



Not all the ethical issues of this course are centered in the clinical setting, but a lot of them are, and you need to keep in mind the priorities, the players, the power relations, and some of the competing priorities that make discussions at the bedside very complex.

I spoke of this Tuesday in terms of *levels of engagement*: **mini** (the individual values and priorities, moral intuitions, personal beliefs and social role); **Micro** (the interactions of individuals—the interpersonal relation between physician and other caregivers, patient and family members, physician and patient.) **meso**: the institution—the hospital, the assisted living facility, the home—in which care is being delivered. The hospital is a very complex institution, with a variety of objectives—some of which can conflict. Think of the insurers/payors, the lawyers and regulators, the medical device manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies as invisible presences at the bedside. Finally, on the **macro** level: health care occurs in a society, in a larger social context. That larger level includes legislation and public policy—a legal system that operates idiosyncratically, a reimbursement system that operates counterintuitively, a fragmented health system—as well as people of various cultural backgrounds and often quite different expectations of their health care system.

**B: The onion/jawbreaker self:** socialization and the source of our moral intuitions

It is in the socialization of the self that we get our first exposure to moral language. We know that ice cream is good; no one needs to tell us that. But we have to be taught that doing what mommy and daddy tell you makes you a good little girl, and grabbing tommy's truck when he's playing with it is bad. Good, bad, right and wrong are paradigmatic moral language. Like all words they have many uses, but they are also very important in sketching the parameters of the moral, ethical realm.

As we grow and interact increasingly with the world around us, the reactions we get to our choices and desires are internalized as voices in our heads, and they come from various levels of the socialized self. I think of it as either an onion or a jawbreaker. If we come from completely homogeneous and value-uniform communities, of course, we might enter into the world of adulthood as onions; but how many are so lucky? (And if we did, we would be as likely to flee them as join them.) As it is, the question of reconciling the voices in our heads, and combining them into a wise and moral response to the vagaries of life represents the quest for moral maturity that will occupy most of us for most of our lives.

**C: Talking about our actions (and those of others)**

Something happens to you.

You go to your best friend, and repeat the situation. Jones did this, or wants that

You might classify the situation: it's a certain kind of thing, can be *described* one way or another.

You might also *judge* the situation: *value* the resulting or desired situation, or the motivation of the action, or the nature of the action, -- as good or bad, right or wrong.

That was an act of cruelty, and cruelty is wrong.

That was murder. No, it wasn't; it was an execution...

If you and your friend agree, it's all very comfortable, if a little bit boring.

If you don't agree about the valuation of the action, things finally get interesting.

Giving reasons for your moral judgments is the level of *justification*.

This is where ethics begins. *Ethics is the discourse of justification, of asking and giving reasons for our choices, our behavior.*

You can react one of two ways to moral disagreement. You can change the subject and not speak to that person again; or you can get more interested in disagreement than in the comfort of agreement; start taking philosophy classes, picking fights, organizing political campaigns....

**D. The poles of ethical action:**

We are agents in the world. We face decisions, we make choices, we are responsible for the things we do and the consequences of our choices and actions. This fundamental fact of freedom, of choice, is the realm of ethics.

I have some alternatives, and because of who I am and who I want to be, I choose among them. I pick one course of action.

What I do, the act itself, is publicly available; a fact; it is in the world, subject to scrutiny by others. It can be described, and morally evaluated.

Furthermore, action in the world has effects. It has consequences. The results of my actions impact other people than myself.

Ethical theories are often differentiated by which pole of ethical action they prioritize; but any ethical theory worth its salt has to take account of all three poles of ethical action. Frankena's little book, *Ethics* (Prentice-Hall) is pretty useful for rough sketches of each kind of ethical theory, plus an excellent statement of how they are related.

I hope my comic-book version of an introduction to ethics will help you when you read the first 40 pages of SAL for next Tuesday. We may have occasion to refer to some of the diagrams as the course wears on.

**Some useful vocabulary:**

You need to know that some of these words are terms of art; they describe particular positions, or draw distinctions that will be relevant throughout the semester.

Descriptive/normative (judgments)

Teleology

Deontology

Autonomy

Heteronomy

Categorical imperative

Beneficence/maleficence

Principle of utility

Casuistry

Relativism/contextualism/absolutism

stakeholders