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Ethics 1 – Why Ethics Should Not Be Taught to Grown-Ups



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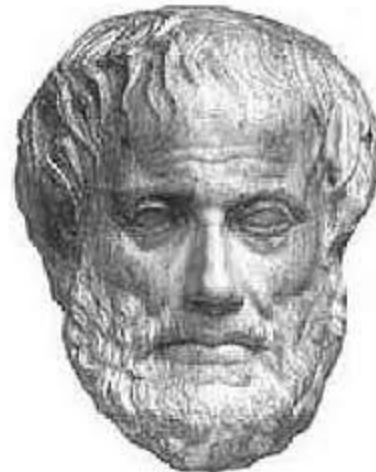
Michael Coyne is a founding member of Waldheger/Coyne. His practice focuses on federal income tax matters, primarily employee benefits. A fellow in the American College of Employee Benefits Counsel, Mike served a three-year term as a member of the Internal Revenue Service's Advisory Committee on Tax Exempt and Government Entities (the "ACT"), where he chaired its project on Section 403(b) Arrangements. He also served as an adjunct professor in the Case Western Reserve University College of Law Graduate Tax Program, where he taught courses in Qualified Retirement Plans.



A frequent writer and lecturer on employee benefits matters, he is a contributing editor to the Section 401(k) Advisor. He has served on NIPA's Webinar Committee and also served as the co-chair of the 2012 and 2013 ASPPA annual conference. Mike also serves as a director of the Small Business Council of America (SBCA), a tax lobbying organization representing the interests of closely held businesses.



- Happiness is the one good of human activity done for its own sake.
- We study ethics in order to improve our lives, and therefore, its principal concern is the nature of human well-being.



- Our professional ethics should be driven by our own virtue and character.
- Our personal life and our professional life really are not separate.
- Virtue Ethics is a tool for integrating our private and professional lives in a positive way.

- Consequentialism
 - “The ends justify the means.”
 - Utilitarianism.



- Deontology
 - Unites responsibilities and obligations when evaluating ethical decisions.
 - Decisions are consistent because they are based on set responsibilities.
 - Circular 230
 - NIPA Code of Ethics

- **Virtue Ethics**

- Emphasizes the role of one's character and the virtues embodied in that character for determining ethical behavior.
- One should live a virtuous life in order to assure "virtuous" or ethical living.
- The norms of the profession must be shown to reflect a commitment to an important substantive human good that contributes to our living a flourishing human life.

Which Approach is the Right Approach?

- Each asks a different ethical question:
 - Deontology asks, “What is my duty?”
 - Consequentialism asks, “What are the likely consequences of my action?”
 - Virtue Ethics asks, “What would a virtuous person do?”

Why Virtue Ethics?

- Virtue ethics is more about being than doing.
- Virtue ethics is not just about the heroic but also about the ordinary.
- Virtue ethics is bound up with our pursuit of well-being and happiness and our roles in the world.

- How do we interact with our clients?
 - Relationship Building
 - Communication



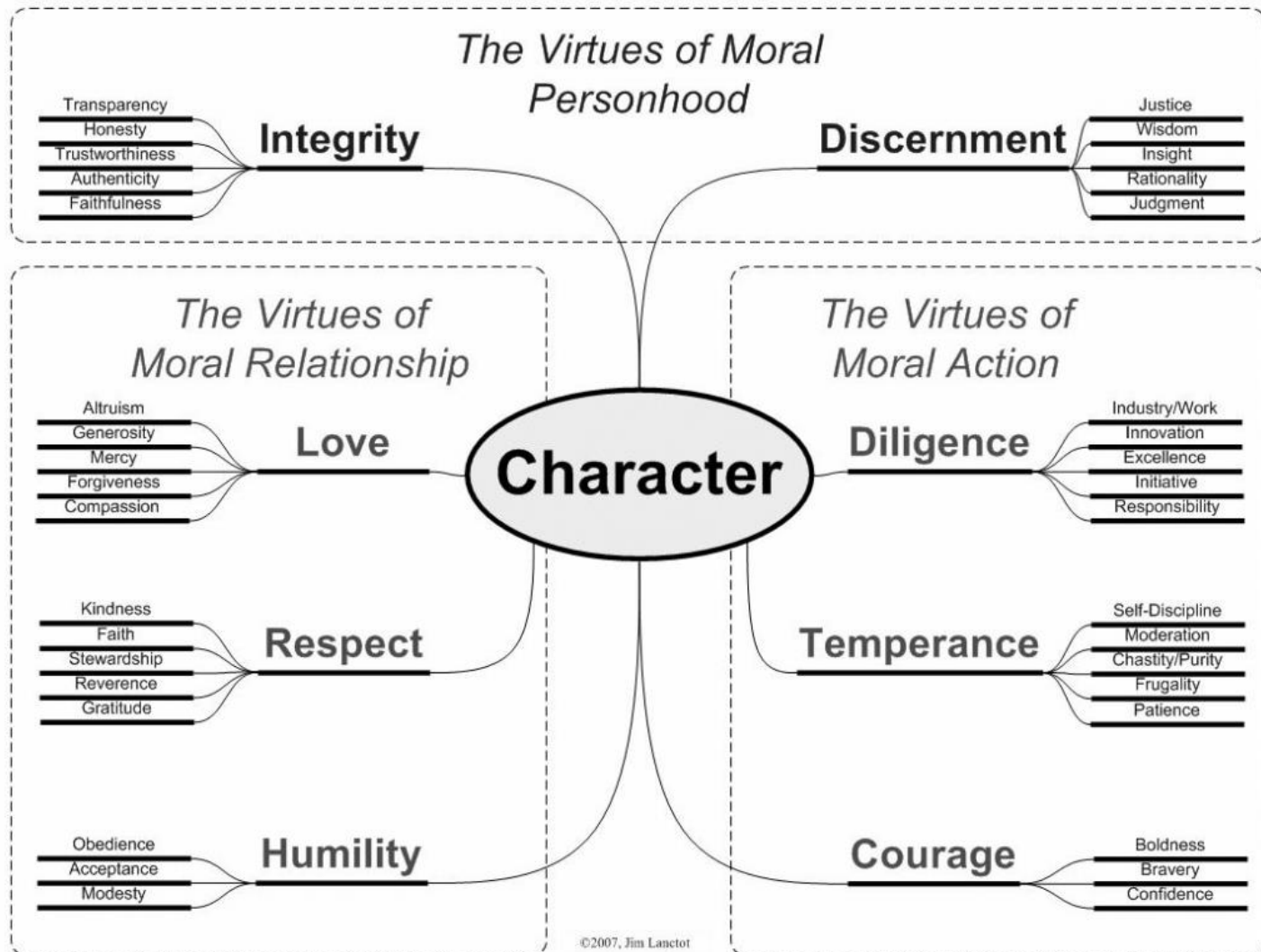
- How do we bring ethics into our office?
 - Relations with colleagues, supervisors, employees.
 - Commitment to getting better, improving competency.
 - Providing our staff with appropriate resources.
 - Communicating expectations.
 - Being the best employee we can be.
 - Being the best supervisor we can be.

- How do we interact with others in our profession?
 - Relationships with competitors.
 - How do we speak about competitors?
 - How do we involve ourselves in professional organizations?



- Are we hard wired to know the difference between good and evil?
- Who decides what is virtuous?

Virtue Ethics and Our Profession



- “Ethics Are Lived, Not Learned” – Michael Bugeja
 - Ethics are about motive rather than sequence, circumstance or setting. There is little, if any, moral difference between the reporter who plagiarizes words in a newsroom and the marketer who steals numbers at an agency.
 - There is little, if any, difference between personal and professional ethics.

- George Washington on ethics:
 - “Associate men of good quality, if you esteem your own reputation; for it is better to be alone than in bad company.”
 - "The propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained." (1789 inaugural address).



- George Washington on ethics:
 - **“In politics as in religion, my tenets are few and simple. The leading one of which, and indeed that which embraces most others, is to be honest and just ourselves and to exact it from others, meddling as little as possible in their affairs where our own are not involved. If this maxim was generally adopted, wars would cease and our swords would soon be converted into reap hooks and our harvests be more peaceful, abundant, and happy.”**



- What are your virtue ethics?
- Does your organizational culture, management style, and professional practice reflect your ethical values?

- “Ethical Intelligence: Five Principles for Untangling Your Toughest Problems at Work or Beyond”
 - Do no harm.
 - Make things better.
 - Respect others.
 - Be fair.
 - Be loving.



- Final Thoughts

- You will be happier and more fulfilled if your work life embodies your personal values.
- The key to practicing virtue ethics is to think about and act on the ethical aspects of everyday decisions.
- Virtue ethics demands discussion and interaction with the world.
- When viewed expansively, ethics becomes a dimension of life. It is interwoven with our individual and collective pursuits, and is a means to individual and collective success.

