

Models of Ethics in Global Contexts

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Nothing to disclose.

Humanities

- Encompass the disciplines that describe and interpret human experience.
- Ethics: the humanities discipline that is most frequently included in medical education.
- Ethical values, principles, and paradigms aim to provide guidance for human behavior; criteria for distinguishing between better and worse, or right and wrong choices.

Garrett Hardin, 1968:
The Tragedy of the Commons

The morality of an act is a function of the state of a system at the time [the act] is performed.



Some recognized 'systems' in global health:

- Local communities, cultures, social norms, health risks, health systems
- Health care institutions
- Health policy
- Academic partnerships
- Research
- Aid industry
- Local/national economies and governments

Ethical norms, questions, and conflicts may be found within and between systems.

Western Ethical Values and Paradigms:

Serve motivational, aspirational, and conflict resolution purposes

- Respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence
- Human rights and duties
- Consequences, outcomes, utilities
- Compassion, empathy, altruism
- Religious ethics; virtue ethics
- Pragmatism
- Health equity
- Social solidarity, reciprocity
- Social and economic justice

Neglect non-Western ethics: communitarian values, Asian philosophies, Middle-Eastern traditional cultures, etc.

Global Health: Some morally defensible outcomes and their consequences

- New medical treatments
- Decreased maternal and child mortality
- Extended life-span
- Strengthened health care capacities
- Explosive population growth
 - Environmental devastation
 - Species extinction
 - Climate change
 - Civil conflict

The Tragedy of the Commons

- Hardin: *There is no technological solution to the population problem. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.*

The World as a Whole: A Neglected System

- Today, we recognize the dependence of human life on biodiverse ecosystems; that what we do in global health impacts the future of all life on earth.
- The goals of global health must be framed within this much larger system.
- Calls for an ethic of accountability to planetary health and future generations.

Challenges to thinking globally

- The scale of thinking about our planet as a whole exceeds both our cognitive capacities and our empathy.
- Lack of models and metaphors that can meaningfully frame our actions in a context we can't see and a future we can't know.
- The necessary adaptations are prohibitively difficult.

How to define our responsibilities for the future?

Some possibilities:

- **Technological innovation and economic development will solve these problems.**
- **Positive and negative duties and rights:**
 - Duties to do no harm, to remediate past harms, prevent future harms;
 - Rights not to be harmed in the present or future, rights to be helped.
- **Deep Ecology:** Recognizes the interdependence of all life forms; calls for protection of biodiversity.
- **Intergenerational equity:** Compels present generations to refrain from activities that will negatively impact future generations.
- **Precautionary principle:** If the consequences of an activity are uncertain and possibly harmful, the activity is to be avoided.

Expanding the moral agenda of global health

- Academic global health is uniquely situated to speak the truth: that unconstrained human reproduction and consumption is not sustainable.
- Systems and ethics are human constructs. Global health can choose to broaden its moral commitments to include ecosystem sustainability.
- Any such ethic may challenge some traditional medical goals, lifestyle expectations, economic paradigms, and moral commitments.
- If we are not willing to speak these truths, clearly and loudly, who will?

