions be ruled by whim or passion. Just as computers have a default drive that kicks in unless an alternative mode is chosen, so our moral choices seem to be driven by an egoistic search for pleasure unless we consciously opt for another ethical path.

A second response to the diversity of ethical theory is to pick and choose separate approaches to fit different interactions. Stacy might take an egoistic stance when required to fill out an evaluation form, adopt a utilitarian approach when asked to be a tutor, react with a Kantian inflexibility in response to her roommate's request to lie, and employ a dialogic attitude toward Harold. This pick-and-choose approach to ethical conduct seems like the medieval assertion that any practice was legitimate as long as one could find a single priest to condone it. A situational approach to morality defeats the purpose of having normative principles that are designed to provide guidance regardless of the circumstances.

The third possible response is to select one of these time-honored ways of making ethical decisions, and then live according to its dictates when you face hard choices in life. Perhaps you are bothered by the idea that two or more people can in good faith select different ethical standards. If so, remember that a basic assumption made by Mead, Maslow, Geertz, Walter Fisher, and others is that human beings are different from animals. Isn't it more human to live an "examined life" of choice rather than merely reacting to the demands of instinct? Also, consider how you would respond to adherents of each of these moral positions. Wouldn't you rather converse with almost any of them rather than with someone who claimed not to be guided by any moral principle?

In spite of their varied methods for determining where to draw the line on deception, the common counsel of each of these theorists is that Stacy should not lie. This is not to suggest that each theory is equally valid or that it makes no difference which principle we adopt as our highest court of appeal. But aligning ourselves with men and women of goodwill who have subscribed to a consistent ethical stance increases the probability that we will communicate with integrity.

## QUESTIONS TO SHARPEN YOUR FOCUS

1. What is the main difference between *ethical egoism* and *utilitarianism*? Kant's *categorical imperative* and Ross' *self-evident duties*? Aristotle's *golden mean* and Buber's *dialogic ethics*?
2. Can you conceive of an action that would be *loving* but *unjust*? How about behavior that is *unloving* but *just*? Could a person act in both a loving and just manner, yet still not be *virtuous*?
3. Some of the ethical theories require a high level of mental work to figure out what is *good*, *right*, or *virtuous*. Others involve little or no *cognitive effort*. Which ones are "no-brainers"?
4. There's a natural link between some ethical positions and theories presented earlier in the book. What ethical theory ties in with Rogers' *existential theory*? Thibaut and Kelley's *social exchange theory*? Hall's *critical theory*?

## A SECOND LOOK

*Recommended resource:* Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, Pantheon, New York, 1978.

*Doing ethics:* Clifford Christians, Kim Rotzoll, and Mark Fackler, "Ethical Foundations and Perspectives," in *Media Ethics*, 3d ed., Longman, New York, 1991, Chap. 1.

*Ethical egoism:* Edward Regis, "What Is Ethical Egoism?" *Ethics*, Vol. 91, 1980, pp. 50-62.

*Utilitarianism:* John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, J. W. Parker, London, 1843, Book VI, Chapter XII.

*Categorical imperative:* Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, H. J. Paton (trans.), Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1964, pp. 69-71, 82-89.

*Self-evident duties:* W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Oxford University, Oxford, 1930, pp. 1-47.

*Veil of ignorance:* John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1971, pp. 136-142.

*Golden mean:* "Nicomachean Ethics," in *Introduction to Aristotle*, Richard McKeon (ed.), Random House, New York, 1947, pp. 331-347.

*Divine will:* Augustine, "On Lying" and "Against Lying," *Treatises on Various*

- Subjects*, Vols. 14 and 16, R. J. Deferrari (ed.), Catholic University, New York, 1952.
- Dialogic ethics*: Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1947, pp. 1-39.
- A Different Voice*: Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1982.
- Overview of communication ethics*: Richard Johannesen, *Ethics in Human Communication*, 3d ed., Waveland Press, Prospect Heights, Ill., 1990.

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- 1 J. M. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, Eng., 1972, p. 124.
  - 2 Epicurus, "Leading Doctrines, 8," cited in R. D. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1910, p. 185.
  - 3 Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead*, Signet, New York, 1971, p. x.
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