Teaching Practical Ethics

Elaine E. Englehardt
Utah Valley University

Michael S. Pritchard
Western Michigan University

ABSTRACT: A common view is that, whether taught in philosophy departments or elsewhere, practical ethics should include some introduction to philosophical ethics. But even an entire course cannot afford much time for this and expect to do justice to ethical concerns in the practical area (for example, business, engineering, or medicine). The concern is that ethical theories would need to be "watered down," or over-simplified. So, we should not expect that this will be in good keeping with either the theories or the practical concerns.

In addressing this problem, we turn to philosopher Thomas Reid (1710–1796). He insisted that, because morality is for everyone, one needn't be a philosopher to understand its requirements. Although it can be useful to organize our moral thinking around a few basic principles, a system of morality is more like a system of botany or mineralogy than geometry. Noting this can guide us in constructing effective courses in practical ethics.

KEYWORDS: common sense ethics, duties, ethics across the curriculum, philosophical ethics, practical ethics, principle of universalizability, systems of morals, theory of morals, Michael Davis, Bernard Gert, C. E. Harris, Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, William Whewell

INTRODUCTION

A marked change in the teaching of ethics in higher education over, roughly, the last half-century is the rise of serious interest in ethics across virtually the entire curriculum. In turn, this has given rise to serious concerns about what the aims and goals of such teaching should be, what the specific content of ethics courses or educational units should be, and what qualifications are needed to teach ethics in this or that area.[1] For philosophers, more accustomed to ethics being taught within the academic discipline of philosophy, this has given rise to a number of challenging questions about what sorts of contributions philosophy

©2013. *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 27:2. ISSN 0738-098X. pp. 161–173
doi: 10.5840/ijap20131293

can make to the clearly practical concerns of academic areas such as business, engineering, law, medicine, social work, or other professional programs in higher education.

On this traditional view that the teaching of ethics belongs primarily in academic departments of philosophy, it is understandable that one would hold that courses in ethics should somehow address the central philosophical concerns about ethics. A worry this view prompts is that even an entire course in, say, engineering ethics cannot afford the time required adequately to present a theory of ethics like utilitarianism or Kantian ethics and still do justice to the sorts of ethical questions engineers need to address. Another worry is that, even if more efficient ways of presenting these theories were employed, they simply would not do the sort of work one might hope for—helping students in engineering better understand the practical ethical problems engineers face, thus increasing the chances that they will, as engineers, make better ethical decisions than they would without being introduced to these theories. A concern is that, in order both to take into account the students' lack of background in philosophical ethics and their need to understand ethical problems in engineering, the favored ethical theories would need to be "watered down," over-simplified and, in short, distorted. So, even if the theories were then "applied" to ethical problems in engineering, the applications would not yield conclusions in good keeping with either the theories or the practical problems themselves.

HELP FROM THE PAST

To help resolve these pedagogical concerns, we will begin with some reflections on the views of eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid (1710–1796). Reid spent much of his philosophical life in Glasgow, where he succeeded Adam Smith as holder of the chair of Moral Philosophy. As such, he taught a great variety of courses, including courses on practical ethics and on what he called "the theory of morals." Although Reid devoted much of his philosophical energy to "the theory of morals" (which he took to be concerned with the powers of the mind that enable us to be moral agents and, thereby, to take morality seriously in our daily lives), he did not think that even the best theory of morals would be of much, if any, value in improving our judgment. Just as a theory of vision does not, by itself, improve our vision, a theory of morals does not, by itself, improve our moral discernment.[2] For moral improvement, Reid thought, we should turn to practical ethics. It is this aspect of Reid's thought that we will explore here.

When we turn to practical ethics, says Reid, we will find "systems of morals," ways of organizing our moral thinking that can aid us in recognizing our duties, their relationships to one another, and their connections with the various moral virtues. Although, for Reid, a system of morality can help us organize our moral thinking, he holds that a system of morals is more like a system of botany or mineralogy than a system of geometry. In a moment we will discuss briefly what he likely has in mind in drawing this contrast. But, here what we want to emphasize is that this exploration of Reid is not primarily an historical endeavor to understand Reid in his day. We are discussing Reid because we believe that his

views can provide important insights into how, even today, we might effectively approach teaching ethics in various professional disciplines, practices, vocations and research areas.

Reid's *Active Powers of the Mind* and his recently published lecture notes, *Practical Ethics* are filled with ideas that illuminate our need to examine our moral practices, often with the aid of what he calls 'systems of morals,' ways of organizing our basic moral concepts, rules, and principles that are understood by philosophers and non-philosophers alike.[3] Reid's expression, 'systems of morals,' indicates that he thinks that there is more than one moral system. But he holds that the same basic principles can be expected to run through all the systems. Reid compares these principles to the laws of motion—few and simple, but they regulate everywhere. It would seem that everyday experience is a key to being able to navigate well morally in this world. However, unlike the laws of motion, the limits of moral systems are not "fixed by nature, but by the wide circle of human transactions."[4]

This "wide circle of human transactions" is navigated, not just (or even primarily) by philosophers and metaphysicians, but by people from all walks of life who, nevertheless, are quite capable of understanding the moral complexities of the circumstances in which they find themselves. Whether this capability is well developed in actual practice is another matter. Here Reid is more the realist than optimist—although he would place hope in various forms of education.

For the past several decades, we have had an interest in introducing ethics across the curriculum at our universities, especially in areas that help students prepare for their working careers. This has involved encouraging faculty from a variety of disciplines other than philosophy to reflect with their students on the ethical problems one is most likely to face in professional and working life. Many students are already working and are anxious to discuss the ethical difficulties that occur daily in their work place. Without a strong background in philosophical ethics is it appropriate for faculty in these disciplines to take on the task of helping their students anticipate and think through possible solutions to the ethical problems they are likely to encounter? Our answer is, certainly, and we believe Reid would give the same response.

As we have said, for Reid, "the theory of morals" is concerned with clarifying our understanding of the active powers of mind that enable us to be moral agents. He distinguishes this from practical ethics, which focuses on useful ways of organizing our understanding of how we ought to conduct our lives. Reid regards both types of inquiry to require careful, rigorous thinking. The first, moral theory, he says, is as "difficult and perplexing" as any area of philosophy. However, practical ethics, is much more readily within our reach and, he adds, is "in most cases very plain," even though there are some "intricate and perplexed cases."[5]

Many might contend that, whatever the terrain of practical ethics may have been like in Reid's time and place, there is no shortage of "intricate and perplexed" cases that require our attention in today's professions and practices. Even so, "moral systems" remind us of matters that are rather clear and straightforward, as well as help us better frame our understanding of those issues that are more "intricate and perplexed." Although organizing our moral understanding in this

way requires careful, rigorous thinking, this can be undertaken by philosophers and non-philosophers alike.

Reid's comparison of moral systems with those of botany and mineralogy, rather than with a more tightly constructed system of geometry, suggests a somewhat open-ended approach to practical ethics. In areas such as business, engineering, law, and medicine there is much to discover and clarify, just as there is in botany and mineralogy. Although we might aspire to expand our systematic understanding, progress is piecemeal; and being confident that one has had an important insight or discovery in one area need not wait on our being able to work out its possible relationships to everything else that might eventually fit into a system.

It is interesting that Reid uses botany and mineralogy as models for systems of morals, rather than geometry. Botany and mineralogy in Reid's day were emerging sciences. The taxonomic schemes that were being developed were wedded to human use—medicine, herbs, and foods were the primary focus in botany. Human uses of minerals were the primary focus in mineralogy. Furthermore, both kinds of system were incomplete—open to new entries, and even to modifications in classification. The reach and usefulness of these schemes was very much dependent on what might be discovered by empirical means. The way in which Reid depicts a geometric system is strikingly different. Ideally, it is a closed system, with its basic parts set, both in themselves and in relation to one another. Discoveries come through a priori assumptions and deduction rather than empirical searching, sifting, and winnowing.

So, moral systems for Reid leave room for challenge and revision—though, likely, not total displacement. But, even at their best, they will leave some answers incomplete, even to the point of not being very helpful. Still frustration or dissatisfaction in one area need not infect other areas. Also, doing well in one area may not help much in other areas.

In contrast to Reid's approach, consider Plato's early dialogue, *The Euthyphro*. In response to Euthyphro's confident assertion that it is right for him to prosecute his own father for murder, Socrates challenges Euthyphro to explain what it is that makes all right acts right.[6] He rejects Euthyphro's initial appeal to particular examples of rightness; seemingly, he thinks that we need to know what all right acts have in common before concluding that this or that act (or even this or that kind of act) is right. How do we go from 'some' to 'all' if we can't explain why the 'some' we are offering qualify as being of the right sort or part of the 'all' for which we are searching? However, Reid would likely object that there may be no one thing that makes all right acts right—but this should not prevent us from seeing that some sorts of actions are right, or wrong. If there is one thing that all right acts have in common that makes them right, we may some day discover this, Reid could say. Meanwhile, we can make some headway with less than that.

Bearing this in mind should help us see why Reid holds that it is a mistake to think, "in order to understand his duty, a man must needs be a philosopher and a metaphysician."[7] Morality should be within the grasp of anyone willing to spend the time and energy to focus clearly on the practical issues it raises. In his *Practical Ethics*, Reid says:

> The practical Part of Ethicks is for the most part easy and level to all capacities. There is hardly any moral Duty which when properly explained and delineated does not recommend itself to the heart of every candid and unbiased man. For every Man has within him a touchstone of Morals, the dictates of his own Conscience which approves of what is Right and condemns what is wrong, when it is fairly represented and considered without prejudice.[8]

Although moral systems may require relatively few principles, Reid concedes that they "swell to great magnitude" because the applications of these principles "extend to every part of human conduct, in every condition, every relation, and every transaction in life."[9] What these extensions are likely to involve can be anticipated to some extent, but much needs to rely on practical experience rather than philosophical or metaphysical speculation. This needs to be borne in mind in teaching courses in practical ethics that are designed to help students anticipate the sorts of ethical issues they will face once they are in the workplace.

It should be noted that although practical ethics should be within the grasp of all, without having to become philosophers or metaphysicians, Reid acknowledges that obtaining a firm, clear grasp does pose serious difficulties. After asserting that there is "no branch of Science wherein Men would be more harmonious in their opinions than in Morals were they free from all Biass and Prejudice," Reid concedes:

> But this is hardly the case with any Man. Men's private interests, their Passions, and vicious inclinations and habits, do often blind their understandings, and biass their judgments. And as Men are much disposed to take the Rules of Conduct from fashion rather than from the Dictates of reason, so with Regard to Vices which are authorized by fashion the judgments of men are apt to be blinded by the Authority of the Multitude especially when Interest or Appetite leads the same Way. It is therefore of great consequence to those who would judge right in matters relating to their own Conduct or that of others, to have the Rules of Morals fixed and settled in their Minds, before they have occasion to apply them to cases wherein they may be interested.[10]

Still, he adds optimistically, if our duty is "properly explained and delineated" to those who are "candid and unbiased," they can be expected to understand and accept its moral force.[11] So, helping students understand these challenges and consider ways of dealing constructively with them in morally acceptable ways would seem to be useful objectives in courses in practical ethics.

It is important to bear in mind that Reid sees the function of fixed and settled "Rules of Morals" in particular circumstances, not as algorithmic tools, but mainly as helping us focus on what we need to take into account, rather than allowing our "Biass and Prejudice" rule the day. Even with the appropriate rules firmly fixed in mind and "Biass and Prejudice" pushed aside, *judgment* is needed. The sort of fixed and settled "Rules of Morals" Reid has in mind can stand up to critical challenge (as distinct from rules based solely on "fashion") as aides to gaining clear, moral focus and in resisting the lure of "Passion," "Appetite," "Interest," and "Fashion," when they tempt us in the direction of "Biass and Prejudice."

> When the principles are applied to these [i.e., the 'wide circle of human transactions'] in detail, the detail is pleasant and profitable. It requires no profound reasoning (excepting perhaps, in a few disputable points). It admits of the most agreeable illustration from examples and authorities; it serves to exercise and thereby to strengthen moral judgment. And one who has given much attention to the duty of man, in all the various relations and circumstances of life, will probably be more enlightened in his own duty, and more able to enlighten others."[12]

Notice, however, the condition that must be met if there is to be ease of understanding that is "pleasant and profitable"—one must have "given much attention to the duty of man, in all the various relations and circumstances of life." This is hard work, even if one finds it "pleasant and profitable." This hard work can occur in courses in practical and professional ethics—even if only some of the "wide circle of human transactions" is examined.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Michael Davis's views on teaching courses in practical ethics seems to resonate well with Reid's approach to practical ethics. In a series of recent articles in the journal *Teaching Ethics*, he exchanges ideas with C. E. Harris about the relevance of ethical theory in teaching courses in practical ethics.[13] Davis contends that teaching grand theories, such as utilitarianism or a Kantian theory of respect for persons, should not be expected to help students in determining morally good courses of action in their professional settings. Davis concludes:

> Using moral theory in a course in business or professional ethics is like calculating logarithms from scratch when you have a reliable table available (and are not good at mathematics). You will take more time doing the calculation, have more errors (because of the complexity of the calculations), and (if, but only if, all goes well) end up with much the same result as if you had used the table.[14]

For Davis, trying to teach versions of the complicated theories of moral philosophers is problematic. Those with academic background in moral theory may be able to do quite well in teaching those theories. However, he observes, "most moral theorists have, I think, noticed how often those who know something of moral theory but are not expert get a moral theory wrong or, at least, fail to appreciate how problematic certain interpretations of it are."[15] He adds that there are no quality controls on how these theories are taught, and this can do harm to the student and the professions.

> There is no evidence that students who take even several courses in moral theory are more likely to act ethically than those who take none. And we should, I think, have substantial evidence that moral theory does benefit students enough in that way before imposing a required course on them for that reason. A requirement should rest on more than a well-meaning belief that the course will do some good. Anyway, the failures of teaching a little moral theory do not force the conclusion that what is needed is more moral theory. There is good reason to think that no amount of teaching moral theory can be justified by the better practical decision-making likely to result.[16]

Davis has long argued (and practiced) that students and professionals are best served in practical ethics courses by focusing on a set of practical questions, rather than on the grand theories that predominate in standard courses in philosophical ethics. He offers a list of questions, such as the following, that can be asked when examining cases calling for ethical choices in practical ethics courses.[17]

- Harm test—does this option do less harm than any alternative?
- Publicity test—would I want my choice of this option published in the newspaper?
- Defensibility test—could I defend my choice of this option before a Congressional committee, a committee of my peers, or my parents?
- Reversibility test—would I still think the choice of this option good if I were one of those adversely affected by it?
- Virtue test—what would I become if I choose this option often?
- Professional test—what might my profession's ethics committee say about this option?
- Colleague test—what do my colleagues say when I describe my problem and suggest this option as my solution?
- Organization test—what does the organization's ethics officer or legal counsel say about this?

Davis says that this list is not the only possible, or even the best, list; but it is one that works well with his students when engaging in moral problem solving.

The straightforwardness of Davis's questions mirror Reid's reflections on our ability to understand moral problems and responsibilities. Despite our lack of full or precise understanding of the origins and development of our moral capacities (a problem in for a "theory of morals" to address), Reid insists that this does not provide an excuse for those who might claim they do not understand duties to others and their related virtues. Once our rational capacities are reasonably well developed, Reid holds, we are capable of understanding duties associated with virtues. "The man who is incapable of perceiving the obligation of virtue, when he uses his best judgment, is a man in name, but not in reality. He is incapable either of virtue or vice and is not a moral agent."[18] However, even among those whose rational capacities are well developed and do qualify as moral agents, it is "Men's private Interests, their Passions, and vicious inclinations & habits" that are the primary offenders in provoking the bias and prejudice that so often distort moral judgment.[19]

So, as the young workers extend their "moral systems" into a world of new challenges, there will be moral surprises, but with alertness, seriousness of purpose, and a willingness to employ one's moral faculties thus far developed, Reid is convinced that, for the most part, they should be able to discern what is morally required of them and act accordingly. The academic study of practical ethics cannot be expected fully to prepare students for these challenges, but it can, if done well, help set a promising path.

ARRANGEMENTS IN MORAL SYSTEMS

Reid assists us in understanding that there can be different arrangements in moral systems that highlight, for example, the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. Another system may highlight basic duties or rights. "One division may be more comprehensive, or more natural, the another; but the truths arranged are the same, and their evidence the same in all."[20] Furthermore, they are sufficiently accessible and understandable to non-philosophers without their having to become philosophers or metaphysicians of a sort. This does not mean that they will not have ever to think philosophically; but having to think mathematically in order to solve a math problem doesn't require one to be a mathematician, either.

Hence, it seems that Reid would encourage professors in medicine, botany, engineering, and the like to engage in discussions of practical ethics with their students. He wouldn't want professors from professions other than philosophy to be told they are not capable of leading discussions like this. Students need the assistance of a professor/mentor who can discuss ethical problems they are likely to encounter. Neither the professor nor students need to be philosophers to comprehend nuances of these discussions—or their practical importance.

Just as practical ethics and philosophy have been going through an awkward relationship in today's educational institutions, practical ethics' relationship to disciplines other than philosophy has been strained. Noticing the proliferation of new courses in practical ethics in a variety of disciplines (not just Philosophy departments), in the late 1970's the Hastings Center, an ethics "think tank" in the New York area, formed a group of educators from across the curriculum to discuss what they thought the aims and goals of teaching ethics in higher education should be.

To the surprise of many, a consensus emerged among those who met periodically over a two year stretch of time at the Hastings Center. A series of publications on teaching ethics was published for a wide range of areas (e.g., business, engineering, law, medicine, social work). The five points of agreement for this group were that courses in ethics should: (1) Help stimulate students' moral imagination; (2) Help students recognize moral issues; (3) Help students analyze key moral concepts and principles; (4) Help elicit a sense of responsibility in the student; and, (5) Help students deal constructively with moral ambiguity and disagreement.[21]

Incorporating these objectives in courses presumes that students should be regarded as active learners who may already have considerable aptitude for undertaking the study of ethics in areas of life for which they are preparing. They will have had at least some prior, first hand experience dealing with everyday situations calling for moral discernment and judgment, and they many will have already spent a fair amount of time working with others, learning about customers, making exchanges for money or service, and the like. However, Reid offers a word of warning:

> The most obvious truths are not perceived without some ripeness of judgment. . . . Judgment even in things self-evident, requires a clear, distinct, and steady conception of the things about which we judge.[22]

Furthermore, the "conception of things" about which students will have familiarize themselves includes an understanding of various professions (for example, engineering, law, medicine, social work) and aspects of the world of work they have not yet confronted. It is in these areas of relative inexperience that students will need to be able to discover that which can, on reflection, sometimes be seen as self-evident—and that which, even after careful reflection, cannot.

COMMON SENSE ETHICS

Reid and Davis are advocating a common sense approach to practical ethics. Davis's recommends that students ask themselves a set of questions that will already strike them as somewhat familiar. He explains:

> What makes these tests easier to teach than moral theory is that they are drawn directly from common sense. Students can apply them with reasonable accuracy almost as soon as they have read them because they have in fact already been applying them more or less (though generally using one to make a decision and forgetting the rest). The problem with this method, if it is a problem, is that there is no simple routine for dealing with an option that passes some tests but not others—except to develop a new option that does better.[23]

If we wish to get clearer about matters of ethics in a given area, how should we proceed? Well developed codes of ethics (as found in, for example, professional engineering societies) can be useful starting points, as these are developed by experienced, thoughtful practitioners. However, it is important to bear in mind that codes of ethics undergo changes. They are best viewed, not as the last word, but as the current word; and their provisions are not self-interpreting, but require good judgment. Case studies featuring ethical problems are often an effective means for developing strong discussions about ethical questions that can arise in the professions and the work place. Codes of ethics can be included in discussions, but not as something to which one should blindly and uncritically adhere. Teachers can take the lead in developing and discussing cases with their students. These cases can be written and analyzed from their own professional experiences or from experiences others have had in the field in question. The cases can also come from news features, literature, and film. But these are only suggestions. There are many possible approaches, the main requirement of which is that a steady eye should be kept on the practical arena within ethical issues need to be addressed.

Sometimes faculty learn about ethical challenges their students face after they have left the classroom. Imagine a former student, Troy, telling his instructor about an ethical problem at his engineering firm. He is asked to support a bid his company is making for a large contract. Mark, a former classmate of Troy's, is similarly assigned to support his company's competing bid for the same contract. Mark learns of Troy's assignment, contacts him and asks if there are any job openings where Troy works. He tells Troy that he has sent him an e-mail that contains the bid information Mark's firm is submitting. He tells Troy, "You can open it or not; but please realize, I want a job with your firm. I know your firm needs this contract. My firm will do fine without it."

This is an example in which the approach to practical ethics advocated by Reid and Davis—both classroom teachers—could assist Troy in thinking through his "opportunity." A noteworthy feature of Troy's situation is that he might well find himself tempted by Mark's offer. To that extent, we might say, Troy has a motive for looking at what Mark has sent him. However, Reid might add, human beings are capable of assessing and, when appropriate, resisting such motivation. Motives, Reid holds, might influence our actions, making our decisions easier or more difficult; but they do not necessarily cause them—we moral agents do.

In the case under discussion, let us imagine that Troy exercises his judgment in a way that reflecting his personal integrity and commitment to honesty. Though not formally schooled in philosophical ethics, Troy could also explain his decision in terms of the code of ethics endorsed by his employer, an engineering firm that adheres to the responsibilities, rules and ethics needed to be a respectable professional. But even without using the professional code, Troy understands that he would morally object to a competitor using such tactics at the expense of his firm. This, Troy, concludes, would be cheating—as wrong if he resorts to this as it would be for one of his company's competitors. He places his trust in the standard bid process, as it is fundamental to his notion of fairness in business. Asking Davis's questions could help Troy clarify his discomfort with Mark's email and help provide him with a thoughtful and nuanced reason for distancing himself from the information Mark is offering.

Although Davis's questions do not provide an algorithmic way of resolving ethical problems in business and the professions, asking this same set of questions, regardless of the business or profession in question, suggests that there are ethical principles and considerations that cut across the moral domain—much as Reid says about "moral systems." However, caution in generalizing from one kind of case to others is needed. There is only one principle that Reid is prepared to say applies everywhere without exception. This is what today is commonly called the "principle of universalizability." Here is how Reid characterizes it:

> In every case, we ought to act that part towards another, which we would judge to be right in him to act toward us, if we were in his circumstances and he in ours; or more generally—What we approve in others, that we ought to practice in like circumstances and what we condemn in others we ought not to do.[24]

Reid says acceptance of the principle of universalizability is necessary if we are to be moral agents at all. So, Troy must think beyond his particular case to others that are relevantly similar. However, it is not necessary for him to have a comprehensive theory of justice or fairness (let alone of morality in general) in order to make a reliable decision. Uncertainty, or even confusion, in one area does not need to hinder confident, clear-headed thinking in other areas of ethics.

We can understand that basic moral considerations are related to one another, and it may seem that coming up with a unifying theory headed by a single, grounding principle would be ideal. But, as Dugald Stewart, one of Reid's students and strong followers warned, philosophers can be misled by "an excessive love of simplicity" and in their quest for one master principle may have succeeded only in sidestepping "the real complication of our active principles."[25] From Reid

and Stewart's perspectives, it is quite acceptable to have pieces missing from our moral jigsaw puzzle. In the end, Reid was quite satisfied that practical ethics can do without a single, master principle that provides unity and comprehensiveness to a moral system.

Reid may have underestimated the extent to which moral disagreement can remain even after getting past prejudice, distorting passions, personal ambition, and the like. For example, advances in medical technology have given rise to some perplexing problems in medical ethics related to the use of sophisticated technology, including life-saving or life-extending devices, justice issues in providing and distributing healthcare, and so on. Philosophers should not be expected to shed more light on these practical problems by instructing us in the "theory of morals." We just have to think harder at practical levels accessible to thoughtful people from all walks of life.

Nineteenth-century British philosopher, William Whewell, also resisted the lure of having one master principle in morality. He was a mineralogist as well as a philosopher, suggesting that he might have agreed with Reid's view that systems of morality are more like systems of botany or mineralogy than geometry. In any case, at the outset of his widely used *Elements of Morality*, Whewell says, "I am desirous that [the reader] should understand that, though I do not speak of my work as a Philosophy of Morality, I have tried to make it a work of rigorous reasoning, and therefore, so far at least, philosophical."[26] So, although one does not need to be a philosopher in order to think carefully and well about ethics, it does not follow that one will not have to think philosophically.

WHO CAN TEACH PRACTICAL ETHICS?

Although we know of no place where Reid explicitly addresses the question of "who can teach practical ethics," we believe that today he would encourage professors in medicine, botany, engineering, and the like to take up the challenge of teaching practical ethics to their students. He would not want professors from professions other than philosophy to be discouraged from this because they lack formal background in philosophical ethics. Students need the assistance of a professor/mentor who can discuss ethical problems they are likely to encounter. Neither professors nor students need to be philosophers to comprehend nuances of these discussions—or their practical importance. Reid rightly points out that the "theory of morals" is a very difficult subject, one that requires a rather high level of philosophical acumen to undertake seriously, and also a subject about which we can expect much disagreement among philosophers. However, Reid thinks it is not necessary for professors in medicine, botany, engineering, and the like to tackle this subject. Practical ethics provides plenty of pedagogical challenges of its own. This, Reid, Stewart, Whewell, and Davis would agree, should not be one of them.

Endnotes

1. For an early discussion of these matters, see Callahan and Bok, *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*, as well as the many monographs in specific areas of the curriculum. For

more current discussions, see issues of *Teaching Ethics*, the official journal of the Society for Ethics Across the Curriculum. (See, especially, the recent exchanges by C. E. Harris, Michael Davis, and Bernard Gert beginning in the Fall 2009 issue and continuing in the Fall 2011 issue.) See, also, "Ethics Across the Curriculum" and other features under 'Programs' and 'Archives' at WWW.UVU.edu/ethics.

2. This seems to overlook the possibility that a theory of vision might help us improve our vision by providing insights into how to develop visual aids such as eyeglasses, artificial lens, microscopes, and telescopes, as well as surgical procedures that improve vision. Analogously, recent explorations in psychology, sociology, and neuroscience might help us both discover shortcomings in some of our basic ways of understanding and dealing with moral matters, and to come up with effective ways of dealing with these shortcomings. Just as we have had to learn to recognize and deal with visual "blind spots" in driving, we are now trying to learn how to recognize and deal with moral "blind spots." On the latter, see, for example: Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots*; and Werhane et al., *Obstacles to Ethical Decision-Making*.

3. Reid, *On the Active Powers of the Mind*; Reid, *Practical Ethics*.

4. Reid, *On the Active Powers of the Mind*, 642.

5. Ibid.

6. Plato, 1975 *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, translated by G. M. A Grube, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing,) 8.

7. Reid, *On the Active Powers of the Mind*, 643.

8. Reid, *Practical Ethics*, 10–1.

9. Reid, *On the Active Powers of the Mind*, 642.

10. Reid, *Practical Ethics*, 11.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. These discussions can be found in *Teaching Ethics* 10.1 (Fall 2009) and 12.1 (Fall 2011).

14. Davis, "The Usefulness of Moral Theory in Teaching Practical Ethics: A Reply," 56.

15. Ibid.," 52.

16. Ibid.

17. Davis, "The Usefulness of Moral Theory in Practical Ethics: A Question," 73–4.

18. Reid, *On the Active Powers of the Mind*, 639.

19. Reid, *Practical Ethics*, 14.

20. Reid, *On the Active Powers of the Mind*, 642.

21. Callahan, "Goals in the Teaching of Ethics," 61–74.

22. Reid, *Practical Ethics*, 219.

23. Davis, "The Usefulness of Moral Theory in Teaching Practical Ethics: A Reply," 57.

24. Reid, *On the Active Powers of the Mind*, 639.

25. Stewart, *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*.

26. Whewell, *The Elements of Morality*, Vol. I, vii.

References

Bazerman, Max, and Ann Tenbrunsel. *Blind Spots.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Callahan, Daniel. "Goals in the Teaching of Ethics." In *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*, ed. Daniel Callahan and Sissela Bok. New York: Plenum, 1980. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-3138-4_2

Callahan, Daniel, and Sissela Bok, eds. *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*. New York: Plenum, 1980. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-3138-4

Davis, Michael. "The Usefulness of Moral Theory in Practical Ethics: A Question of Comparative Cost." *Teaching Ethics* 10.1 (2009): 69–77. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/tej200910117

———. "The Usefulness of Moral Theory in Teaching Practical Ethics: A Reply to Gert and Harris." *Teaching Ethics* 12.1 (2011): 51–8. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/tej201112116

Plato. *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. G. M. A. Grube. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1975.

Reid, Thomas. *On the Active Powers of the Mind*. In *Philosophical Works*, Vol. II, with notes by Sir William Hamilton. Hildesheim: Gekorg Olms Verlagsbuchanlung, 1997.

———. *Thomas Reid on Practical Ethics: Lectures and Papers on Natural Religion, Self-Government, Natural Jurisprudence and the Law of Nations*, ed. Knud Haakonsen. University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2007.

Stewart, Dugald. *The Works of Dugald Stewart, Vol. 5: The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*. Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1829.

Werhane, Patricia H., Laura Pincus Hartman, Crina Archer, Elaine E. Englehardt, and Michael S. Pritchard, *Obstacles to Ethical Decision-Making*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Whewell, William. *The Elements of Morality*, Vols. I and II, 4th ed. London: Cambridge University Press, 1864.