

## **Ethics Workshop**

**6 May, 2010, Polytechnic University.**

**The three passages from the Bible:**

- 1) Isaiah (11: 6-9) Justice and peace**
- 2) Genesis (3:2-5) knowing good and evil**
- 3) Luke (15:11-32) Love and mercy**

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1) Peace presupposes justice, which is the vital space for every creature. At the back of justice, there is the respect for a common value.



[http://www.taiwandna.com/Peaceable\\_Kingdom.jpg](http://www.taiwandna.com/Peaceable_Kingdom.jpg)

Edward Hicks [American Folk Artist, 1780-1849]

Isaiah 11: 6-9

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play in the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11: 6-9)

## 2) Genesis (3:2-5) knowing good and evil

The human question of “good and evil” has been presented by the Bible with a sad story – Adam and Eve and the snake.

Michelangelo painted the story on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel with vivid representation of the difference between innocence and intelligence.



([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Forbidden\\_fruit.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Forbidden_fruit.jpg))  
(Gen. 3:2-5)

“2 The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,  
3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' ”  
4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.  
5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:2-5)

So, humanity has to pay an expensive price for having their eyes opened. – They have to be mindful of their conscience. The word conscience comes etymologically from the Latin words **cum** (with) and **scire** (to know).



([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Forbidden\\_fruit.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Forbidden_fruit.jpg))

Despite the **original sin**, Christians believe in **redemption**, which is love expressed in forgiveness, in respect for the human person.



([http://faculty.cua.edu/mackm/HUM/im2/files/prodigal\\_son.jpg](http://faculty.cua.edu/mackm/HUM/im2/files/prodigal_son.jpg))

Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669).

**Return of the Prodigal Son** (Luke 15:21-24)

**21**"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'<sup>[a]</sup>

**22**"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23**Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. **24**For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:21-24)

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The three passages of the Bible express the basic view of Christians on the human situation of being conscious about good and evil. In other words, they are able to discern what is happening and are able to decide on actions to be taken. They are responsible. They are an ethical being.

The ideal world for Christians is a world described by the prophet Isaiah, where the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. This is a peaceful world where everyone respects the rights to live well by the others. Behind this ideal worldview is the principle of justice. The justice that let everyone enjoy their own freedom without endangering that of the others.

But Christians are not so naïve as to ignore the human reality of this world. Using their religious terms, it is called a world with original sin, suffering from the struggle between good and evil, full of violence and death. However, Christians believe in redemption, which is forgiveness motivated by altruistic love.

In a simplistic way, a Christian cannot ignore the principles of love and forgiveness, justice and peace in their daily life and specially in their research ethics.

Ethics should be understood as leading a life worth living or a satisfying life. Ethical choice involves:

- 1) the discernment of value
- 2) the respect for others
- 3) the courage to act



([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Forbidden\\_fruit.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Forbidden_fruit.jpg))

Some fundamental questions carried on by Christian traditions are:

Life and Soul

- the physiological unity of mankind;
- the justification of prevention and extinction of human life.

- the existence of the human soul,
- spirituality and immortality of the human soul,
- difference of the human soul from the vital principle in animals;
- the creation of the world and of man
- limitations for man
- presuppositions for science

### Ethical

The limitations of science from the ethical point of view are twofold. The direct action of science on ethics and the reaction of ethics upon science. And both action and reaction create limitations for science.

The activity of man is guided by two spiritual faculties, understanding and will. From the **understanding** it derives light, from the **will** firmness. The understanding precedes the will and hence the influence of science upon ethics. This influence becomes an important factor in the welfare of the human race.

According to Christian conviction, there are two general principles to be kept in view. First, ethics is more important for mankind than science. Happiness of peoples and nations consists rather in moral rectitude than in scientific progress. The conclusion is that if there should ever be a conflict between science and ethics, ethics should prevail.

Now, there can be no such conflict except in two cases: when scientific research leads into error, and when the teaching of science, even if true, is applied against sound educational maxims.

However, ethics should not influence science, except in the way of stimulating research and teaching.

### Freedom of knowledge

The freedom of knowledge is perverted by men in a double sense.

First, they carry the freedom of the will into the judgment. Love, hatred, desires, are passions or acts of the will, while judgments are formed by the understanding, a faculty entirely devoid of free choice.

Secondly, they deprive the understanding of the necessary indifference and equilibrium, and force it to one side, whether the side of truth or that of falsehood.

### Unlimited freedom

The demand for unlimited freedom in science is unreasonable and unjust, because it leads to licence and rebellion.

There is no unlimited freedom in the world, and liberty over-stepping its boundaries always leads to evil. Man himself is neither absolutely free, nor would he desire unbounded freedom. Freedom is not the greatest boon nor the final end of man; it is a means to reach his end. Within his own mind, man feels bound to truth. Around himself, he sees all nature bound to laws and even dreads disturbances in their regular course.

(<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13598b.htm>)



(<http://willienelsonpri.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/aung-san-suu-kyi.jpg>)

In conclusion, I wish to mention Aung San Suu Kyi. 20 years ago, when she was awarded by the European Parliament the “Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought”, she wrote an essay entitled “Freedom From Fear”. The essay starts with this sentence: “It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.” The essay continues to say: “Fearlessness may be a gift but perhaps more precious is the courage acquired through endeavor, courage that comes from cultivating the habit of refusing to let fear dictate one's actions”.

Here, we are scholars in the free world. We usually don't suffer from fear of imprisonment, fear of torture, fear of death, fear of losing friends, family, property or means of livelihood. All these fears are mentioned by Aung San Suu Kyi in her essay. However, we might nurture fear of poverty, fear of isolation, but above all, we are always confronting the fear of failure. What to do when one is in fear? Aung San Suu Kyi says we need the courage to believe in the sanctity of ethical principles. In fact, we are here to reflect on such principles.

In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Her son Alexander Aris delivered the acceptance Speech on her behalf. He quoted her from the essay “Freedom From Fear” by saying; “At the root of human responsibility is the concept of perfection, the urge to achieve it, the intelligence to find a path towards it, and the will to follow that path if not to the end, at least the distance needed to rise above individual limitation... ”.

Aung San Suu Kyi links her courage to her faith in Buddhism and understands the concept of perfection as truth, justice and compassion, which is the same as love and forgiveness, justice and peace expressed in different ways by the Christians, such as by Mother Teresa.



(<http://www.topnews.in/files/Mother-Teresa-kolkata.jpg>)

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### Questions for group discussion:

- 1) If “**understanding**” and “**will**” are the two distinct faculties that guide the activity of human beings, which one precedes the other?
- 2) Should there be an unlimited “**freedom for science**”? If yes, why? If no, what are these limitations?
- 3) If there should ever be a conflict between “**science**” and “**ethics**”, which one should prevail?

### Guideline for the case analysis of Professional Ethics

- (1) Statement of the case.
- (2) What is (are) the ethical problem(s)?
- (3) Who are the main persons involved (stakeholders)?
- (4) Are there legal issues? Professional codes?
- (5) What are the values involved? What is the basis for an ethical decision?
- (6) What does your religious or philosophical tradition have to say? Basis for ethical decision.

(Source: Frank Budenholzer, Fu Jen University, Taipei)