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Ten Questions About Ethics

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C. William Pollard

[handwritten at top:] - Euthophio - Socrates - ask the question to define issue
— you should make the
determine —

TEN QUESTIONS ABOUT ETHICS (suggested by Bill Pollard)

A seminar given in Holland, Michigan on July 24, 2007 for the Herman Miller Co.
by Peter Kreeft, Professor of Philosophy, Boston College

[handwritten box:] How would Aristotle
run G.M,

I. What is and isn't ethics?

II. A very brief history of ethics

III. Where do moral values and ethical principles come from?
Do they come from God? What is the relation between God and ethics?

[handwritten left margin:] What is the faster
good will provide
should provide
as semi
wealth fame power,

IV. *Why* should a person seek to be good?

[handwritten:] because God or the Gods will it
Euthyphro (not good answer)
— in order to
be real —
Should be because it is right
eg the good

V. Is there a *summum bonum* or greatest good to life?

[handwritten:] — Aquinas + Pascal — 3 levels - world
intellectual See
pg 7

VI. Does evil prove the reality of a freedom to choose?

VII. How does one know what is right and wrong, good and bad?
Do we have a moral compass, a true north that can guide us?

VIII. Can virtue be taught?

IX. Can the business firm not only make and sell quality products on a profitable
basis and create wealth for its shareholders, but also become a moral
community for the development of human character?

X. What suggestions would you have for us in seeking to further develop a
program of moral education within the business firm?

[handwritten:] - Eup

[handwritten bottom:]
- Don't base your ethics on what the Gods say — No because saying Gods
— But what about relation between the God.
— Ethics does not depend upon what you life, desire or will
— Is there a higher law that depends on a higher standard

1

I. What is and isn't ethics?

in placed in naturally

A. Is ethics objective and scientific or subjective and emotional?

Argument: Premise 1: There are only 2 kinds of reality, objective and subjective. *not everything objective is natural or rational*
Premise 2: If a reality is objective ("out there"), it is a matter of science.
Premise 3: If a reality is subjective ("in here"), it is a matter of feelings.
Premise 4: Ethics is not a matter of science. For ethical objects such as moral goodness, rightness, duty, & law are not either sense *data* or mathematically measurable.
Premise 5: Ethics is not a matter of feelings. For ethics *judges* feelings as well as acts by higher standards or principles. *normative*
Conclusion: Ethics does not deal with any kind of reality.

What is the mistake in this argument?
What are the 3 possible kinds of mistakes in any argument?

not post-modern / definition of science / history research / sense - rational / like religion

B. If ethics does deal with reality, what kind of reality is it?
What kinds of reality are there? What are the possibilities?
1. objective matter
2. subjective mind, spirit, soul
3. subjective matter (bodies)
4. objective minds, spirits, souls (other people)
5. God

If all of these are real, is ethics about all of them?
If so, how? What questions does ethics ask about them?
What philosophies deny each of these and what are their consequences for ethics?

C. Is ethics a science?

1. Not in the modern, narrow sense of *the scientific method*, which demands empirical data and verification, and exact measurement.

2. Yes, in the ancient, broad sense of *rational wisdom*, giving good logical reasons for conclusions, especially about values. Philosophy, "the love of wisdom," is a "science" in this sense, and ethics is a crucial part of it.

   Ethics depends on other parts of philosophy:

   a. Metaphysics, which studies being (cf. the above 5 "kinds of reality")
   b. Epistemology, which studies knowing and how we know
   c. Philosophical anthropology, which studies the nature of man

(Examples of this dependence: Marx vs. Buddha, Plato vs. Aristotle)

D. What does ethics study?

  1 Three words expressing 3 <u>dimensions</u> of ethics:

    a. "ought" (obligation) — *duty*
    b. "right" (vs. "wrong")
    c. "good" (vs. "evil")

  2. The 3 human <u>powers</u> that determine these 3 things:

    a. conscience   (see point VII: what exactly does 'conscience' mean?)
    b. law   (see point III: 4 kinds of law) *human law, define law natural law*
    c. human nature (see point III: where do values come from?)

  3. The 3 <u>areas</u> of ethics within each of the 3 dimensions
     (cf. the analogy of the fleet of ships):

    a. social ethics
    b. individual ethics
    c. the "summum bonum"
       greatest good

  4. The 3 ethical <u>determinants</u> (factors that determine the ethical value or
     disvalue of any human act):

    a. the act itself
    b. the motive *why*
    c. the circumstances or situation

E. What ethics is not: some incomplete ethical systems:
   The ~~four~~ 3 most popular ethical oversimplifications, in light of D4 above:

    1. <u>Legalism</u>. Obedience to law is necessary but not sufficient. Merely
       obeying the laws of baseball does not make you a great player.

    2. <u>Subjectivism</u> (sincerity of motive) or <u>Emotivism</u> ("it can't be wrong if it
       feels so right"). Ethics commands love. Feelings cannot be commanded.
       Therefore love is not a feeling. (What *is* love then?)
       willing good for you

    3. <u>Conventionalism</u> (ethical relativism, "appropriateness," *mores* instead of
       morals; if this were true, all social nonconformity would be evil!) or
       <u>Utilitarianism</u> (pragmatism, "situation ethics"), success at attaining goals.
       "Does the end justify the means?"

3

II.   A Very Brief History of Ethical Thought

A. pre-ethical, pre-"fallen," innocent consciousness
B. present human consciousness ("the knowledge of good *and evil*")
C. post-ethical, perfected, Heavenly consciousness

Within B,

1. pre-rational, primitive, instinctual, unreflective
2. rational, reflective
3. post-rational, "postmodernist"

Within 2,

a. Eastern (Hindu, Buddhist, Taoíst, Confucian)
b. Western
   (1) Ancient, classical
       (a) Greek
       (b) Roman
   (2) Medieval
       (a) Jewish
       (b) Muslim
       (c) Christian
   (3) Modern, post-religious, secular ("Enlightenment")

       (a) The essence of the modern ethical revolution: C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man,* p. 87
       (b) Machiavelli's solution to "hypocrisy": fit the standards to the practice instead of vice versa
       (c) Do pre-existing wills posit values or do pre-existing values judge wills?
       (d) The origin of the modern ethical revolution: voluntarism
           (I) Euthyphro, Luther, Descartes: divine voluntarism
           (II) Hobbes & Rousseau ("social contract") human voluntarism
           (III) Nietzsche & Mussolini: the logical consequence of (2)
       (e) Is modern man less moral than pre-modern man? How?
       (f) If moral values do not come from wills, where do they come from? See next point (III)

The ultimate answer to Socrates in Euthyphro

III.   Where do moral values come from?

   A. Do they come from God?   *yes +* ~~no~~ *NO*
      1. What is the relation between God and ethics?
      2. What is the relation between *religion* and ethics?
      3. Dostoyevski wrote: "If God does not exist, everything is permissible."
         Is this true?
      4. A possible answer: the parallel case of the relation between God and
         science

   Ethics ~~claims~~ to True ethical principles are consistent with understanding the nature of God — C (fear if you don't agree C)

   B. Seven possible answers to where moral values come from:

      1. the will of God or the gods (Euthyphro: divine voluntarism, fundamentalism)
      2. the *nature* of God, the ultimate fact ("Be ye holy for I the Lord am holy")
      3. human nature (Plato, Arisotle) as teleological (naturally ordered to its end)
      4. human wills collectively ("social contract theories," "moral positivism")
      5. the human will individually (Kant's "rational autonomy")
      6. "biological imperatives" (survival, pleasure, power)
          (Does Darwinian evolution entail this moral consequence?)

   C. How does Aquinas's distinction between 4 kinds of law answer this question?

      1. eternal law (the nature of God)
      2. divine law (historical revelations of the will of God)
      3. natural law (human nature) *reason unwritten*
      4. positive law ("posited" or made by man)

   D. The modern problem with "natural law": cf. the Clarence Thomas hearings

      1. Modernity's objection to "natural law": is it "religious"?
      2. The need for natural law rather than merely positive law: the Nuremberg trials
      3. The need for natural law rather than divine (religious) law: religious wars
      4. The American founders (cf. the Declaration) based positive law on natural law
         rather than religious law for universality and equality (the English
         "Enlightenment"); current American jurisprudence ignores natural law for fear
         of religion (this is the French "Enlightenment," the French Revolution)

5

IV.   Why be good?

A. N.B. our first 4 questions were about the "4 causes" of ethics:

(I) = the "formal cause" or definition of what it is
(II) = the "material cause" or its contents
(III) = the "efficient cause" or its origin
(IV) = the "final cause" or its end (purpose)

B. Seven possible answers to the question "Why be good?"

1. individual power (Machiavelli, Sauron's Ring)

2. social rewards (Dewey, Pragmatism)

3. divine rewards (before or after death) (the Bible)

a. extrinsic, "mercenary" rewards
b. intrinsic, "natural" rewards

4. subjective happiness (Epicurus: pleasure)

5. objective "happiness" (Aristotle: "blessedness")

6. duty, justice (Kant) ("do it just because it's right")

7. love (the displacement of the ego: *all* the religions of the world)

a. love of the impersonal, perfect Good (same as answer 6?)
b. love of other persons and what is best for them
c. love of a God who is both personal and perfect

V. Is there a "summum bonum" (greatest good, ultimate end, "the meaning of life")?

1. What are the consequences if the answer is no?

2. What are the alternatives if the answer is yes?

    a. Hinduism's 4 candidates
        (1) pleasure (the *Kama Sutra*)
        (2) power (the caste system)
        (3) philanthropy
        (4) mystical enlightenment: *sat-chit-ananda*

    b. Ecclesiastes' 5 candidates
        (1) wisdom
        (2) pleasure
        (3) power
        (4) altruism
        (5) religion (non-revealed, agnostic)

    c. Aquinas' 8 candidates
        (1) wealth
        (2) fame
        (3) power
        (4) honor
        (5) bodily goods (health)
        (6) pleasure
        (7) goods of the soul (intellectual and moral virtues)
        (8) God

    d. Pascal's 3 levels
        (1) worldly goods (hand)
        (2) intellectual goods (head)
        (3) moral and religious goods (heart)

3. How can we test the candidates?

    a. Travel the roads, experiment
    b. Learn from other travelers
        (1) intellectual (philosophers)
        (2) fictional (novelists)
        (3) real (friends)

VI.   Evil

    A. Evil as an argument for atheism

    B. Does evil prove the reality of a freedom to choose (free will)?

        What are the consequences of a denial of free will?
        1. Exculpation
        2. Behaviorism ("hit them")
        3. God as tyrant
        4. The meaninglessness of moral language

    C. Five kinds of freedom from five kinds of evils

        1. free choice (vs. determinism)
        2. freedom from punishment
        3. physical freedom (vs. slavery, imprisonment, impotence)
        4. political freedom: rights (vs. disenfranchisement)
        5. freedom to attain your end (vs. frustration)

        Which of these is inalienable?
        Which is the most important?
        Which is the least important?

    D. Is evil real?
        Dilemma: if it's real, God made it; if it's unreal, we are fools to fear it
        Solution: evil is not a thing but a hole, a bentness or a disorder in things

    E. Two kinds of evil (which is worse?)

        1. physical or emotional evil (evil suffered against your will)
        2. moral evil (evil done by your will)

    F. What is the origin of each of the two kinds of evil?

    G. The practical question: how defeat evil?

        1. Wisdom (seeing the ugliness of evil & the beauty of goodness)
        2. Courage (willingness to suffer and sacrifice)
        3. Moderation (common sense and self-control)
        4. Justice (fairness, desert)
        5. Faith: surrender to a "Higher Power" (Grace or Destiny)
        6. Hope (confidence)
        7. Love as the ultimate motive
        8. Absolute honesty

VII. How do we know what is right or wrong, good or evil?
Do we have a moral compass?

A. Is moral discernment intellectually easier than we think? (Jn 7:17)
Is it morally harder than we think? (Rom. 1:18-22)
Are problems of discernment intellectual or moral? Compare the mentally
retarded or small children with Harvard PhD's: which discern better?
Do you agree with Wm. F. Buckley's famous dictum?

B. Possible answers to the moral compass (which must come first?):
1. other people
2. God
3. your own conscience

C. The meaning of "conscience"
1. Is it a feeling?
2. Is it a prophet?
3. Is it infallible?
4. Does it need to be "informed"?
5. Does it need help?
6. Is it absolutely authoritative?

D. What does conscience do?

1. awareness
a. of the moral *dimension,* moral *categories*
b. of the primary obligation to "do good and avoid evil"
c. of what kinds of acts are good and evil (e.g. Ten Commandments)
d. of what specific acts fall under these
2. feeling, "prodding"
a. to "do good and avoid evil" before acting
b. of guilt or moral peace after acting

E. Is there an objective standard or paradigm? Is it God?
But how do we know God?
And how do we know ourselves?

1. The rationalist answer
2. The "mystical religion" answer
3. The "revealed religion" answer
a. Jewish: God's deeds & words in Jewish history
b. Muslim: the Koran
c. Christian: Christ

VIII. Can virtue be taught?

    A. The importance of the question

    B. The Platonic dilemma about teaching virtue (in the *Meno*)

        1. Four ways virtue might come to us
        2. The arguments pro and con virtue's teachability
        3. Why Plato seems to be right: the logical analysis
        4. Why Plato seems to be wrong: the data of experience
        5. Aristotle's common-sense solution: Plato is half right:
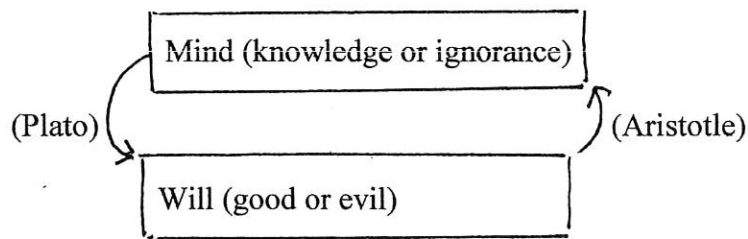
        6. Modernity's answer: virtue cannot be taught if it is subjective
        7. Are there any other ways virtue might come to us?
        8. Is any one answer adequate?
        9. What are the consequences for teaching ethics?
       10. Teaching ethics vs. teaching virtue

IX. Can the business firm not only make and sell quality products in a profitable basis and create wealth for its shareholders, but also become a moral community for the development of human character?

    A. Short answer: yes.

    B. Longer answer:

   The goals of the company =

         1. to make and sell quality products for the benefit of the public
         2. to generate profit to make this possible
         3. to be a human, humane, and moral community
             a. as an extrinsic addition (seminars like this one)
             b. as one of the goals of the business, as it is one of the goals of life
             c. in the very process of (1) and (2) above:

    C. Cf. the world's first business, Adam in the Garden of Eden
         1. tilling the soil: communications & advertising
         2. tending the garden: production
         3. taming the animals: personnel
         4. naming the animals: authority
         5. being fruitful & multiplying: profit
         6. cooperation with Eve: community
         7. by obedience, being an extension of God's work: creativity

    D.. How to relate these goals to each other: see diagram, next page

A possible model of the integration of goals in a business:
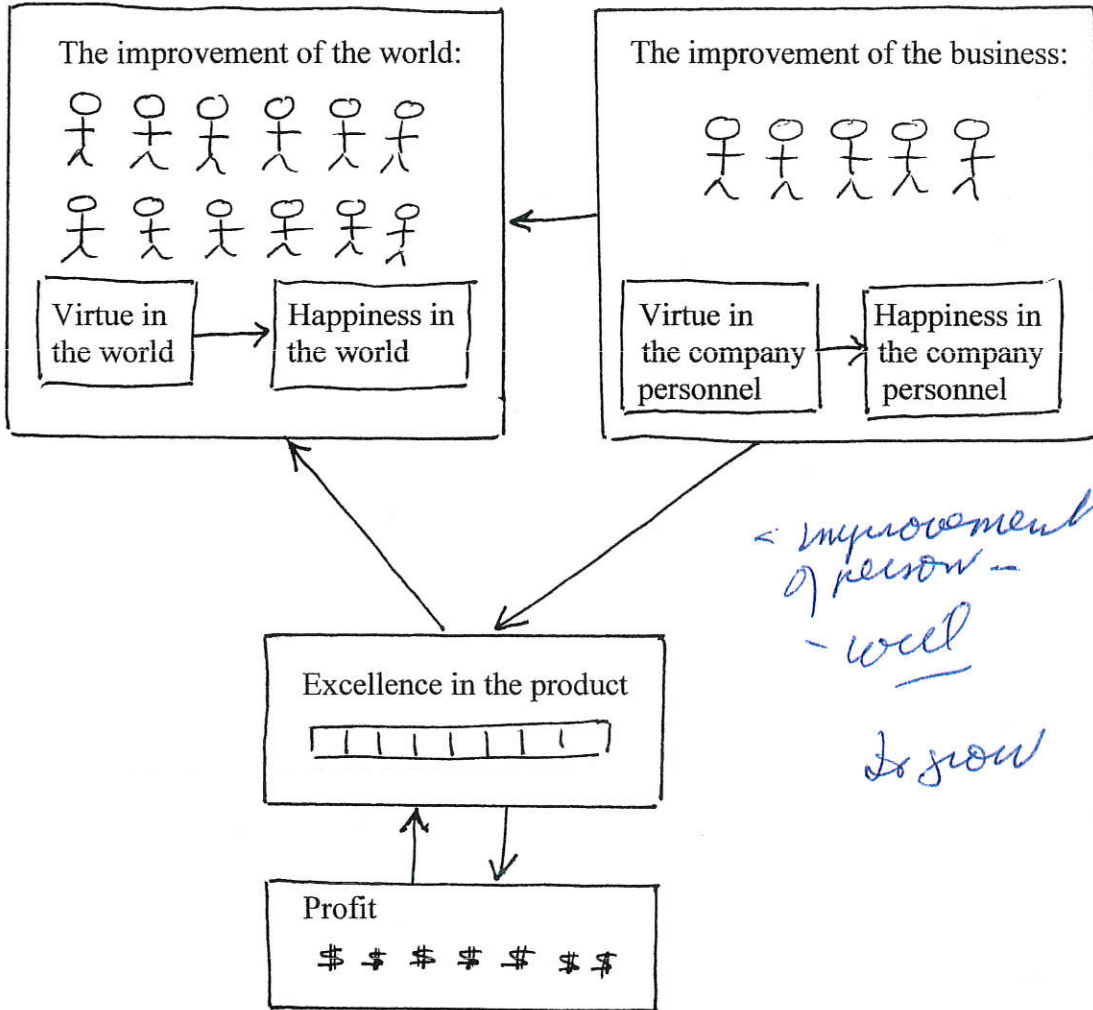
X. What suggestions would you have for us in seeking to further develop a program of moral education within the business firm?

Ten Suggestions (N.B. the difference between Moses and Kreeft!)

1. See morality, and moral education, as intrinsic, not extrinsic, to your company (which is a community, an organism, not just an organization)

2. Resolve that it is therefore necessary, not optional.

3. Learn by imitation of successful models: Lumen, Legatus.

4. Learn also by imitation of larger social models: Confucius, Judaism.

5. Concentrate on personal virtue as the key rather than on programs, methods, etc. Resist the "technologization" of morality.

6. Involve *all* personnel at all levels actively and explicitly.

7. Have a clear hierarchy of related and integrated goals.

8. Encourage personal religion as the most effective means to the moral end.

9. Do not be exclusive and "fundamentalist" in judging methods or religions, but be morally and personally "judgmental" (demanding high standards)

10. Be open to other, new, creative ways; never rest on your laurels.