Ethics and Problem Solving: Pathway to Happiness!

Dr. Penelope Keough, National University, San Diego, California, USA

E-Leader Conference, June, 2015
Prague, Czech Republic

Simplifying Difficult Decisions When Faced with Moral Dilemmas

Abstract of Paper

- This presentation explains an efficient way for professionals to solve moral dilemmas that confront them in their daily practice.

- An overview of cognitive psychology will be explored as it relates to how one looks at solving perplexing life issues.

- Various case studies will be examined to illustrate the efficiency of applying a template based on the Ethics Game (Baird, et. al, 2011) and cognitive psychology.

- This paper will serve as a springboard to applying Kohlberg's theory of moral decision making to any issue that impedes one's professional career.

- The purpose of the presentation is to synthesize major psychological theories with the "Ethics Games" and show that any moral dilemma can be solved by using the correct positive mindset, based on psychological theory and superimposing a basic "ethical' template to reach a conclusive decision.

- A synthesis of the process will be explored step by step and provide a benefit to the educational, business and professional communities. The presentation will culminate in providing examples to the audience for their practice in finding solutions to moral dilemmas.

Ethics Game (Baird, C. & Niacaris, J., 2011) –
Based on 36 questions divided into 18, rationality-sensibility axis and 18 on the autonomy-equality axis

Ethical Lens Inventory Results

Your personal preferred lens is:

Results Lens

You listen to your intuition (sensibility) to determine the greatest good for each individual (autonomy).

Your Core Values: Autonomy and Sensibility

You prioritize the value of autonomy over equality. Your primary concern is protecting individual rights. You believe this is the best way to assure that everyone in the community is treated fairly.

You prioritize the value of sensibility over rationality. You believe the best results are achieved by examining each situation in its own context rather than applying one-size-fits-all solutions.

Your Classical Values: Prudence

You demonstrate wisdom in practical matters and foresight as you act with enlightened self-interest in a particular situation. You also bring optimism, imagination and the gift of entrepreneurship to the table.

Your Key Phrase: "I make choices that are good for everyone."

Because you value autonomy and sensibility, you tend to assume that each person operates from a clear sense of their own values.

Your Definition of ethical behavior: Creating the Greatest Good

You define an ethical person as one who makes responsible choices that benefit many different individuals at the same time. You seek "win-win" results for everyone, even in complex situations.

RATIONALITY

Rights/Responsibilities Lens

Relationship Lens

AUTONOMY

EQUALITY

Results Lens

Reputation Lens

SENSIBILITY

Decision Making is Based On:

- A person's values

- A person's core beliefs

- A person's blueprint, i.e. "what historical events have shaped the person's history

- A person's cultural lens

- Even a person's "number" in the family can influence decision making (first child, middle child, youngest – only child?)

- Ethical behavior (Kohlberg)

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Preconventional Level

- Stage 1 – *Obedience/Orientation* (avoids punishment by obeying rules)

- Stage 2 - *Right and wrong is determined by personal needs* (It's right cause I need it)

Conventional Level

- Stage 3 – *Being nice/relationships orientation* – pleases others

- Stage 4 - *Law and order orientation*– legal authorities obeyed; social order protected

Postconventional Level (Principled) Level

- Stage 5 – *Social Contract Orientation*-socially agreeable standards, moral majority

- Stage 6 – *Universal Ethical Principles Orientation*- human dignity- no matter what!

Solving Difficult Decisions
A Simplified Analysis:

- Participant determines what quadrant he/she performs in

- Participant determines what stage of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development he/she operates in

- For example, if a participant falls in the lower right quadrant he/she favors equality and sensibility and view the world through a reputation lens.

- Partnered with Kohlberg's Post Conditional Theory of Moral Development (for the greatest good/social justice), the participant will solve problems by applying values espousing good character and what is good for the community.
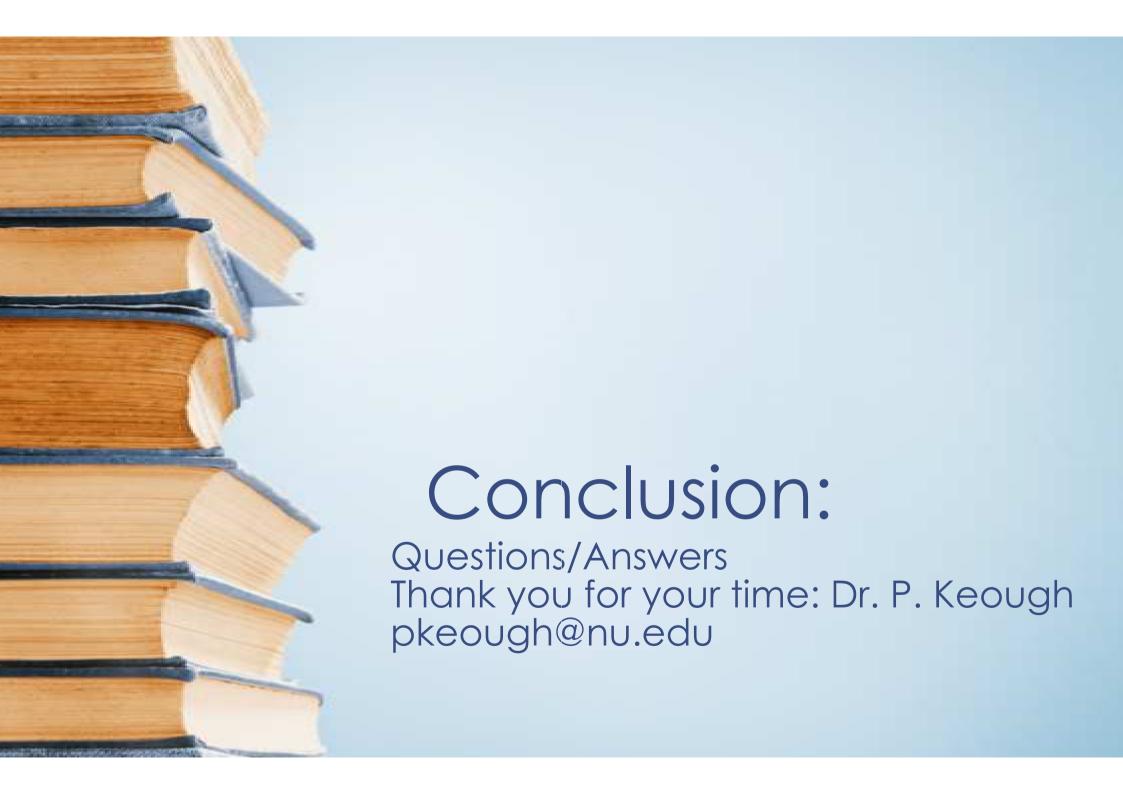
Variable in Thought Process: Albert Ellis

- Rational Emotive Therapy (founding father – Albert Ellis)

- Ellis favored getting rid of negative, burdensome and "broken record" thoughts by the one immersing him/herself in whatever the issue might be. In other words, "feel the fear and do it anyway".

- Cognitive therapy also plays a role in ridding one of "stinkin-thinking".

- Cognitive therapy problem solving involves self monitoring and self instruction (Kauffman, 2005) to program oneself to eliminate the negative thought as soon as it enters one's mind or even "subconscious".

Case Study: What do you do?

- Your spouse loans $16,000 (US dollars) to your son (a stepson to your spouse). There is no verbal agreement, no written agreement, no understanding the money has to be paid back.

- After about 6 months the spouse asks the son for payment. He says he has no money.

- The spouse starts to become verbally abusive to you. There is even one physical encounter in the wee hours of the morning.

- The spouse perseverates daily on getting the money back so much so he begins to act irrationally –so much so that the family dog is threatened with a knife as leverage to make you do something about the spouse getting money back: WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT??

Steps to Problem Solving: A Review

1. Study in problem solving begins with answering 36 questions in the Ethics Game to find out your "lens" in tackling problems.

2. See that your "lens" matched your values.

3. Apply Kohlberg's theory of moral development (your stage has been pre-determined.

4. Baring any "stickin thinkin", you have the tools to come to an appropriate answer.

Conclusion:

Questions/Answers
Thank you for your time: Dr. P. Keough
pkeough@nu.edu

References

Baird, C. & Niacaris, J., (2011)Ethics Game, LLC
 Kauffman, J.M. (2005). Characteristics of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders of Children and Youth. Pearson, Boston, Mass.
 Woolfolk, A. (2013). Educational Psychology, 12th ed. Pearson, Boston, Mass

(personal experience!)