How to Think About Hard Things

Dr. Steve Gimbel
Gettysburg College
Advantages of Codes of Conduct

- Pre-resolves standard conundrums
- Uniformity in expectations
- Allows the community to explicitly state expectations and standards
- Life is complicated
• Factual statements are descriptive
  • “Steve is wearing pants.”
What is an Ethical Question?

- Factual statements are descriptive
  - “Steve is wearing pants.”
- Ethical statements are prescriptive
  - “It is morally wrong to juggle kittens.”
What do the terms “morally right” and “morally wrong” mean?
Parts of an Ethical Situation

- Who
- What
- So what
- To whom
- With whom
Who – Virtue Ethics

- Character - We create ourselves through our actions
- Telos - Actualizing our moral potentiality
- Finding the mean or reaching your goal?
Duty, rules, and the virtuous villain
The Categorical Imperative
• **Never** lie?
• Our actions change the world, yours *REALLY* do – the principle of utility

**So What - Utilitarianism**
- The Bono Brigade
- Rights as history changing
- Rights as prohibitive - the weakness of rights
With whom – Care-based Ethics

- Gilligan’s contract/care distinction
- The moral import of relationships
- The weight of caring
• Yes – morality as an umbrella concept
• This is usually not a problem
• The structure of a moral conundrum
• Is this “situational ethics”? Well, yeah.
  • Flag burning vs. endangered species
No, but it begins to give us a framework within which we can have civil, intelligent discussions about hard questions.