

## Book Review

Bryan, V., Sanders, S., & Kaplan, L. (2016). *The helping professional's guide to ethics: A new perspective*. Lyceum Books. Chicago, IL

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*The helping professional's guide to ethics: A new perspective* uses Gert's (1970, 2004) common ethics approach to provide a very practical, useful and in-depth approach to ethics. The book provides a clear system for approaching ethical dilemmas. Both the content and the examples illustrate the complexity of ethical issues.

Chapter 1: "The basics of moral theory, professional codes of ethics, and professional ideals," explains moral theories including Deontology, Utilitarianism, and Principlism. Deontology is a moral philosophy based on duty. It looks at intent and derives from Kant's moral imperative. Utilitarianism looks at outcomes or impacts of actions. This approach focuses on the creation of happiness or the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Principlism seeks to combine these competing moral frameworks to provide guidance for ethical practice.

Chapter 2: "Moral development and ethical decision making in social work practice," begins with the

assertion that when moral rules conflict people frequently rely on intuition to make decisions. It presents the Neo-Kohlbergian and the Four Component Model of moral development (Rest, Narvaez et al. 1999). Both seek to go beyond cognition alone to develop a more nuanced understanding of moral development. The chapter serves to expand the complexities of moral development and set up the discussion of Gert's approach to understanding morality as it is practiced.

Chapter 3: "Common morality and ethical decision making," introduces Gert's (1970) ten moral rules: Do not kill; Do not cause pain; Do not disable; Do not deprive of freedom; Do not deprive of pleasure; Do not deceive; Do not cheat; Keep your promise; Obey the law; and Do your duty. It then discusses moral rule violations and when they are justified or not. The chapter provides a series of questions to be answered in justifying a violation of a moral rule. It argues that this is the moral system all rational people would agree to and use.

Chapter 4: "Confidentiality and the duty to warn and protect," argues that to understand conditions under which one may violate privacy one must have a clear understanding of the concept of privacy. The legal and ethical rules and definitions of confidentiality are clearly explained. The chapter, then, discusses conditions under which there may be a duty to warn and/or protect, which conflicts with the duty to maintain confidentiality. A clear and understandable discussion of applying common morality thinking

based on a case study demonstrates how one can apply ethical thinking to reach a reasonable and ethical decision.

Chapter 5: "Competency," focuses on determining if a client is competent to give informed consent and freely participate in treatment. Legal definitions are reviewed. The many issues and confusions about competency are reviewed. Clear guidelines for determining competency in particular situations are provided with the cautions that mental impairment does not necessarily imply incompetence and competence may vary from situation to situation. Again, a case study is analyzed following the common morality system. Competency is defined as the ability to make rational decisions in the situation.

Chapter 6: "Paternalism," discusses the situation when one is acting on behalf of a client especially when acting against a client's wishes. Paternalism may involve withholding information, supplying misinformation or interfering with a client against the client's wishes. Always justified that the worker knows what is best for the client. To act in a paternalistic way, one must develop a rational argument that satisfies the criteria of the common morality system.

Chapter 7: "Informed consent: Important moral considerations," provides a very in-depth understanding of the requirements for effective consent. It addresses consent based upon the moral rules don't deceive and don't deprive of freedom. The social worker must provide the client adequate information about potential benefits and risks involved in the proposed intervention. There must be no coercion. The social worker must determine that the client is competent in the given situation. The chapter provides strong guidance to help the worker assure these conditions are met.

Chapter 8: "Dual relationships," addresses many possible dual relationships. It provides excellent guidance to help the worker understand possible dual relationships and how the moral rules can help the worker understand dual relationships and how to manage them. It explains what is required to justify a dual relationship.

Chapter 9: "Conclusion," explains the use of the moral rules and how they can help the social worker make better and clearer ethical decisions.

I found this book very useful. It can help students and workers learn to make clear and nuanced ethical decisions. It provides agreed upon moral rules, but also how their application can be situationally guided. I especially like that it provides a clear process for moral thinking and decision making. Many of my students can recite the ethical standards, but lack the ability to think through actual application in specific context.

## References

- Gert, B. (1970). *The moral rules*. New York, Harper and Row.
- Gert, B. (2004). *Common morality: Deciding what to do*. New York, NY, Oxford University Press.
- Rest, J., et al. (1999). *Postconventional moral thinking*. Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum.