

INTRODUCING ETHICAL INQUIRIES

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The problematic features of teaching philosophical ethics are inextricably linked to, and are dependent upon, the problematic features of philosophical ethics itself. This thesis is exemplified by two radically diverse approaches to searching for the good and the good life. The differences within each approach are discussed in terms of the principles of Plato and St. Augustine, on one hand, and William James and John Dewey, on the other hand. Before introducing their thoughts, attention is given to a context of teaching ethics to collegiate students, that is, to a structure or framework within which to organize and to interpret the development of principles in the history of ethics. I have concluded that differing conceptions of the good require correspondingly differentiated modes of searching for the good, both of which must be considered in teaching ethics in the collegiate classroom.

INTRODUCTION

The problematic features of teaching philosophical ethics are inextricably linked to the problematic features of philosophical ethics itself. Furthermore, the former depends substantially upon the latter. That is, the difficulties in determining what to teach and how to teach in this area rest somewhat upon the difficulties in ascertaining the nature of the good. The purposes of this essay, however, include neither elucidating the nature of the good nor proposing a general plan concerning the content and teaching methodology for ethics courses. Rather, the major purposes are three: (1) to contrast two radically diverse approaches to the search for the good (life); (2) to exemplify briefly these two approaches; and (3) to consider implications of these matters for teaching ethics to college students. As indicated, implementing the first two purposes forms the basis for carrying out the third purpose.

More specifically, I will attempt to explain and to exemplify a context for introducing studies in the history of ethics in Western philosophy to college students who have no formal background in philosophy. The term “context” here signifies a structure or framework within which to organize and to interpret the development of principles in the history of ethics. The particular context suggested is neither complete nor sufficient to satisfy the intent, but it might be employed beneficially as a starting point (properly problematic itself!). This specific structure or framework consists of a practical question and a theoretical

question, which are correlated as a basis for formulating a thesis. Both questions and the thesis presume that studies in philosophical ethics can be identified with a “search for meaning,” primarily the meaning of the good life (otherwise interpreted, hopefully, by each student as “my life”). Both questions and the thesis, therefore, are intended to promote a kind of reflection which indicates to the serious student that this inquiry is essential to becoming an authentic human being.

I now move on to an explanation of the two questions and the thesis, to be followed by an exemplification of the same, employing the principles of Plato [428/27-347/46 B.C.], Saint Augustine [354-430], William James [1842-1910] and John Dewey [1859-1952].* Some observations on teaching ethics to college students conclude this essay.

A “CONTEXT” FOR ETHICAL STUDIES

The central *practical* question is this: What kinds of search are needed in order to discover or to create what is good—in order to live a “good life”—in order to be happy? This is considered a practical issue insofar as it pertains to overt human behavior. The process to be employed in undertaking this search, as we shall see, depends at least partially upon whether the good is to be discovered or created (terms to be analyzed below).

The central *theoretical* question represents a fundamental issue in the history of Western philosophy. It has two parts: (1) Is there a transcendent reality (that is, beyond time and change) which serves as a standard or criterion for what is deemed to be good, or (2) does all reality constantly change, rendering goodness “radically relative”? Although these alternatives are not considered definitive in all quarters, the dichotomy they represent does seem to be supported by William James’s conception of a “forced option” in religion (in accord with which skepticism represents a clearly negative choice).

What is the meaning of “radically relative” in the second part of the theoretical question? Characterizing goodness as radically relative in a world in perpetual motion requires advertence to a common distinction between the object of knowledge and knowledge itself. The former (the object of knowledge) signifies the knowable, what is able to be known; whereas the latter (knowledge) signifies the awareness (on the part of the knower) of the knowable.

Next, it should be noticed that both alternatives (1 and 2) in the theoretical question necessitate relativity. Relativity of goodness is simply a fact of human life due to the subjective feature of all human knowing: since no human being can know the object conclusively, but only partially, our knowledge is relative in all instances. Thus, in #1 (the first alternative), the object of knowledge is believed to be permanent, objective, universal, etc., but the knowledge of this infinite object by the finite human being is always relative. Therefore, #2 (the second alternative) is “radically relative” because both the object of knowledge *and* knowledge itself are constantly changing and, therefore, relative. In other words, the relativity of the good in the second alternative is due not only to the inconclusive and imperfect awareness of the finite knower, but also to the constantly changing object. This distinction is essential for appreciating the inherent differences between the two alternatives and the thesis pertaining to the search for meaning.

What relationship endures between the theoretical question (of the existence or negation of transcendence) and the practical question (of the kinds of search needed to

discover or create the good)? The connection is seen in the thesis to be investigated in the main part of this essay: different approaches to or different modes of the search for the good (life) are required by alternative #1 and alternative #2. An effort to explore this thesis follows by means of a very brief comparative analysis of selected principles of Plato and St. Augustine, on one hand, and William James and John Dewey, on the other hand. Especially noteworthy is the existential link between the nature of the good perceived and the nature of the search. This link warrants careful observation in teaching collegiate ethics.

FOUR ALTERNATIVE AVENUES TO THE GOOD (LIFE)

Plato [428/27-347/46 B.C.]

Plato's philosophy addresses a very practical problem: how do we establish personal goals and find meanings in our lives? What are the criteria for our judgments? He claims that the search for personal goals and for the meanings of our lives cannot be fruitful if we fail to transcend changing earthly beings. For example, if we wish to improve the constitution of our country, we cannot succeed simply by observing various constitutions. Again, if I wish to become a better person, I cannot succeed simply by observing the lives of numerous human beings. Why is this so? Plato would say, what we do in instances such as these, as a matter of fact, is to employ some kind of standard or criterion beyond the facts in order to select or adopt what is appropriate for our purposes. For example, among the constitutions, a person might choose as a source of improvement for our own one which embodies the clearest ideals of justice for the widest range of people. Again, the person whom I might choose as a model for my own self-improvement might be someone who exhibits sincere concern for the well-being of others.

In conclusion to Plato's answer to the practical problem of how we establish personal goals and find meanings in our lives, one must go beyond empirical observation of changing beings. Plato distinguished the World of Ideas from the sensible world. The former, the proper object of knowledge, is an objective, permanent, infinite hierarchy of essences, which is a perfect model of things existing imperfectly in the sense world. The means of searching for the eternal essences is the spiritual mind of the person, who possesses genuine knowledge innately because of the preexistence of the soul in which it gained clear knowledge of the World of Ideas, which (most universally) is the Good. At birth, the soul is imprisoned in the body, and the knowledge gained in its preexistent state is clouded or obscured. Therefore, the process of learning is called reminiscence, recalling the previously clear knowledge or clarifying the knowledge now clouded, by means of questioning oneself and other persons.

One of the central issues confronted by Plato in ascertaining meaning through knowledge of a reality beyond time and change pertains to the possibility of a (finite) human being's comprehending an ultimate, infinite reality. Plato alleviates without eliminating this difficulty in three ways. First of all, he believes that the Good (or World of Ideas) is knowable—partially; and that human beings are by nature capable of knowing it—partially. Secondly, he asserts that the sense world participates in (shares in or takes the source of its perfection from) or imitates (is “molded” in the likeness of) the World of Ideas. Thirdly, due to the preexistence of the soul and its knowledge of the Good, every person is born with knowledge,

although clouded due to the drag of the body. Learning, in the highest sense, therefore, is recalling or clarifying the innate knowledge of the Good possessed by the soul.

My central point exemplified in these principles pertains to the fact that the “direction” of the search for the good (life) and the mode of the search undertaken are governed by the nature of what is deemed to be good. For Plato, the nature of the Good precludes the possibility of searching for it in the sensible world, with technical equipment in laboratories, for example. Since the Good is a spiritual reality, it can be reached only by means of a spiritual human faculty, in this case called mind or reason. This spiritual journey, undertaken through a process of questioning, is consonant with Plato’s dualistic (body and soul) conception of human nature.

Saint Aurelius Augustine [354-430 A.D.]

In his adult life, Saint Augustine focused on a conscious, practical search for happiness. What he understood by happiness before the age of thirty was to be sought in material goods and physical pleasure. That changed during his early thirties when he experienced two conversions: an *intellectual* conversion through Plotinus and the Neoplatonists by means of which he was able to comprehend the truth as a spiritual reality, and a *moral* conversion through Saint Paul and the Bible by means of which he turned his life (not merely his mind) to Christ and the Gospels. These personal changes effected a radically revised appreciation of happiness for Augustine. As a Christian, he believed that happiness could be attained by possession of a perfect good beyond all fear of loss, that is, understanding of the truth and ultimately a relationship with God. Such a conception seemed to him necessary because any potential loss compromises one’s happiness. Epistemologically, the need to transcend time and change stemmed (as for Plato) from the human need for a permanent goal as well as for stable criteria by means of which to render judgments concerning truth and goodness in this changing world.

Augustine now confronted a problem similar to that of Plato: how can a (finite) human being encounter meaningfully an infinite reality? His answer centers upon the process of Illumination provided by God, the ultimate, infinite Creator known through faith and reason. The foundation of Illumination is the eternal reasons, the Divine ideas in the mind of this personal God, Who provides the light by which eternal and necessary ideas are known as eternal and necessary. This light provided by God is analogous to the light of the sun needed by the physical eye to see material things. Therefore, Augustine explains that, while human beings have a role in teaching others to learn, God is not only the end or the goal of human life, but also the ultimate means to that end.

Again, my central point exemplified in Augustine’s principles pertains to the fact that the “direction” of the search for the good (life) and the mode of the search undertaken are governed by the nature of what is deemed to be good. Since the truth for Augustine is a spiritual reality, it can be reached only by the spiritual faculty of the soul called reason. Since the Ultimate Truth is a personal God who communicates with human beings through the process of Illumination and Who has revealed Himself in the Scriptures, Divine faith is combined with reason to provide an avenue to God and genuine happiness.

Therefore, the search for meaning and beatitude within Augustine’s framework requires “believing in order to know.” In other words, “finding” God in one’s life requires

rational evidence, but if one waited for rational evidence proportionate to the faith commitment of an authentic Christian, there would be no Christians. As a consequence, a person gains some evidence for the existence of God, but must then make an act of faith as a basis for gaining more knowledge by rational evidence. For example, no one can seek the meaning of the New Testament as divinely revealed without believing in a personal God who has revealed. This search for the meaning of Christianity through faith and reason must be centered, of course, on the Gospels, that is, on the teachings of Jesus Christ, God who became Man and who died on the Cross and after three days arose from the dead to save all mankind.

FROM PLATO AND AUGUSTINE TO JAMES AND DEWEY

Before moving on to brief considerations of the twentieth-century American philosophers James and Dewey, I would like to summarize the theoretical point most crucial to our practical ethical question of what kinds of search are needed in order to discover or to create what is good. Plato and Augustine agree upon the need for a Transcendent Being, beyond change and time, as a source of meaning, truth, and goodness. For them the consequence of rejecting an Ultimate Reality is condemnation to a life of meaningless relativity. Choices among relative objects, as we all confront daily, cannot be made, they claim, on the sole basis of the relative objects. For example, in choosing one restaurant out of ten (or in narrowing the choices to ten!) at which to dine this evening, we go beyond the relative facts (size, price, distance, etc.) in order to make our choice. The criterion or standard by means of which we judge is independent of the relative facts. This finalized reality becomes the guiding light insofar as it is discovered (partially) by the human decision-maker. Therefore, existentially in the minds of human beings, this Ultimate Reality, which *in itself* is believed to be the same for all, differs from subject to subject *as known*. This is the problem of transcendence and immanence - which is no problem for James and Dewey because they do not accept an objective, transcendent reality.

While these two American philosophers differ radically between themselves concerning the existence of God, they share a belief that there is no need of an objective transcendent reality in order to render the world meaningful. It should be noted that this position (as that of Plato and Augustine in this regard) does constitute a belief, a faith that by nature is not and cannot be fully or completely substantiated in a discursively rational manner. The position assumed by James and Dewey has its origins in a secretive group known as the Metaphysical Club, which met occasionally in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Charles Peirce [1839-1914] was the leader of this informal group and James was one of its members. The aim of the "project" which convened them was to understand the world "without leaning upon a divine providential intelligence." That is, they wished to explain the meaning of human life in the world without relying upon a belief in an objective transcendent being such as that shared (philosophically) by Plato and Augustine. (One of the historical reasons why the philosophies of Peirce and James did not become widely known until after the first decade of the twentieth century is because of the rejection of the kind of Transcendence posed by Augustine. Christianity was too ingrained in the culture of the United States.)

William James [1842-1910]

William James, as Plato and Augustine, sought in a very practical manner the good life and human happiness. In fact, his philosophical search became so closely associated with the practical that his philosophy has become known as “pragmatism.” James’s starting point, however, distinguishes directly and immediately his search for the good (life) from that of Plato and Augustine. What characterizes this starting point? The key is experience, which for James is the touchstone for thought and action. That is, what we ought to think and what we ought to do stem solely from experience. Even more fundamental and significant is his insistence that personal experience is reality itself. Therefore, reality, as personal experience, constantly changes; reality is an “experience continuum.”

The process of searching for the good in this context must be a means of “keeping in touch” with one’s personal, constantly changing reality. For James this means reversing the inquiry into the *origins* of experience of the classical British empiricists to a continuous search for the *outcomes* of specific experiential occurrences. His pragmatic method is noteworthy, furthermore, for the distinction between the consequences of *doing* something and the consequences of *believing* in someone or something. In both instances, these consequences provide the sole source of meaning for truth or goodness. This distinction is extremely crucial, for it allows James to accept in a meaningful way the existence of a supreme being. Belief in God produces practical effects (such as an enhanced sense of security) and, therefore, is meaningful and real. (The faith in question is natural faith, of course.)

James’s God, it must be observed, does not share the kind of transcendence found in the Good of Plato and the personal God of Christianity in Augustine. The latter two individuals believe that the Ultimate Being exists independently of all particular experience. According to James, however, God not only depends directly upon experience, but is *created* by personal experience. James’s own personal experience afforded him belief in (what he considered) the real existence of God. (Of course, he would have to grant on his principles that my experience might not enable me to accept the existence of a supreme reality.) In other words, while Plato promotes the *discovery* by all persons of the universal Good (that is, to be known and lived by all), and Augustine promotes the *discovery* by all persons of the universal love of the Supreme Being, James insists that each human being, by means of personal experience, *creates* (or does not create) an ultimate reality. In the former (requiring discovery), the Transcendent is Supreme, and the inferior human being must conform personal thinking and living to that reality as a means to the good and happy life. In the latter (requiring creation), the human being is supreme in determining whether or not there is a God and what kind of being this particular God becomes as a means to the good and happy life. What differences can be ascertained for the modes of searching for the good in these two dramatically different theoretical postures?

Both camps insist upon a process of reflection or thinking as a means to comprehending the good. For James, therefore, any real apprehension of what is good must be developed by utilizing his pragmatic method. While others can inform you (as in conversation or in print) of the results of their use of this method, it remains for each person to create his own “good” through personal employment of the method. In his comments on ethical matters in *The Will to Believe and other essays*, James clarifies his position. For example, he insists that no

reality called good or evil exists without a sentient being because the good is created *only* by such beings who act (or believe in someone or something) and ascertain the effects of such actions (or beliefs) upon their feelings: good feelings have created the good; bad feelings have created evil.

In a hypothetical circumstance of only a single (sentient) individual, therefore, the only problem to be considered by that person is a consistency of personal choices because there is no outward obligation. Whatever this person chooses to do is a legitimate choice to be tested by action. While going for a swim and smoking a cigarette simultaneously is not a likely possibility, the only source of moral worth is the person's subjectivity: nothing in the world can be considered of intrinsic value, capable of being sought as an end in itself. This means that the most fundamental ethical problem in the real world (with more than one individual!) is unifying the multiplicity of personal goods into a harmonious and stable system. Of course, that is a problem for Plato and Augustine, also, because of each person's subjective (partial) consciousness of the universal good. With James, however, the search for the good is not undertaken by means of a spiritual faculty of reason engaged in *discovering* some objective Ultimate Reality, which is then to become the basis for a pattern of living. The search for the good (that is, by means of his pragmatic method) is itself a process of living in which one first acts (or believes) and then becomes aware of truth and goodness on the basis of personal feelings.

Among James's ethical conclusions, two will be mentioned. The social good to be sought (only on the basis of personal satisfaction of desires known via actions and beliefs) is assessed in terms of the greatest amount of happiness, or fulfillment of desires, for the greatest number of people. Secondly, whatever good is created by human beings individually and socially is merely tentative and suggestive. The good is created as life is lived. There are no guidelines beyond the process of living itself, beyond past and present experiences along with anticipations of future consequences.

John Dewey [1859-1952]

Any understanding of the philosophical ethics of Dewey must be tied to a view of his method of reflection. Also a pragmatist, his method is similar to that of James insofar as the consequences of one's personal actions provide the basis for truth and goodness (which he never really distinguishes, as James attempts to do). Two points of difference from the method of James should be noted: for Dewey only physical (humanly conscious) actions provide the sources of truth and good. Secondly, in accord with his elimination of believing someone or something in ascertaining meaning, Dewey employs the notion of adjustment of the person to the physical environment as the most central factor in discerning good and evil. While personal feelings obviously are involved, they are not the "whole show," as with James.

What is this pragmatic method of Dewey? It has been called a "problem solving" method because the awareness of a problem, or lack of adjustment to the physical environment, in the living process of an individual person initiates the process; and the resolution of the problem, or the reestablishment of harmony between the person and the physical environment, concludes the process. In between these two, hypotheses (tentative solutions or ideas) are sought and then evaluated for potential success in light of past

experience. In order to learn whether any particular hypothesis succeeds or fails in solving the problem, an experiment (a lived physical activity) must occur. Only then can the idea (hypothesis, tentative solution) be determined to be true and good or false and evil—or both: true and good to the extent that it solves the problem, and false and evil to the extent that it fails to do so.

For example, in determining the most expedient means of traveling from one city to another (the problem), various hypotheses can be considered. One can fly, take a train, or drive, for instance. If you choose to drive, there may be the problem of what route to take. Choosing the best possible hypothesis or idea may require extensive investigation—in the library, through phone calls, etc., in order to obtain necessary information. However, before one can determine the good (or truth) of any of these means to the resolution of the problem, action must be taken. You must fly or take the train, or drive a particular route in order to determine if that means provides a satisfactory adjustment to the environment (solves the problem). No one else can do this for you; only you can obtain your own truth or good. However, the intelligent person will rely upon the experience of others as well as one's own past experience for facts in determining the best course of action, the one which will most likely resolve the problem.

It must be noted that for Dewey, this is the *only* method of thinking, and it is a process of intelligent living. As a result of his negation of James's distinction between acting and believing in the reflective method, Dewey claims to have gone "beyond agnosticism." That is, he says in *A common faith*, adhering strictly to this method of reflection (which in general is the same for all, but which in particular has as many variations as there are specific applications of it) leads to recognition of the fact that one cannot even raise a meaningful *question* of the existence of a supreme or ultimate reality (that is, beyond time and change). Therefore, he claims that he is no more an atheist than a theist; he is not even an agnostic. All three of these groups accept the meaningfulness of the question of the existence and nature of a supreme being—they just have different answers to the question. He claims that his kind of indifference to the question of ultimates is more effective in eliminating the ultimates than the staunchest atheism.

In Chapter Seven of *Reconstruction in philosophy*, Dewey asserts that the sole source of morality is actions of conscious persons in specific situations. Morality exists only when something has to be done; what has to be done, of course, is to resolve the problem (that is, to eliminate the lack of adjustment to the physical environment for all persons and things affected by the action). Since there is only this way of being intelligent, moral intelligence is carried out through the problem solving method. Since every situation of life is unique, every moral situation is unique, and every resolution (good) sought and attained is unique. Therefore, the relativity of the good is radical in terms used above since this relativity stems not only from the subjectivity of the knower, but also from Dewey's belief in the fact of universal, perpetual change. (There is obvious evidence from our senses in general, and the natural sciences, more particularly, that tangible realities constantly change; what must be *believed* because it cannot be empirically verified is the fact that only tangible realities exist.)

Continuing in his description of a proper quest for the good, Dewey insists that the introduction of his method into moral matters eliminates the "greatest dualism" which burdens humanity: that between the physical and scientific, on one hand, and the moral and ideal, on the other hand. The exclusive use of this method in the realm of morality eliminates the

traditional dualism of facts and values. Also eliminated is the familiar dichotomy of means and ends; the latter as well as the former is a process because all of reality is a process. There is no ultimate end, or end to be sought for its own sake. A moral principle is a fallible plan of acting to resolve a problem; it is identified with a hypothesis, idea, or tentative solution. Therefore, the moral principle is subject to constant alteration; even though the good is achieved by solving the problem, the resolution pertains directly only to a particular occasion and becomes data for use in achieving another good (in a new situation).

THE FOUR ETHICAL ALTERNATIVES

We are exploring the thesis which contends that the nature of the good directly affects the process of attaining it in knowledge and practice, thus, affecting the kinds of search for the good in which persons engage. All of this, in turn, becomes a basis for what to teach and how to teach in ethics courses in higher education. Therefore, in effect, we have plotted the basis for four alternatives in searching for the good and in teaching ethics. Also, we have displayed briefly two pair of alternatives: while Plato and Augustine differ, and James and Dewey differ, these differences are not as severe as those between Plato and Augustine, on one hand, and James and Dewey, on the other hand. The key here is the notion of Transcendence.

Again, the crucial distinction illuminating this pair of differences is that between the object of knowledge and knowledge itself. The latter, awareness within the human mind of the object of knowledge, is constantly changing according to all four of these individuals simply because there is no such phenomenon as perfect knowledge. All knowledge is partial or incomplete and, thereby, changing and relative. However, the object of knowledge, synonymous with the knowable, is for Plato and Augustine spiritual and permanent, beyond time and change. For James and Dewey, on the other hand, the object of knowledge is constantly changing since all things are constantly changing in accord with one's experience. Therefore, the persistently changing knowledge for Plato and Augustine is anchored or directed by a permanent, transcendent reality; while James and Dewey contend that the search for the good has nothing to do with considerations beyond the immediate experience of human beings in the natural world. For the latter pair, there are no courts of appeal beyond the natural process of conscious reflection, that is, absolutely nothing beyond time and change as Plato's Ideas (the Good) and Augustine's personal Triune God. There are no guideposts for James and Dewey other than past and present human experience, rendering the good radically transitory. Plato's and Augustine's distinction between a subjective seeker and an objective being sought is obliterated. While James believes in God on pragmatic grounds, it is a God which he creates through his experience and which has, by his own admission, nothing necessarily to do with morality. Dewey avoids the occasion of considering the existence of a transcendent being by developing a method of reflection which addresses only human physical interaction with the world, avoiding any place for seeking meaningful consequences through an internal act of believing.

The uniqueness of each of these four positions can be observed by seeking a general direction and path of the search for the good (life) suggested by each of the four philosophers. For Plato and his followers, the search must be focused upon discovering a suprasensible reality by means of the spiritual faculty of the soul called mind or reason or intellect. For

Augustine and those true to him, the search for the good requires use of the mind (a spiritual faculty) in order to discover immaterial realities and, ultimately, the Personal God of Christianity by means of faith and reason (believing in order to know). For William James and his followers, the good (life) must be created by making choices and implementing them by overt activity or by believing in someone or something in order to ascertain how the consequences (of the action or belief) make the person feel. For Dewey and faithful Deweyans, the good (life) also is created, in this case by the problem solving method in an attempt to render a meaningful and satisfactory adjustment to the environment.

CONCLUSION

In summarizing and concluding these remarks on introducing ethical inquiries in the collegiate classroom, I would like to restate and exemplify the thesis before a few closing comments. An expanded version of the thesis can be stated as follows: differing conceptions of the good (and good life) require correspondingly differentiated modes of searching for the good (and good life), both of which must be considered carefully in teaching ethics in the collegiate classroom. The following schema represents an attempt to compare general principles and implications of Plato, Augustine, James and Dewey concerning three factors: the nature of the good (or Good, or God), modes of search for the good (and good life), and pedagogical principles pertaining to ethics at the collegiate level. Below is the summary:

Plato

Nature of the good (or Good, or God)

The World of Ideas, an ultimate, transcendent, perfect reality beyond time and change; knowable to some extent; sought for its own sake and as a necessary, guiding light in a changing earthly existence

Modes of searching for the good

A process of reminiscence: questioning which engages the rational faculty of the (dualistic) human being; based upon the nature of the good and the pre-existence of the soul in which it (the soul) was in contact with the World of Ideas, providing each person with innate but clouded knowledge

Pedagogical principles for collegiate ethics: the teacher should

- (a) develop an environment in which students will feel intellectually free to ask questions of themselves and others (including the teacher);
- (b) assist students to recall their personal abstract concepts and principles; and to appreciate the relationship of these concepts and principles to their lives;
- (c) promote students to read extensively and critically materials most pertinent to this kind of search;

(d) lead students to discuss with one another (and with the teacher) their own reflections;

(e) establish a curriculum in which the subject matter is organized so as to lead students toward knowledge of the Good.

St. Augustine

Nature of the good (or Good, or God) (After his philosophical conversion to Neo-Platonism *and* his moral conversion through St. Paul and the Bible)

God as the Ultimate Good: a Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who is a loving and providential Being (Father); Who became a man and died for the sins of all human beings (Son); and Who inspires and enlightens human beings, enabling them to live in accord with the commands of God and the dictates of personal conscience (Holy Spirit)

Modes of searching for the good

The use of the rational soul called reason, which must be interrelated with and subordinated to Divine faith, a gift of God presented in conjunction with the process of Illumination, by means of which human beings are able to “see” eternal and necessary ideas in the mind of God as eternal and necessary

Pedagogical principles for collegiate ethics

- (a) The end of education is to meet God, Who also is the primary means to that end.
- (b) The only authentic teacher is Christ, the Interior Master.
- (c) Human teachers should present occasions for students’ learning (the route to meeting God) via a proper intellectual environment and the provocation of genuine questions.
- (d) Human teachers need to explain and to exemplify the nature and interrelations of faith and reason, especially “believing in order to know.”
- (e) The curriculum should be organized so that all subject matter is centered upon God, leading the student to a knowledge of God.

William James

Nature of the good (or Good, or God) (Assuming personal experience as equivalent to reality)

That which makes one feel good (comfortable?) as a consequence of overtly doing something or believing in someone or something; is radically relative insofar as all things constantly change

Modes of searching for the good

The pragmatic method, a process by which a person ascertains meaning, truth, and value by referring to personal feelings derived from doing something or believing in someone or something

Pedagogical principles for collegiate ethics. The teacher should

- (a) provide a suitable physical environment for living - in order to learn;
- (b) promote reading and discussion only in the context of physical activity and believing in someone or something as aspects of life itself;
- (c) arrange life-like activities conducive to decision-making in social circumstances;
- (d) act as a resource, along with other resources, assisting students to gather data as a means of carrying on life activities intelligently (that is, via the pragmatic method).

John Dewey

Nature of the good (or Good, or God)

That which re-establishes (or is tending toward the re-establishment of) a personal, harmonious adjustment of the individual to the environment (including other persons) as a consequence of some measurable interaction between the two; is radically relative insofar as all things (not only experience) constantly change

Modes of searching for the good

The pragmatic or problem-solving method, initiated by awareness of a practical problem of daily life; followed by formulation of one or more hypotheses (ideas, moral principles, tentative solutions), which must be weighed for possible success in view of past experience (one's own and others'); and tested in action

Pedagogical principles for collegiate ethics. The teacher should

- (a) provide a physical environment suitable for the students' present living as a basis for their learning;
- (b) assist students in living more and more intelligently (reflectively) by providing information or suggestions enabling them to implement the problem-solving process with increasing effectiveness;
- (c) evaluate students' performance on the basis of how intelligently they live (that is, carry on the problem-solving process).

The first of my final remarks pertains to Socrates' image of the midwife, the conclusion being that no one can learn for another. Therefore, the teacher can merely assist others to learn for themselves. This applies to Plato and Augustine as well as to James and Dewey; it means that all authoritarianism and indoctrination interfere with or nullify authentic teaching and learning. Students must be motivated to "think for themselves"—they must be taught to be "creative." However, we have noticed that "thinking" (therefore, "creativity") bears thoroughly different meanings for Plato and Augustine, on one hand, and James and Dewey, on the other. This occurs in ethical matters, we also have noticed, in connection with their varying conceptions of the good. Their views of the good generate certain features of how it must be searched, which, in turn, become focal points in determining how to lead others to comprehend the good, known as teaching ethics. (As noted above, there also are substantial differences between Plato and Augustine, and between James and Dewey.)

In regard to the term “creativity,” there is much more to be said than will be attempted here. First of all, the term can be associated with “original thinking,” not meaning the production of some totally new idea or principle, but rather a genuine understanding of some meaning— not even necessarily for the first time—by a particular person. To all four of the individuals discussed, creativity in this sense is identified with real learning. Active, creative minds must be cultivated by the Platonic and Augustinian teachers as well as by those following James and Dewey. However, when the former pair effectively promote “creative thinking” in their students, they are inducing them to *discover* what is believed to exist transcendentally and objectively, beyond space and time, as universal and independent of all human activity. The universal Good for Plato is knowable, and human beings are capable of partially knowing it by reason and intuition. The personal, Triune God of Augustine can be met and known, partially in this life, by reason and (most importantly) by the faith which is a gift of God. Both Plato and Augustine, therefore, require students to think creatively and critically in order to know. This process (including the faith demanded by Augustine) is a process of the spiritual soul, which gives life to the body and guides human activity.

On the other hand, when James and Dewey promote “creative thinking,” they directly and immediately are promoting a process of practical living, in which the individual must engage as a means to *creating* the truth and good. Therefore, the term “creative” here can be applied to the human activity of thinking and to the result, a process which is a consequence that when favorable can be called “good.” This good, James and Dewey contend, has come into being only because of human activity (of physical doing for Dewey, and of doing and/or believing for James). It has been *created*, not discovered in the sense of “finding” some already existing reality.

Before the final concluding remark, I would like to comment very briefly on another central topic called faith, but only to note the distinction between Divine faith and natural faith, and the overwhelming pervasiveness of the latter in human living. Among the four individuals considered here, only Augustine makes a claim for the reality of Divine faith, faith as a gift of God. However, all four employ a large dose of natural faith (and/or intuition) in their philosophical reflections. Perhaps, it could be shown clearly enough that Augustine’s famous dictum, “I believe in order to know,” could be applied on the strictly natural plane in the thought of Plato, James, and Dewey. For example, how does Dewey know that his problem solving method is the *only* method of knowing? Knowledge of that principle is not provided by the problem solving method. How does James know that experience is reality, and that personal feelings provide the key to distinguishing good and evil? He does not derive this knowledge through his pragmatic method. How does Plato know that the World of Ideas is an infinite, perfect and permanent reality? His knowledge gained through the dialectical process does not enable him to achieve perfect, permanent knowledge. Therefore, it appears appropriate to conclude that in interpreting Plato, James, and Dewey, we also ought to consider the interrelationships between faith and reason. This might assist us in detecting their starting points and in ascertaining what they believed in order to know. In these three, of course, we would be analyzing only natural faith (and intuition?) in relationship to reason. Among the four, only Augustine raises

the question of the meaning of Christian philosophy - and, subsequently, Christian education.

Finally, evidence provided above shows that philosophy (and, where applicable, theology) in its content (*what* is known) and in its related method(s) of reflection (*how* the content is known) provides a basis for pedagogical principles. More specifically, the nature of the good (*what* is known) in relationship to the mode(s) most appropriate in the search for it (*how* the good is known) provides a substantial and indispensable groundwork for teaching ethics to college students. This groundwork itself should become integral to the learning processes of these students.

NOTE

*The scope of "Ethical Inquiries" as used in the title of this article is seriously and intentionally limited in view of the following three factors. First of all, in regard to the number of philosophers chosen, I decided upon four as a reasonable size in order to balance the need for some depth of investigation, on one hand, and the limitations of space, on the other hand. Secondly, the specific choice of representatives of diverse philosophical traditions is significant in illustrating the thesis. While "diversity" is virtually endless in philosophy, in a sense, one of the areas of divergence which strikes me as crucial to appreciating Western (including Filipino?) culture today in terms of knowing the truth and living the good life is indicated by the following: (1) those who accept as realistic some objective, unchanging, ultimate reality to be discovered intellectually as a basis for living one's life; and (2) those who deny this kind of reality and are left to create their own changing truths and, thus, their own practical paths to happiness. This is explained in more detail under "A context for ethical studies" and is a cornerstone of this investigation. A third reason for the choice of these four philosophers lies in my own background: in studying them, and in employing their principles in structuring and teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in philosophy of education for nearly forty years.

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