

MAINE MARITIME ACADEMY

ETHICAL REASONING IN ACTION

Think *OCEANIC* | Guiding Questions: Concepts, Potential Pitfalls, and Strategies

O BLIGATIONS – What duties & obligations apply? (moral, personal)		
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Duties (what is morally “due” others) and obligations (what have you “obliged” yourself to do); what is owed to others; accountability	Avoidance; bystander effects; fear of getting involved; cowardice; confusion of rights and interests (rights inflation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify basic duties to aid and assist others Consider voluntary promises and roles you have taken and the moral requirements that come from them Consider all the rights (natural, legal, moral) that others may have and what may be owed to them because of those rights Examine the intent behind actions
C ONSEQUENCES - What would produce the best short- and long-term outcomes?		
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Outcomes; results; future utility; ends	Difficulties predicting the future; unforeseen or unintended consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult those with more, richer experience, i.e. “competent judges” (JS Mill) 10-10-10 Strategy (Sue Welch) – what could happen in 10 days, 10 months, and 10 years Ask: Best for whom? For what?
E QUITY – How can I (we) act fairly and justly, balancing interests?		
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Justice; fairness; equality; considering and balancing all interests; impartiality; equal opportunity; objectivity	Biases such as: self-serving and my-side/confirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek impartiality, objectivity Veil of Ignorance (John Rawls) – assume no knowledge about yourself, such as abilities, interests, gender, race, socio-economic standing, don’t privilege self-interest Ideal Observer – try to see things “as if” you knew everything, were omniscient
A UTHORITY – What do legitimate authorities expect? (professional, legal)		
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Rightful command; control or influence on moral decisions from law, experts, & religious sources	Legal and professional expectations may conflict with moral requirements; what is “legal” is not necessarily “right”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and evaluate differential claims to authority, and different authoritative expectations What do professional or legal authorities expect? What professional ethical codes may apply? Note how power functions in the scenario

<u>N</u>EEDS – What needs exist? Are <u>all</u> voices being heard?		
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Essentials; must-haves; requirements; “life and death” material necessities	Effort to direct and command the lives of others without moral sanction (Paternalism); disrespect; self-interest; short vs long term issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for, listen to, value, and respect the needs others express themselves • Note which voices are not present • Pause discussions periodically to “check-in” and make sure all voices are being heard (“thumbs tool”) • Ask for and gain informed consent before doing something to anyone
<u>I</u>NTEGRITY – Is this potential decision honorable and virtuous?		
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Character; honor; identity; ideal self; actualized self; virtues; habits	Self-deception; self-destruction; vices such as laziness and arrogance; ethical and epistemic fallibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the kind of person you want to become • Consider classical virtues such as, but not limited to honor, wisdom, courage, honesty, generosity, humility, compassion, respect • Ask: Would I be proud of the person I become as a result of this action/decision?
<u>C</u>ARE – Who is vulnerable or in need of care?		
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Empathy; love; compassion; concern; sympathy	Too centered on the immediate, close, and personal; in-group and my-side biases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify vulnerable persons • Attempt to take the perspective of others • Try to “walk in the other’s shoes” • Share personal stories; work with different people; travel; expand your concern to at least “humanity” if not further, i.e. beyond your circle of care

These aspects of ethical reasoning form the acronym

O C E A N I C

The questions raised by ethics, like the ocean, are indeed **profound**, meaning deep and vast, and yet with the right tools remain **navigable**.

Like the ocean, ethical issues range far and wide, connecting to and affecting realities far distant from initial appearances.

What would it mean for ethical reasoning to be oceanic?

To think deeply and broadly, across time, to leave no border unexamined, to note the interconnectedness of life and resources across the globe.