Applied and professional ethics – an introduction

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Three cases

- The whale
- The neonate
- G8
The whale

- Whale hunting
- Why? Meat, profit
- Why not? Suffering, extinction

- Moral questions:
  - Does animal suffering matter?
  - Do whales have a right to life?
The neonate

- New medical technology: newborns can be saved week 22-24
- Undeveloped, risk of early death, life-long handicaps
- What to do if the neonate catches pneumonia?
- A moral conflict: The right to life vs quality of life
G8 Should the debts be cancelled?
Common to these cases

- No simple answers
- No given answers
- Conflicts of values and rights

A need for assessment of consequences, listening to stakeholders, balancing of values...

reflection = applied ethics
Definition

“The terms “applied ethics” and “practical ethics” are used interchangeable to indicate the application of ethics to special arenas of human activity, such as business, politics and medicine, and to particular problems, such as abortions.” (Childress, 1986)
How?

Should the G8 cancel the debts of the poorest nations? (Do the G8 have a moral *obligation*? Do the poorest nations have a *right* to cancellation?)
1. Identification

What are the relevant moral considerations?
- Suffering
- Inequality
- Contracts
- Property rights
- ....

What are the morally relevant facts?
- Extreme poverty
- What are the consequences of cancellation?
- ....
2. Analysis/discussion/argument

- Moral intuitions?
- Ethical theory?
- How do we balance relevant ethical principles? In this case?
- Are there any facts that are of particular importance?
- What are the implications of different alternatives?

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- How do we achieve a reflective equilibrium- justified view?
3. Decision/action/evaluation

- What is the answer?
- What should we do?
- Did it turn out well?
Doing applied ethics

- Everything is open for discussion!
- Don’t jump to conclusions!
- No dogmatic answers!
- Open minds!
What is the role of the ethicist?

Peter Singer vs Ronald Dworkin: “Animal liberation” vs “philosophy from the inside – out”
Should the applied ethicist be a judge or a moderator?
Professional ethics
– mirroring applied ethics

- Medical ethics doctors, nurses
- Business ethics businessmen...
- Technology and ethics engineers..
Professional relations generates moral norms

1) *Relations to people dependent on professional work and service* – honesty, trustworthiness, care, safety...

2) *Relations to workmates* – loyalty, solidarity...

3) *Relations to employers* – loyalty, confidentiality...
Professional ethics as rule ethics

Rules for professional behaviour:

- “The patient/client is entitled to be treated with respect, which means that:
  - The therapist shall respect the right of the patient/client to a private life.
  - The therapist shall obtain such information only as is necessary for the treatment.”

(Swedish Code of Ethics for Occupational Therapists)
Professional ethics as virtue ethics

“A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve *those goods which are internal to practices* and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.” (MacIntyre)

...professional virtues
Questions for discussions

1. Why should we engage in applied ethics? What is the aim?
2. Peter Singer vs Ronald Dworkin: Should the applied ethicist be a judge or a moderator?
3. Are there any absolute moral norms or principles?
Case 2

- You are doctor at a clinic for early born babies. There is a baby born in week 24. Many organs are underdeveloped and if you use intensive care you estimate that the probability for survival with grave handicaps is 50%.

- You can choose either to put in all intensive care or give the baby an injection resulting in death. What do you do? Why?