An Introduction to Ethics:

From the Greeks to
Applied Behavior Analysis

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Ethics:
What’s all the Fuss?
Ethics

“Relating to what is good or bad, having to do with moral duty and obligation.”
(Moral is defined as relating to principles of right and wrong.)

“Ethics is not about being better than someone else; it’s about being the best we can be.”

\(^1\)Webster’s New World Dictionary, 3rd College Edition
\(^2\) © 2000 Josephson Institute of Ethics.
What is Ethics

Acting with an awareness of the need for complying with rules, such as the laws of the land, the customs and expectations of the community, the principles of morality, the policies of the organization, and such general concerns as the needs of others and fairness.
Code of Ethics

Sometimes referred to as a *Value Statement*, with general principles to guide behavior, outlining a set of principles that affect decision making.
Perhaps the BEST Example:  
*The US Constitution*

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America
Code of Conduct

A “code of conduct” is a set of rules outlining the social norms and rules and responsibilities of, or proper practices for, an individual, party or organization. Related concepts include ethics, honor, moral codes and religious laws.
Similarities

Both a Code of Ethics and Conduct are similar as they are used in an attempt to encourage specific forms of behavior.
Ethical guidelines attempt to provide guidance and choices to influence decision making.
Conduct regulations assert specific behaviors are appropriate, while others are inappropriate.
Differences

• Both are used in an attempt to regulate behavior.
• Ethical standards are generally wide-ranging and non-specific.
• Conduct standards generally require little judgment, you obey or incur a penalty.
So, What Does ABA Have?

Effective January 1, 2016, the Behavior Analysis Certification Board implemented the Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts (“The Code”)
• Scattered throughout The Code are a smattering of Ethical standards;

• The majority of the document serves as a Code of Conduct with specifically enforceable standards;
Included within The Code are references to:

- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Promoting an Ethical Culture
Typically, a Professional Code of Ethics will also include references to:

- Honesty;
- Respectfulness;
- Loyalty;
- Transparency;
- Accountability;
- Diversity;

- Values;
- Ideals;
- Social Validity;
- A philosophy dealing with what is morally right and wrong;
What Does “Ethics” Mean to You?

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“Hello babies. Welcome to Earth. It’s hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It’s round and wet and crowded. On the outside, babies, you got a hundred years here. There’s only one rule that I know of babies – “God Damn it, you’ve got to be kind.”
Examples of Ethical Philosophies
Much of the History of Ethics comes from the Greeks

All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there, spent their time doing nothing but talking and listening to the latest ideas.
Evolution of Ethical Systems

Plato: Ordered Integration

Aristotle: Well Being
Epicurus: Peace of Mind

Stoicism: Resigned Self Control
Augustine: The Love of God

"If the highest aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in port forever."
--St. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas: Fulfillment of our Purpose

"God loves each of us as if there were only one of us."
-St. Augustine
Others:

Reformers (Luther): Believing obedience

Kant: Deism

Nietzsche: Non-absolutism

Rauschenbusch: Christianizing the Social Order

Barth: Transcendence

Nygren: Love as the Christian Norm

Fletcher: Situation Ethics

M.L. King: Non-violent Revolution
B.F. Skinner

Humanist of the Year (1972),
American Humanist Association

Skinnerian ethics holds that individuals already and necessarily do the good that maximizes reinforcement. A social environment may induce its members to give help even though these members gain nothing from the advantage of the group (Skinner, 1975). Thus, society provides overriding reasons for self sacrifice with practices which have been selected simply because they have contributed to its survival.
Skinner (1975) asserts that we learn moral behaviors because of the consequences that follow. In effect, each generation has been provided with a history of reinforcement and punishment that assures these values become "ends in themselves." Each generation, for example, steps into guarantee adequate care of the very young, the aged, the infirm, the retarded, and the psychotic.
Six Major Ethical Views
(Norman L. Geisler)

Start with the Question:

Is it ever right to lie to save a life?

Corrie ten Boom tells how she lied to save Jews from the Nazi death camps. In a number of biblical stories, people lied to save lives. The Hebrew midwives lied to save baby boys Pharaoh had commanded them to kill (Exodus 1:15-19). Rahab lied to save the lives of the Jewish spies in Jericho (Josh 2).

We will use this dilemma to illustrate six major ethical positions.

Which best describes your Ethical Philosophy?
Antinomianism ("there are no laws")
Antinomianism asserts that lying to save lives is neither right nor wrong. It argues that there are no moral absolutes or objective principles by which the issue can be judged right or wrong. The question can only be answered on subjective, personal, or pragmatic grounds, but not based on any kind of morality. There is no moral law to help us decide.
Generalism ("there are no universal laws")

Generalism claims that lying is generally wrong. As a rule, lying is wrong, but this rule may be broken in specific cases. Since there are no general, universal laws, whether a particular lie is right or wrong will depend on the results. If the results are good, then the lie is right. Most generalists would say that lying to save a life is right because in that case the end justifies the means necessary to attaining it. But still they would say that lying in general is still wrong.
Six Major Ethical Views

(Geisler)

Situationalism ("Lying is sometimes right: there is only one universal law")

Situationalism asserts that there is only one absolute moral law, and telling the truth is not it. Love is the only absolute – lying may be the most loving thing to do. In fact, lying to save a life is the loving thing to do. Hence lying is sometimes right. Any moral law can be broken for the sake of love. Everything else is relative, and only one thing is absolute.
Six Major Ethical Views

(Geisler)

Unqualified Absolutism (“Lying is always wrong: there are many non-conflicting laws”)

Unqualified Absolutism believes that there are many absolute moral laws and that none of them should ever be broken. Truth is such a law. One must always tell the truth no matter what the consequences may be. Truth is absolute and absolutes can never be broken. Results may never be used to determine whether an action is morally defendable.
Conflicting Absolutism ("Lying is forgivable: there are many conflicting laws")

Conflicting Absolutism recognizes that we live in an evil and fallen world where absolute moral laws run into inevitable conflict. In such cases it is our moral duty to choose the lesser evil. We break the lesser law and plead for mercy. Moral dilemmas are sometimes unavoidable, but we are culpable anyway. We can lie to save a life but we need to ask for forgiveness so the sin of lying.
Graded Absolutism ("Lying is sometimes right: There are higher laws")

Graded Absolutism argues that although there are many moral absolutes that will conflict with one another, some obligations are higher than others. Where there is an unavoidable conflict, our duty is to follow the higher law. God does not blame us for what we cannot avoid. Thus it is right to lie to save a life and no sin has been committed that requires forgiveness.
So, Which are You?
Why?
Ethics in the Maturation of the “Profession” (?) of Applied Behavior Analysis
Houston, we have a problem...


Analyzed 27 newspaper articles published from 1973 to 1977 to determine the extent of negative media coverage of behavior modification (BMD). In about 48% of the articles, BMD was presented inaccurately. BMD was equated with psychosurgery, brainwashing, sensory deprivation, drugs, and even torture.
Recipe for Disaster: Conditions That Give Rise to Unethical Aversive Control

Paul Mahoney and Michael F. Dorsey
Pennhurst State School & Hospital

- Provided habilitative services to individuals with mental illness and physical disabilities.
Pennhurst State School & Hospital

• “Suffer the Little Children” (TV10, 1968)
  – Overcrowding
  – Segregation
  – Excessive Use of Restraints
  – Aversive Control
Pennhurst State School & Hospital

  - Deficiencies found:
    - Operations
    - Habilitation
    - Clinical
Sunland Training Center

- Opened in 1965 in Miami Florida - Provided services to children diagnosed with intellectual disabilities.

- For those interested in more information on the Sunland Training Center, please see Bailey & Burch’s *Ethics for Behavior Analysts*. 
Sunland Training Center

• Blue Ribbon Panel Conclusions (Bailey & Burch, 2011)
  – Unethical “Treatment” Program
  – Client deaths
  – Administrative complicity
  – Poor staff training
Willowbrook State School

  - Robert F. Kennedy visit
High Desert State Prison (HDSP)

• Establishment of a Behavior Modification Unit Pilot Program (BMU)
• Participant Criteria
• General Program Description
High Desert State Prison (HDSP)

- Inmate claims
- Prison Legal News article
  - Addressed the issues of prisoner abuse, racism, and cover-up
  - Noted the evolution of a program based upon positive reinforcement to one based upon aversive control
Washington, DC – March 5, 2013 – Juan Méndez, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, presented a report to the UN Human Rights Council yesterday in Geneva holding governments around the world accountable for violations of the UN Convention Against Torture. The report cited the United States, calling on the federal government to bring an end to the use of electric skin shocks and restraint at the Judge Rotenberg Center (JRC) in Canton, Massachusetts.
Behavioral View of Ethics

• Ethics – standards of behavior developed by culture to promote the survival of that culture
• Ethical guidelines are an important source of behavioral control when immediate reinforcers influence individual to behave in a way that leads to aversive stimuli for others
  – Remember: ALL Behavioral Treatment approaches are, by definition, Restrictive
• When members of the same culture learn to follow the same ethical guidelines, the guidelines exert rule-governed control over behavior
Arguments Against Deliberately Controlling Behavior

• Because of history and experiences, some have argued that any attempt to control behavior is unethical

• Goal of any social helping profession involve change in behavior and behavior control

• It is often necessary to change, manage, influence, or control behavior
  – It is necessary to ensure that it is done ethically
Ethical Guidelines

- Organizations that have addressed ethical guidelines involved in behavior modification/analysis:
  - American Psychological Association (APA)
  - Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI)
  - Behavior Analysis Certification Board (BACB)
ABAI “Policy” on Code of Ethics

“The Association for Behavior Analysis International expects its members to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional behavior in the conduct of their work and the advancement of behavior analysis. ABAI embraces the diversity of professions within its membership; thus each ABAI member should adhere to the ethical standards that have been defined for his or her profession.”
Ethical Guidelines

Based on:

– 1977, *Behavior Therapy*, publication of set of ethical questions to ask
– 1978, Stolz & Associates, a comprehensive report on ethical issues involved in behavior modification
– 2002, American Psychological Association’s *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*
1968: SEAB begins publishing the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis (JABA)* and names M. Wolf as its first editor. D. Baer, M. Wolf, and T. Risley, now at the University of Kansas, define the field in their seminal paper, "Some current dimensions of applied behavior analysis." *JABA*, 1, 91-97. The most frequently cited articles in the field of behavior analysis.
Seven Dimensions of ABA
Baer, Wolf & Risley, 1968

1. Applied
2. Behavioral
3. Analytic
4. Technological
5. Conceptual Systems
6. Effective
7. Generality
8. Maintenance (1968)
Proposed a “radical concept that clients (including parents, and guardians….., and even those whose taxes support social programs) must understand and admire the goals, outcomes and methods of an intervention” (p. 284)

Cheryl Davis, Lesley A. Shawler, Timothy A. Nipe, Josephine Southwick, Emily Debacher, Rachel Fuliciniti, and Michael F. Dorsey
Method

- *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*
  2000-2015
- 608 articles
Results: operational definition scale
Association for Behavior Analysis International

Right to Effective Treatment

1989
The Association for Behavior Analysis, through majority vote of its members, declares that individuals who receive behavioral treatment have *A Right to Effective Treatment*, including:

- *A therapeutic physical and social environment*
- *Services whose overriding goal is personal welfare*
- *Treatment by a competent behavior analyst*
- *Programs that teach functional skills*
- *Behavioral assessment and ongoing evaluation*
- *The most effective treatment procedures available*
PUNISHMENT

Systematic Review

Conceptual Issues

Social Validity

Ethics

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The Association for Behavior Analysis International Annual Conference

Chicago, IL May, 2016
Method

- Reviewed journals (1968 - 2014)
- Search term “Punishment”
  - Might have unintentionally excluded some procedures
  - Aversive vs. punishment
- Only included studies with punishment procedures as independent variables
- Tagged and categorized studies
Journals Reviewed: 1968-2014

- American Journal of Mental Deficiency
- Analysis and Intervention in Developmental Disabilities
- Behavior Analysis in Practice
- Behavior Modification
- Behavior Therapy
- Behavioral Assessment
- Behaviour Research and Therapy
- Behavioral Interventions
- Child and Family Behavior Therapy
- Child Development
- Education and Treatment of Children
- Exceptional Children
- Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology
- Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis
- Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders
- Journal of Behavior Therapy and Education
- Journal of Educational Psychology
- Journal of Educational Research
- Journal of Experimental Child Psychology
- Journal of Mental Deficiency Research
- Journal of Orthopsychiatry
- Journal of Special Education
- Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior
- Mental Retardation
- Psychological Reports
- Remedial and Special Education
- The Behavior Analyst
- Research in Developmental Disabilities
- School Psychology Review
- The Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps
- The Journal of the Association for the Severely Handicapped
Review: 1968 - 2014

- 33 journals reviewed
- Found in 23 journals
- 530 studies
Number of Punishment Studies Published Per Year

Year

Number of Studies Published

Behavior Analysis Certification Board

Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts (2016)

Guidelines for Social Media
Ethical Implications of Social Media on Codes of Professional Conduct

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Purpose

• To review websites for organizational members of ABA affiliates to determine the percentage of companies that have ethical violations on their websites.
Methods

- Boundaries of competence
- Integrity and reputation of the profession
- Patient/therapist relationship or professional boundaries
- Multiple relationships and conflict of interest exploitative relationships
- Confidentiality
- Disclosures

- Behavior analytic assessment
- Affirming principles
- Avoiding false or deceptive statements
- Intellectual property
- Statements by others
- Media presentation
- Testimonials and advertising
- Confidentiality and BABC intellectual property
- Discouraging misrepresentation
So,
Is Behavior Analysis a Profession?
Or, Should it be?

“A profession arises when any trade or occupation transforms itself through ’the development of formal qualifications based upon education, apprenticeship, and examinations, the emergence of regulatory bodies with powers to admit and discipline members, and some degree of monopoly rights.’” (Bullock and Trombley, 1999).
The sociological investigation of “professions” began in the 1930s with attempts to define characteristics or traits that distinguish the professions from other occupations. (Runt’e, 1995)
Review of Characteristics

- Skill based on esoteric knowledge;
- Provision for Training and Education, usually associated with a University;
- Formal Organization;
- Altruistic Service;
- Adherence to a Code of Ethics and Conduct;
Does ABA Meet These Standards?
What We Need to Do

1. Educate the general public that Applied Behavior Analysis is an altruistic/ethical person-centered profession;
2. Partner with non-ABA advocacy groups to assist in their mission while educating them that we are ethical people;
3. Stop publically criticizing members of other professions for not meeting our “evidence-based” standards. These are our standards, not theirs;
4. Work to educate the Executive Councils of ABAI and APBA that Behavior Analysis is a Profession, not a group of practitioners from other professions coming together to employ the Science of Human Behavior as a tool in our respective professions;
5. Work together as colleagues to define our Ethical Position;
QUESTIONS?