Ethics in Academic Advising

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Academic advisors confront many ethical problems and benefit from being able to draw on a system of ethical principles. Such principles, to be credible, should be philosophically defensible and not merely reflective of individual tastes. This article proposes such a set of principles, shows how they can be used to cope with ethical dilemmas, and explains why such dilemmas cannot be prevented. These principles are intended to be useful in training academic advisors but are not intended to create a code of ethics for advising.

Your advisee Sally O'Mally has just come to see you. She has learned that she is deficient in a specific graduation requirement and is asking for help. She claims that her previous advisor failed to inform her of this requirement, though she also acknowledges that she has not been conscientious in taking responsibility for knowing and meeting her requirements.

In this case you are aware that Sally has the right to appeal to the dean who has jurisdiction. You also know that this dean has in the past granted appeals when they were based on allegations of procedural error — even when those allegations were dubiously documented. Another student, Robby Robinson, was successful in such an appeal just recently. Thus you estimate that, were Sally to appeal, she would have a good chance of being excused from the requirement.

On the other hand your professional judgment is that Sally would benefit from taking the course that she is trying to avoid. You feel obliged to advise her of her right to appeal, though you know that if she appeals she will likely escape the requirement, which you don't want to see happen. What should you do?

This situation resembles many ethical dilemmas in academic advising. Features will be familiar to most readers. Currently advisors are feeling both an increased awareness of these dilemmas and a heightened interest in finding a way to deal with them. Despite this interest, published work that brings a systematic method to bear on these dilemmas is hard to find. This article proposes at least the beginnings of such a method. Some may find here a foundation they can build on; others may find their disagreement will help lay a foundation of their own.

The article explains why ethical dilemmas in academic advising are so difficult. It then proposes a way of coping with them. The method presented has three advantages:

I. It is rooted in a philosophical account of what makes actions ethically right or wrong. Thus someone using this method has an objective foundation for defending decisions as intellectually responsible.

2. It moves from philosophical foundations to the resolution of real-life ethical problems.

3. It acknowledges that no algorithm for finding a correct ethical solution exists. Solutions will never be perfect, and the anxiety inherent in decision making cannot be banished by formula.

Foundations

What does being ethical amount to? Conceptually, ethics begins with taking the "ethical point of view." That means resolving to approach situations from a disinterested rather than a selfish perspective, holding others' interests to be as meritorious as one's own. To ask "What should I (ethically) do in this situation?" is to put one's own stake in the situation on hold, trying instead to view it as an impartial observer.

A person acting out of self-interest may sometimes do the right thing but not for ethical reasons. The disinterested point of view is the key to asking the right ethical questions. The next step is to devise a method of finding ethical answers.

For centuries philosophers have studied the question "What makes actions ethically right?" Many have proposed ethical theories as answers to this question. There is not enough space here to do justice to the strengths and weaknesses of these theories. Instead, this article is based on four fundamental ethical ideals, drawn from diverse sources, that figure prominently in current ethical thinking. These ideals do not constitute a definitive ethical theory, but they are at least plausible. The reader can judge whether these ideals provide a practical foundation.

The four fundamental ethical ideals are (a) utility, (b) justice, (c) respect for persons, and (d) fidelity. From these, eight ethical principles for

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academic advising follow and can be applied to specific problems with the goal of finding solutions. They will be applied to the case of Sally O'Mally and to other cases as well.

Four Ethical Ideals

Utility

The ideal of utility tells us always to act so as to bring about the most favorable possible balance of benefit over harm for the largest number of individuals (counting all affected individuals as equally important) for the long run as well as the immediate future. This is the notion that has been summarized a bit simplistically in the slogan "the greatest good for the greatest number." Philosophers call utility a ***consequentialist*** principle because it judges actions according to their consequences. (The significance of this concept will be clearer in light of contrasting principles below.)

Utilitarians believe that a person facing an ethical decision must calculate the likely results of alternative courses of action and choose the one that appears likely to bring about the most benefit or least harm. Such calculations are complicated, utilitarians hold, because (a) we are ethically obligated to think through possible consequences of our actions, (b) we are responsible for any results that could be foreseen, and (c) the lines of cause and effect leading to these results can be hard to trace. Nonetheless, it is on this basis that our actions should be ethically evaluated.

Justice

The principle of justice holds that we must treat all individuals equally, granting no one rights or privileges that are not granted to all. This idea of fairness strikes a responsive chord in most of us. Contemporary philosopher John Rawls (1971) has suggested that it is fair to attach differential privileges to particular roles or positions only if those roles are open to all and the special treatment indirectly benefits everyone, even the least advantaged (e.g., special privileges that might be accorded the President of the United States).

The contrast between justice and utility is apparent in the economic sphere. Utility might favor maximizing production to bring about the most goods but not focus on who gets to enjoy those goods, whereas justice might place more emphasis on equalizing individuals' rights within the system even if that results in lower output. An excellent example lies in the debate over reducing the capital gains tax.

Justice is not a consequentialist ideal. Fairness is desirable in itself, irrespective of any benefit that may accrue as a result of it. Justice demanded freeing the slaves, not because they would be better off but because they had the same right to freedom as everyone else.

It is not always obvious how to implement the ideal of justice. The controversy over affirmative action programs, for example, hinges on what justice requires of us to equalize opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups.

Respect for Persons

This ideal received its most famous statement from Immanuel Kant (178511959) in the 18th century but remains important in contemporary applied ethics. Respect for persons commands us to treat individuals as ends in themselves, never solely as means to our own ends, and to treat them as rational, autonomous agents, not merely as things that can be manipulated. Some rules that follow from these abstractions are (a) to tell people the truth, which they need if they are to make decisions; (b) to respect their privacy; and (c) to support their autonomy.

This ideal, too, is distinct from the consequentialist approach. People are entitled to make their own decisions and to know the truth while doing so, whether or not the resulting decisions will be the best for all concerned or even for themselves. We are forbidden from manipulating others even to bring about worthy goals.

Fidelity

Fidelity commands us to live up to commitments that we have made, both explicitly and implicitly. For example, it requires us to keep our promises. A little less obviously, it states that our choices often commit us to responsibilities we may not be aware of. For instance, to become a parent is to shoulder a wide range of responsibilities, some of which can be most difficult, even though one may not be thinking of these while deciding to take on the role.

As with justice and respect for persons, fidelity is not based on consequentialism. The obligation to keep promises is not contingent on whether we like the consequences of doing so.

An important fact — already noted — about these four ethical ideals is that they can conflict.

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For example, it is not difficult to envision circumstances in which one can keep a promise only by telling a lie or in which one can treat everyone equally only at the cost of accomplishing less total good than otherwise. Ethical dilemmas arise in just such circumstances. Two plausible ethical ideals can provide ***prima facie*** plausible reasons for adopting opposite courses of action. Our anxiety when confronting an ethical dilemma stems from the knowledge that whichever course we choose, we will be turning our backs on good reasons for choosing the other. This phenomenon is the source of such agonizing ethical problems confronting modern medicine as (a) allocating scarce medical resources, (b) deciding when it is permissible to cease heroic measures to keep a person alive, or (c) deciding whether to require HIV testing for medical personnel.

Ethical Principles for Advising

From these philosophical foundations we can derive eight ethical principles for academic advising. Attention should be paid not only to the explanation of each principle but also to the ideals from which it is derived.

1. ***Seek the best possible education for the advisee.*** This is a utilitarian principle. In an educational setting, the good that we hope to maximize is education and its attendant benefits. It is not always easy to judge what will be the best education; our obligation is to do our best with the information available. This will benefit students, people with whom they will later have contact, and society as a whole.

2. ***Treat students equitably; don't play favorites or create special privileges.*** Treating students equitably does not mean treating them all the same (e.g., advising them all to have the same major). Differences in students' needs require us to spend more time with one than with another and to advise one more intrusively than another. But the fact that we might like one student more or that we might share another's values would not justify differential treatment. This principle clearly follows from the ideal of justice.

3. ***Enhance the advisee's ability to make decisions.*** This is a key principle of developmental academic advising, so its presence here is welcome. As we all know, we cannot accomplish this goal without permitting the advisee to make decisions. This principle is derived both from utility because it benefits the student and others in the long run and from respect for persons because it supports and develops individual autonomy.

4. Advocate for the advisee with other offices. Students will not get all the services they might from the college without a little help. This principle comes from fidelity because it is an implicit part of the commitment one makes by becoming an advisor. There are limitations on this principle, imposed by utility, for advocating too hard can reduce one's future effectiveness.

5. ***Tell the advisee the truth about college policies and procedures, and tell others (e.g., faculty, staff, and administrators) the truth as well, but respect the confidentiality of interactions with the advisee.*** As a case of truth-telling this is derived from respect for persons, which also includes privacy. Additionally it comes from fidelity, for confidentiality is part of the implicit commitment one makes to an advisee.

6. ***Support the institution's educational philosophy and its policies.*** We need to make special note of this principle because it may not come naturally to advisors who think for themselves and have their own educational philosophies, but it comes from fidelity because it is another commitment that is built into the moral contract one makes when accepting an advising position. Note that this principle does not preclude arguing against policies in appropriate forums.

7. ***Maintain the credibility of the advising program.*** All concerned must perceive the program as giving advice that (a) is coherent, (b) is consistent with college policy, and (c) holds up when questioned. This is derived both from utility because the program's effectiveness depends partly on its credibility and from fidelity because the advisor makes this commitment upon taking the position.

8. ***Accord colleagues appropriate professional courtesy and respect.*** This is not only about being polite to people; it is also a prohibition against encouraging students to believe negative things about the competence or character of colleagues. Opportunities to observe or violate this duty arise when a student asks which instructor to take a course from or asks for confirmation of something that "they" are saying against a particular individual. This principle is based on utility because an institution where such a rule is not followed loses effectiveness and because a student's inclination to gossip and jump to hasty conclusions is unduly reinforced, with long-term consequences.

You may already have thought of a situation in which you would disagree with one of these

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principles, believing that to obey it would not be ethical. It is not surprising that such situations arise. The principles are inferred from ethical ideals, which create only ***prima facie*** duties that can conflict with each other. A ***fortiori*** the same will be true of the ethical principles. How the dilemma of Sally O'Mally arises from this fact is shown below.

First, note this argument on behalf of the proposed principles. They provide useful guidance to academic advisors who wish to act ethically. Moreover, they inherit philosophical legitimacy from the ideals from which they are derived. Accordingly, advisors who adopt these principles and apply them thoughtfully and honestly will generally be acting ethically.

It is worth noting that the ideals and principles help to explain what is wrong with some practices that are clearly unethical in academic advising. The advisor who fails to keep appointments with students is failing (a) in fidelity, (b) in striving for the best possible education for advisees, and (c) in maintaining the program's credibility. The advisor who doesn't keep well informed about rules and requirements will not be able to give advisees the truth they need to make decisions. The advisor who spends more time with female students he finds attractive is failing to treat students equitably, as is the advisor who gives more encouragement to students who share her political philosophy. And even though students often prefer it, the advisor who provides a quick signature without discussing course selections is failing to enhance the advisee's decision-making ability.

We mention these examples not because there is a need to prove that such advisors are unethical but because readers may find that congruence between the proposed principles and their own ethical judgments adds credibility to the principles. That credibility may then carry over to cases where the ethical verdict is not so obvious. This is analogous to the way a scientific hypothesis gains acceptance by its ability to explain known facts and may then be used to predict phenomena not yet observed.

Applying the Principles

A review of the Sally O'Mally case will show what light the principles shed on the problem she poses for her advisor. There are ethical grounds for informing Sally of her right to appeal. To begin with, if an avenue of appeal is open to one student, such as Robby, it should be open to all students similarly situated (Principle 2). Although differences among students may justify different treatment, this case did not indicate that such differences are present. Different levels of assertiveness or street smarts, for example, would not be ethically relevant, nor should Sally suffer for having a more scrupulous advisor than another student has. Moreover, to withhold from Sally the information that an appeal is possible would be dishonest (Principle 5) and would detract from her ability to decide whether to seek the appeal, a decision she has a right to make (Principle 3).

But there are arguments on the other side as well. The advisor might believe that the decision Sally would be disposed to make is educationally wrong and will be marginally harmful to her and her future associates, so there is reason to try to preclude Sally's making it (Principle 1).

Further, given the student grapevine, Sally's using this loophole will increase the probability that others will, too. This would be bad in light of the advisor's commitment to the quality of education (Principle 1), the obligation to uphold the institution's philosophy and policies (Principle 6), and the obligation to maintain the credibility of the advising program (Principle 7). On top of that, Sally's decision would also increase the likelihood that students at large would seek other loopholes, and this is problematic for the same reasons. (The seriousness of these objections depends partly on the nature of the requirement Sally seeks to avoid but not entirely, for any waiver has some effect on the firmness of all requirements.)

Next, the fairness principle that seemed to be a reason for informing Sally may actually backfire. She should indeed have the same opportunity that Robby had. But her case must also be compared with those of the numerous students who have met the requirement, either because they never thought to question it or because they were convinced of its wisdom. Is it fair for Sally to avoid the requirement if they did not? What difference between Sally and these students is ethically relevant (Principle 2)?

Finally, another consideration may cut either way. Circumventing the rules to compensate for earlier irresponsibility may encourage Sally to see this as a desirable way to reach other goals. This could lead her to seek other unwarranted advantages (Principle 2) or to engage in antisocial behavior (Principle 1, and utility in general). On the other hand, one might argue that

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this is desirable, as it will better equip Sally to succeed in a highly competitive world.

What, then, should the advisor do? The decision should not be made by simply counting the number of principles cited on each side and going with the greater—though that may be a starting point. Neither is it possible to rank the principles in order of importance so that one argument will neatly trump another. It would be better, because all the arguments have at least some legitimacy, to find a way to live up to all of the duties. In this case that may be possible.

The advisor can inform Sally of the appeal procedure (thus telling the truth and giving her an opportunity to decide on a course of action). But the advisor need not recommend the appeal, engaging Sally instead in a serious discussion in which the reasons for not appealing are made clear. By walking her through this process, the advisor may do more to enhance her decision-making ability than by leaving her on her own and, at the same time, may avoid the potential bad consequences of an appeal.

One might object that this solution will not work if Sally is an incorrigible who will be out the door on the way to the dean's office before the advisor has finished a sentence. Granted. But if that is what Sally is like, many of the undesirable consequences have already occurred, so having told her is not such a disaster after all.

The resolution proposed for Sally's case is a compromise, a middle ground. Not all dilemmas will be resolvable by splitting the difference. But what recommends this resolution is that it tries to obey all of the principles that bear on the case to the extent possible. The ethical advisor may not always be able to achieve this type of compromise; in some cases a valid principle will have to be disobeyed. Shortly, some help will be offered for situations of that sort as well.

Additional Case Studies

Louis Lane

Louis Lane is one of your new advisees. He describes his new, positive attitude toward school, indicating that he has never really taken education seriously at his previous colleges. As you have only one transcript for him, you inquire about these other experience~He informs you that he never bothered to indicate his first school because he failed or withdrew from all his classes and wouldn't get credit anyway.

You realize that your institution's application requires information about and transcripts from all previously attended colleges and that students sign a pledge that the application is complete and accurate. You also are aware that Louis would probably have been denied admission if his previous record had been known. The campus conduct code permits dismissal for falsifying an admissions application. What should you do?

The immediate question is whether you are ethically obligated to report Louis's history to the admissions office. Doing so is dictated by Principle 6 (supporting the institution's policies). It is also supported by Principle 2 (equity) for if Louis gets away with his actions, he gains an unwarranted advantage over those students who applied with similar or even better records and were turned down. If you don't report Louis, you may become complicit in an act of dishonesty, violating Principle 5, but this argument is mitigated by the fact that you may be obligated to treat your conversation as confidential.

Yet here is Louis before you, brimming with enthusiasm. Principle 1 tells you to try to get him a good education, and he seems bright and motivated enough to take advantage of the education your institution offers. If you report him, he may be dismissed and an opportunity lost. And he'll have still another transcript that shows failure.

Interestingly, Principle 7 (credibility) seems to cut both ways. Reporting Louis's case to admissions supports your credibility with them and perhaps with other campus offices, but that action may diminish the trust students place in your program.

It appears that Louis did not intentionally falsify his application to gain unfair advantage but did so out of a naive supposition that his previous experience didn't matter. This fact, supposing that it is one, helps to tilt us toward a course of action that will keep Louis in school. Though the relevance of Principle 2 (equity) is unquestionable, it would weigh more heavily with us if Louis had been trying to get away with something.

After explaining the problem to Louis (which is required in any case), we would try to nudge him toward a decision to confess voluntarily to admissions (Principle 3). At the same time we would promise to support vigorously his appeal to be kept in school and to get his professors behind this effort as well (Principle 4). This approach also preserves advising program credibility.

In this approach it was not possible (as it was

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in Sally's case) to honor all the principles involved. In particular, if Louis stays in school it seems that Principle 2 has to be violated. It appears that any solution to this dilemma will violate some ethical principle. This is a characteristic of many dilemmas. Note, now, a strategy that was implicit in deciding what to do: to improve perspective the present case was compared to another (i.e., one involving intentional falsification). Doing so made it easier to judge the relative weight of the principles at stake—in this case it seemed best to deemphasize the principle of justice.

So far two strategies have been employed in dealing with dilemmas. The first is to honor all the principles at stake to the extent possible. The second is to compare the case at hand with others that differ in small but potentially important ways. These cases might be actual ones, if we happen to know of any, or hypothetical, as happened here. It doesn't matter, for either type can serve as well in a thought experiment.

Both strategies have in common that the first step toward employing them is to clarify what principles are involved in a particular case.

Phil Phorge

You have just received the registrar's copy of a course withdrawal for Phil Phorge, your advisee. You notice that the signature on the form is not yours, and indeed you don't recall discussing this situation with Phil. This is not his first such incident, and the grapevine says that students do it all the time. In fact you disagree with the required-signature policy because you think it distorts the purpose of advising.

You have to decide what to do with the information in your hands. You can ask the registrar to void the withdrawal, thereby almost insuring an F in the course, as Phil likely could not make up the missed work. You can also refer his case to the Campus Hearing Board, which could choose from a variety of sanctions, including expulsion and an academic dishonesty notation on Phil's permanent record. You can choose both or neither of these options. You may feel (especially because you disagree with the signature policy) that the consequences of turning Phil in are more harsh than his offense warrants, even though it is unquestionably an offense.

This resembles Louis's case not only because the student's failure to be truthful created the situation but also because many of the same principles are involved. A full analysis of the case might be redundant, but note some of its features.

Because it is your signature that has been copied, you may feel some personal pique for which you would like to retaliate. This is a natural human reaction, but you need to remember that from the ethical point of view Phil's offense is no more, or less, serious than if the signature he used were someone else's. Feelings stemming from your direct involvement don't bear on whether you should turn Phil in. They do affect your relationship with Phil, though, and it would certainly be appropriate to tell him that you question whether you should remain his advisor under the circumstances. He may learn something useful from that confrontation.

Two features of the case provide footholds for the strategy of comparison. The fact that Phil has done similar things in the past makes his case less like Louis's, for there is no question of naive intent. That may lead you to place more weight on Principle 6; because his intent was not innocent, Phil's case is more the type that the policy was intended to affect.

The notion that students do it all the time raises the question of justice and Principle 2. As in Sally's case, you have a choice. If Phil is punished, he (unfairly?) loses out to all those students who get away with the same offense, whereas if he is not punished, he gains (unfair?) advantage over the more numerous students who abide by the rules. Here again your knowledge that he has sinned before may incline you to interpret Principle 2 as pointing toward seeing Phil punished, whereas if this were his first offense you might judge differently.

Mindy Martin and Willie Williams

Mindy Martin and Willie Williams have separately come for your signature to drop a course, and you have asked each to explain the reasons.

Mindy, who was raised in a fundamentalist and creationist environment, is uncomfortable with the discussion of evolution that is dominating her required general education science course. There simply is no way to avoid the concept of evolution in the work for this course. In addition to the discomfort she feels, she is afraid that she will fail the course. You are aware that Mindy could meet the science requirement through other courses that would not confront her with evolution so forcefully, if they did so at all.

Willie is also uncomfortable with a class. His

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political science teacher is an avowed Marxist who, Willie says, not only puts a Marxist slant on all the course material but is also constantly making gratuitous remarks that disparage American society and values and America's role in world history. You know from your own contact that this instructor often overdoes his rhetoric and carries his political statements beyond what the evidence at hand will support. As in Mindy's case, this course is not an absolute requirement. As Willie is an economics major, it satisfies a requirement that he study subjects related to his field, but there are other courses that would do so as well.

You have urged both students to stick with their courses on the grounds that involvement with ideas they don't like will benefit them. Willie, at least, has agreed with this proposition in general, but both students insist that their situations are unbearable. You must now decide whether to sign the drop forms.

Mindy's and Willie's cases present some common features. For both students Principle 3 (autonomy) argues for letting them make the decision as they wish. On the other hand, you feel that it is educationally unsound to let students avoid confronting ideas they happen to find unpleasant; thus Principle 1 argues for encouraging them not to drop. In applying Principle 6, you note that institutional policy does not require keeping them in the classes, but many institutions emphasize the value of broadening one's horizons and wrestling with unfamiliar ideas.

Ultimately, if you are unable to talk Mindy and Willie out of dropping their classes, you probably will decide to sign the drop forms. Refusing to do so is an outright violation of autonomy that is hard to justify if you have had a full discussion of the issues. And the alternative courses that the students will take are presumably not bad ones.

There is some more general advice about ethical reasoning in the thinking behind this conclusion. In this situation it seemed necessary to violate either Principle 1 or the students' autonomy. The violation of Principle 1 would be serious but not a disaster: In taking an alternative course Willie will lose little; Mindy will lose an opportunity to learn about evolution, but given her dogmatism it is unlikely she would have learned much anyway. On the other hand, the violation of autonomy would have been absolute and unmitigated. This difference suggests another strategy for resolving dilemmas: Try to identify differences in the extent or degree of the violations of conflicting principles that make one violation less problematic than another.

Recapitulation

To summarize, in addressing an ethical problem in academic advising:

1. Adopt the ethical point of view. Distance yourself from whatever personal stake you have and look at the situation disinterestedly.
2. Apply the ethical ideals and ethical principles for academic advising to determine what action they indicate.
3. If a conflict arises, with different principles dictating incompatible solutions:
   a. seek a way of honoring each of the conflicting principles to some extent,
   b. compare the case at hand with other (real or imaginary) cases that differ in small ways to identify salient features and determine which principles seem more acceptable to disobey, and
   c. in comparing prospective solutions, each of which will violate an ethical principle, try to identify differences in the extent or degree of violation such that one seems less problematic.

Ethics and Law

"What should I do in this situation?" may sometimes be ambiguous, for it does not specify whether it is asking about legal obligations or ethical duties. Fortunately, the two types of obligations often coincide. This is no accident, for laws often mandate what is deemed morally right. But law and ethics are not guaranteed to coincide. There are unjust laws; hence there are circumstances in which the law dictates a course of action that is ethically wrong.

Even without identifying such conflicts, ***legal*** and ***ethical*** do not mean the same thing. Actions are legal or illegal because of the actions of legislators, public officials, and judges: they are ethical or unethical independent of any such actions. Often the law has nothing to do with ethics (**e.g.,** setting the date when a legislative term begins). Conversely, ethical dilemmas often have nothing to do with the law because the alternatives are all legal. Still another difference lies in the fact that in law we want only to avoid doing what is prohibited, whereas in ethics we want to choose the best from among all the possible alternatives.

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It is important to be aware of these differences. One's thinking about an ethical problem can easily become confused if one slips unconsciously into legal reasoning. A legally permissible action may not be the best ethical choice. Conversely it is possible, though rare, for the best ethical solution to be illegal. This is not to say that the law is unimportant but rather that advisors need to (a) be clear on the type of question they are addressing, (b) use appropriate methods for dealing with questions of that type, and (c) upon reaching a conclusion, know which type has been answered and which may remain unresolved.

Law certainly is relevant to ethics. Obedience to and respect for the law makes our behavior predictable and orderly in a way that is beneficial to most people most of the time. But, as with other utilitarian considerations, these can be outweighed in situations where other principles apply. Life raises ethical dilemmas in which the ethical worth of obeying the law conflicts with other ethical values.

Few such occasions will arise in the practice of academic advising, but advisors need to recognize the distinction between law and ethics because they must be aware that to have answered a question in one arena is not necessarily to have avoided a problem in the other. Often (though not always) it is easier to determine what the law dictates than to determine one's ethical duty. In such cases it is tempting to substitute the easier mental exercise for the harder one, and this temptation must be resisted if we are not to deceive ourselves. In particular, if discussion of ethical issues is included in advisor training, trainers need to help advisors avoid falling into this trap.

A Code of Ethics for Academic Advising?

Recently discussion has increased regarding the desirability of a code of ethics for academic advisors. The set of ethical principles proposed in this article has not been labeled a code of ethics. This omission is deliberate and warrants explanation.

To begin with, such a designation would be premature. There has not yet been time or opportunity for others to suggest revisions or additions. A code of ethics should represent the consensus of a substantial number of people.

Moreover, as a code of ethics becomes official through adoption by a professional association, it carries the authority of that association. It may seem binding to members just because they must agree to it as a condition of membership, but to practitioners not affiliated with the association it may have no significance at all. The principles proposed here, by contrast, are intended to apply to all advisors.

(NACADA has taken a step toward a code of ethics in adopting the 1988 "Standards and Guidelines" developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs. Although these standards address some issues discussed above, they do not purport to be a comprehensive code of ethics.)

There is a more important reason, though, for not offering a code of ethics. The model presented here of how ethics works differs from the way ethics would work were it based on a code. A code would sdggest that advisors were in possession of a mechanical formula for doing right: "Follow these rules, and you're being an ethical advisor." Actually obeying the code would sometimes require an effort, but discovering one's ethical duty when a code is available seems pretty straightforward.

As pictured in this article, ethics works rather differently from a code-based model. Ethical ideals and principles are important, indeed they are essential to making decisions that will stand intellectual scrutiny. But they are, as emphasized, *prima facie* rather than absolute rules. They are just the starting point for a process that (a) can demand much more creativity and wisdom than are needed merely to follow a formula and (b) tends to produce less certainty of its results. It is possible that with a code of ethics advisors might fail to see this process as an integral part of being ethical.

However this consequence may not be inevitable. Aware of the pitfalls, those who write and publicize a code perhaps can avoid falling into them. The act of writing the code will heighten the ethical sensitivities of its authors. The code could also be useful in calling advisors' attention to the importance of ethics, an accomplishment that shouldn't be belittled at this stage. It might also help lead them to take the ethical point of view or at least to act as if they did.

We are writing, though, with a more ambitious goal in mind: for all academic advisors to be (a) engaged in thinking through the ethical problems they face and (b) equipped with the tools they need for that process. This will take training and practice. Presenting advisors early in their training with a written code of ethics

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may serve a useful interim function, but it will leave the principal work undone.

The ethics of advising appears to be a relatively new field, even though there is nothing new about the idea that advising presents ethical challenges. When others have had a chance to examine the principles proposed here, they may find them in need of substantial deletions or additions or may prefer some other set entirely. They will likely be able to supplement the brief account of strategies for resolving dilemmas occasioned by conflicting principles. We will be pleased if others are stimulated to improve upon our efforts and look forward to taking part in continuing efforts to find the soundest possible set of ethical principles for academic advising.

Ideally, all who take part in such efforts will continue trying to back their principles for advising in philosophically sound ethical ideals. Ideally, too, the project will be without dogmatism and will be characterized by a wise appreciation of the inherent difficulty of ethics, especially in such an increasingly complicated profession.

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