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24.1. ABSTRACT

This chapter canvasses the current state of ethics in accounting education, engaging with key contemporary debates, emerging themes and problems. Various perspectives are encompassed as the chapter examines key dimensions that affect the relevance of accounting ethics education to students, the accounting profession, and the wider community. Ethics in accounting education is considered from appropriate interdisciplinary perspectives and set within a changing global context. The chapter examines: the case for ethics education in accounting; curricular and pedagogical issues and approaches; and aspects of a future agenda for accounting ethics education.

Keywords: Applied ethics; Ethical theory; Ethics education; Moral exemplars; Philosophical ethics; Reform; Social dimensions

24.2. INTRODUCTION

... we, as individuals, become the resultant sum of each ethical confrontational event as experienced from the beginning of our careers. (Boisjoly 1993: 59)

This chapter sets out to explain and further promote an agenda for ethics education within the accounting curriculum. Key aims of the chapter are to:

- examine the case for including ethics as a central element of accounting education;
- explore a range of curricular and pedagogical issues related to ethics education; and
- consider how the future agenda for accounting ethics education is likely to encompass contemporary developments in, and perspectives on, accounting.

The accounting and corporate scandals of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries served as a reminder of the dramatic consequences of unethical business practices. There were numerous notable cases of accounting fraud, corporate governance failure, and deficient ethics and accountability in many countries including Australia, China, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the U.K., and the U.S.A. (see Jones, 2011 for case examples from each of these countries). These events may be regarded as being emblematic of the significant socio-political influence of contemporary business activity, and of accounting as a means of representing and shaping that activity. Most prominently, in the U.S.A. the Enron/Arthur Andersen case ultimately saw the demise of both the corporation and the accounting firm implicated in the scandal, and the WorldCom scandal was the biggest accounting fraud in history (Cooper, 2008).

Accounting and business failures (such as those involving Enron and WorldCom) share a long lineage with a range of similar scandals and collapses that have occurred and recurred throughout the history of the corporation (see Sykes, 1998; Clarke et al., 2003; Bakan, 2004; Merino, 2006; Jones, 2011). The questionable accounting practices that typify corporate scandals are not atypical business behaviours, despite the “bad apple” characterisation that tends to focus on miscreant individual actors (see Ravenscroft and Williams 2004; Cooper *et al.* 2005). Staubus (2005: 11) suggests that the ethics failures represented by these scandals are “[a]most inevitable”, because of the conflict between the interests of those responsible for corporate financial reports (managers, accountants, auditors) and the ostensible beneficiaries, or users, of corporate financial statements. Multiple groups encompassing a large swathe of the accounting profession are implicated in these ethics failures: corporate accountants and managers; auditors; academic accountants; analysts, regulators, and accounting standard setters (see Jones 2011).

Business schools are also implicated in the widespread public mistrust that has resulted from financial scandal and collapses, having “produced ruthlessly talented graduates who have ambition in abundance but little sense for social responsibility or ethics” (Beverungen *et al.* 2013: 102). It has been observed that:

... many of these [company] officers and, to a large extent, the cultures of these companies, felt comfortable with deceptions in the name of shareholder value because they were accomplishing what they were trained to do in business school ... (Jennings 2004: 12,14)

By “propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility” (Ghoshal, 2005: 76) and the longstanding “history of sidestepping ethics” has resulted in a crisis of legitimacy and confidence (Swanson, 2005: 247). Educators share some of the responsibility for ethical problems in the commercial world, due to their neglect of ethics in business and accounting curricula.

Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Andersen and other cases draw attention to the profound consequences of ethical failures within contemporary accounting and business – and accounting and business education (Owen 2005).¹ Read differently, they may also point to the potential for greater ethical awareness and associated ethical action on the part of accountants and the accounting profession. Accounting failures, scandals, and crises present numerous “teachable moments” of the type that the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) represented more broadly (see Adler, Chapter 23 – this volume).

The place of ethics in the accounting curriculum (and in business education more broadly) is the key concern for this chapter. The need to improve ethics education, sometimes associated with a more general need to broaden (or liberalise) the accounting curriculum as a whole, has been widely recognised for many years (see Amernic & Craig, Chapter 12 – this volume), but there has been insufficient action and progress to date, despite a number of initiatives. McPhail and Walters observe:

¹ Ironically, Arthur Andersen had been regarded as a leader in developing ethics professional programmes for accountants. Its noted activities included developing “... *educational materials relating to accounting ethics in addition to holding conferences that included discussions relating to business and accounting ethics education ...*” (Geary & Sims 1994: 4).

There is a lot of discussion about professional ethics these days and lots of developments within the accounting profession ... While these initiatives represent important developments within the profession, we wonder whether much of the discussion on the ethical challenges facing the profession nevertheless remain rather narrow in their focus and limited in their impact (sic). (McPhail & Walters 2009: xi)

To help explain and further promote an ethics agenda for accounting education, and reflecting the aims outlined at the start of this section, the remainder of the chapter: outlines the case for accounting ethics education (Section 2); analyses a range of issues related to curriculum and pedagogy (Section 3); and, looking forward to a future agenda for accounting ethics education, discusses a number of relevant contemporary developments and perspectives (Section 4). For the purposes of the discussion and analysis in the chapter, it is accepted that, for practical purposes, accounting, business, and ethics are inseparable. Accounting ethics is regarded as a part of business ethics, which is itself associated with organizational, personal, and societal ethics. Therefore, the chapter draws on a wide range of materials from within accounting and beyond.

24.3. ETHICS IN ACCOUNTING EDUCATION

Every business decision has ethical dimensions and, thus, ethics is an integral part of business decision-making. (Felton & Sims 1990: 390)

... it is professional accountants, those specialists who purport to have the public interest at heart ... who have been the main contributors to the decline of ethical standards in business ... (McPhail 1999: 835).

2.1 Ethics and business

Ethics may be broadly regarded as concerning “the actions of people, in situations where these actions have effects on the welfare of both oneself and others” (Gaa & Thorne 2004: 1). In providing guidance for ‘good’ human conduct (and for helping to judge the conduct of selves and others), ethics is about the pursuit of particular values in business, organisational, and social life. Ethical questions of right and wrong, propriety and impropriety, justice and injustice encompass individuals, groups, organisations, and society as a whole.

Accounting is at the forefront of many of the issues plaguing contemporary business and society, yet “accounting remains off the ethical radar” (McPhail and Walters 2009: 3). This may be partly because it is culturally maligned and characterised by a range of negative and narrow cultural stereotypes (Friedman & Lyne 2001; Dimnik & Felton 2006) which perpetuate the image of an inaccessible technical, number-crunching, a-social domain. This produces a lack of substantive engagement with issues of ethics and social responsibility, even as a substantial body of research within the discipline attests to the ethicality and sociality of accounting (see Boyce *et al.* 2012; Boyce & Greer 2013).

2.2 Ethics education matters

Ethics education may be “... an important lever for changing business” (Gentile & Samuelson 2003: 2). This understanding contradicts some accounts which suggest that ethics education at university is unnecessary because, it is assumed, each individual’s ethical values are (and should be) developed under the guidance and influence of parents, religious institutions, school teachers, and other influences (see, for example, Langenderfer & Rockness 1989 on the “Moral–Amoral Dilemma”; Hooker 2004 on the “moral development argument”). Although it is undoubtedly the case that students’ ethical values are already formed to a certain degree by the time they reach university, there is ample evidence that education can

and does influence ethical behaviour. Indeed, instilling particular values and influencing behaviour has been one of the basic social functions of education throughout history, and it is this that gives education much of its social significance (see Boyce 2002).

Ethics education clearly has the potential to make a difference to students and societies but, as institutions, universities generally reflect dominant political and social values and tend to inculcate these values in a way that confirms and reinforces the status quo (Boyce 2002). This generality applies no less to accounting education (see Merino 2006; Boyce 2008; Merino *et al.* 2010). However, it is not totalising, for dominant hegemonies may be challenged (Boyce 2002) while passivity reinforces the status quo.

Without definitive and determined action to change accounting education, students may be actively prevented from reaching higher levels of ethical maturity (McPhail 1999)² and may be desensitised to moral dimensions of accounting (Mayer *et al.* 2005). From a purely pragmatic perspective, a deficient ethics education will also leave students lacking in their capacity to address:

... the kinds of values conflicts, crises, and trends that the press, the general public and our own faculty are concerned about. (Gentile & Samuelson 2003: 2).

2.3 Ethics education works

There is evidence that accountants in practice exhibit a lower level of moral reasoning than those in other professions (Armstrong 1987; Ponemon 1992; Eynon *et al.* 1997), and are, at best, ethically “average” (Fleming 1996). Nevertheless, the completion of a university business ethics course can improve ethical recognition and reasoning skills (Armstrong 1993; Piper *et al.* 1993; Ryan & Bisson 1993; Geary & Sims 1994; Eynon *et al.* 1997; Gautschi & Jones 1998). This can enhance the employability of graduates with broad and transferrable ethical reasoning and associated generic skills (Graham, 2012. See also Watty, Chapter 13 – this volume.) In this context, however, it is important to ensure that education targets a range of employment outcomes. Thus, it should not be assumed that an exclusive managerial focus within ethics education (e.g. focus on management decision-making) is appropriate. (Geary & Sims 1994: 6)

There is little doubt that, in many dimensions of their professional, business, social, and personal lives, accounting graduates will confront a range of significant ethical concerns. They will have to wrestle with dilemmas, justify their own conduct and/or the conduct of

² Many researchers have adopted the work of Kohlberg (1981) and Rest (1986) which suggests students may go through several stages of cognitive moral development to reach ethical maturity, which progress from the “preconventional” level where the focus is on the self (broadly, ethically egoist), through the “conventional” level where the focus is on the group (broadly, sustaining social relationships), to the “postconventional” level where the focus is on the inner self (broadly, autonomous and principle-based) (see Geary & Sims 1994; Leung *et al.* 2006: Ch. 2). Although this approach to understanding moral development and the process of ethical maturing has been widely used in ethics education research, it is problematic to the extent that it “is devoid of a sense of collective fates and collective responsibilities” within accounting (Fogarty 1995: 106). Further, there are other conceptions of the “ways through which human beings become moral agents” (Furman 1990: 33), suggesting that recognition of greater complexity may be appropriate. See section 4.1 of this chapter for some indications in this direction.

others, and excuse or condemn conduct (Maclagan & Campbell 2011). In this context, it is necessary to recognise that the values and beliefs which students hold, and come to hold, may conflict with the established values, beliefs, and practices in the business world. Therefore, a key aim of ethics education must be to help students:

... to understand their own values, the changing and dynamic environments in which they will make decisions, the often conflicting needs of stakeholders, the impact of managerial actions on the lives of others, and the need to give continuing attention throughout their careers to the development of ethical sensitivities and accountabilities. (Felton & Sims 1990: p 390)

Given the above, ethics education may work best if it is embedded within a broader and integrated liberal education framework (Ponemon & Glazer 1990). Within the profession and beyond, such a framework for accounting education has long been acknowledged to be important for the development of a socially relevant accounting and business education (Bedford *et al.* 1986; Accounting Education Change Commission 1990; Donaldson & Freeman 1994; Fogarty 2010; Sangster 2010; Willits 2011; Behn *et al.* 2012; and see also Amernic & Craig, Chapter 12 - this volume). Improving ethics education thus has the potential to advance the broader agenda for improving accounting education.

2.4 Unethical effects

Accounting education generates a tendency to engender a particular kind of identity within students which prioritises economic concerns and marginalises ethical ones (McPhail 2001a; Ravenscroft & Williams 2004). Consequently, the ethical development of students may actually be inhibited, in part, because students are indoctrinated into a narrow, profit-centred view of accounting that marginalises social, environmental, and ethical dimensions (Loeb 1991; Gray *et al.* 1994).

Accounting students are:

... taught that economically appropriate action is that which maximises company profits and ... that morally good actions are concomitant with economically good actions. (McPhail 1999: 836)

Similar findings apply to business students (McCabe *et al.* 1991); the priorities of students in business education shift towards the valorisation of shareholder value to the exclusion of other values (Gentile & Samuelson 2003). It has been argued that this produces a situation in which accounting education serves to “indoctrinate, pacify and cripple ethically our students” (Tinker & Gray 2003: 728). A paradoxical ethical effect of accounting education may be that it trains good people to do bad things (see Low *et al.* 2008).

2.5 Ethical neglect

Despite a generally broad acceptance that ethics education is needed, it has still not been given the prominence it merits in the accounting curriculum (Gaa & Thorne 2004). Puxty, Sikka & Willmott (1994) argued that accounting education was historically responsible for socialising “successive generations” (p.89) of accountants into an ostensibly amoral discipline without any meaningful reflection on the social obligations of the profession. There is “a woeful lack of reflection” (Ravenscroft & Williams 2004: 8) in education and the wider profession on the fundamental premises of the discipline that has been so centrally involved in the business scandals and corruption. In an examination of the North American academic response to contemporary accounting scandals, Cooper, Everett & Neu (2005) found that, despite an ostensible “ethics revival” (p.374), it was characterised by appeals to moralistic and individualistic conceptions of ethics (where miscreants are deemed to be

individual 'bad apples'), portraying corporate and accounting misdeeds either as isolated incidents or as indicative of problems elsewhere in the financial system.

This style of response to pressures on accounting education continues a long-established pattern. In the mid-1980s, the Bedford Committee in the U.S.A. was asked to:

... investigate and report on the future structure, content, and scope of accounting education, with the associated charge to recommend educational objectives and goals for adjusting university accounting education by the year 2000. (Bedford & Shenkir 1987: 86).

The Committee:

... examined developments in university accounting education programs over the ... 1925--85 period. That review of required university courses, programs and teaching methods revealed that the substance of accounting education has remained essentially the same over the last 50 years ... accounting education has not made significant efforts to improve its teaching methods over the last 60 years. (Bedford & Shenkir, 1987: 84--86)

The necessity of improved ethics education was clearly acknowledged, forming a key part of a recommended effort to ensure that students learnt both the technical professional accounting body of knowledge and acquired "the ability to use that knowledge analytically, in creative and innovative ways in accordance with high standards of professional ethics" (Bedford *et al.* 1986: 178). The Committee found that:

The scope and content of future accounting education should ... extend well beyond technical skills ... it must also instill the ethical standards and the commitment of a professional. The general effort to develop in students a concern for individual needs and for the overall advancement of society must be given more emphasis. (p.179)

(See also St. Pierre & Rebele, Chapter 5, this volume, for an alternative point of view.)

Before and since the Bedford report, there have been numerous official calls for fundamental reconsideration and reorientation of accounting education in the U.S.A. (see Black 2012 for a summary) and elsewhere, including major reviews by the Mathews Committee in Australia (Review Committee of the Accounting Discipline in Higher Education 1990) and Solomons in the U.K. (Solomons with Berridge 1974). Reports such as those emanating from the U.S.A.'s Treadway Commission (1987), Accounting Education Change Commission (AECC) (1990), and Albrecht & Sack (2000) have been globally influential, reflecting the broader influence of the U.S.A. in relation to the structure and content of accounting education (e.g. see Leung & Cooper 1994; Mathews 1994; Hancock *et al.* 2009; Canarutto *et al.* 2010). Demonstrated ethical failings over decades have made reform calls all the more significant, but to date they have produced little in the way of substantive change (Nelson 1995; Merino 2006). The promised and anticipated "revolution in accounting education" (Sundem *et al.* 1990) has not eventuated and the level of ethics integration into courses continues to be low (Miller & Becker 2011).

Although a range of institutional factors are undoubtedly at play in this apparent inertia, Langenderfer & Rockness (1989) discussed the historical reluctance on the part of *educators* to incorporate ethics into the accounting curriculum. They identified three key explanatory factors: First, the "Legal–Ethical Dilemma" arises when educators are reluctant to clearly distinguish between law and ethics. In countering this position, Langenderfer & Rockness argued that:

... we must recognize that the laws do not necessarily prescribe ethical behavior or reflect the ethical norms of society, and that universities have an obligation to discuss ethics and what is acceptable ethical behavior that transcends the law. (p.60)

The “Philosophical–Practical Dilemma” reflects the belief of some accounting educators that they are not equipped to teach in this area, thus advocating that ethics be taught from within a philosophy department. Langenderfer & Rockness counter this argument by noting that it prioritises philosophical over practical or applied ethics. They argue that *“if ethical education is to have a significant place in the accounting curriculum, it must be integrated into the accounting courses and taught by accounting faculty”* (p.61) (see section 3.1).

There is evidence that accounting educators are actually willing to integrate ethics into the accounting curriculum (Cohen & Pant 1989; Blanthorne *et al.* 2007). Although some educators may have inadequate skills to teach accounting ethics, this general observation applies to any part of the curriculum. This alone is not an appropriate consideration for curricular design (beyond the short term), since continuing and professional education and development can be designed to address any shortcomings.³

A “Moral–Amoral Dilemma” reflects a more general reluctance of accounting educators to present and discuss ethics issues in class. This may be based on a narrow (and unjustifiable) view that ethics education cannot affect students’ moral values (see section 2.2). Cohen & Pant (1989) identified a broader problem in that there is little incentive in academic work and reward structures for teachers to integrate ethics into their courses.

Although there are clearly a number of barriers and obstacles, there is also a clear case for including ethics in the curriculum as part of a broader change agenda for accounting education (see Flood, Chapter 4, and St.Pierre & Rebele, Chapter 5 – both in this volume).

3 TEACHING ETHICS: CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

... the classroom is probably an effective place to start, particularly in terms of the ability to influence tomorrow's accounting professionals. (Ravenscroft & Williams 2005: 370)

3.1 Curriculum

Despite wide rhetorical support for accounting ethics education, the appropriate place of ethics within the curriculum continues to be debated, particularly the issue of whether ethics should be integrated across the curriculum or concentrated within a specialist subject or subjects. There is certainly a strong case for the adoption of an integrated approach but this does not necessarily obviate the case for one or more stand-alone or specialist ethics subjects within a degree programme. The key benefit of an integrated approach is that, if taught well, students come to realise ethics is not an isolated issue that can be treated separately from other business and organisational concerns – a perspective that is fundamental to ethics in accounting (Loeb 1988; Geary & Sims 1994; Adler 1999).

³ Similarly, some argue that accounting department do not have sufficient resources to teach ethics (e.g. see Blanthorne *et al.* 2007), but the resourcing argument is not specific to this area of the curriculum.

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)⁴ has endorsed an integrated approach, but this decision generated considerable controversy. Critics felt that it represented lip-service to ethics education, and was a lost opportunity to make meaningful change in this important area (see Hartman & Hartman 2004 for a detailed exposition, and Bloom, Chapter 14 - this volume, for a broader discussion of integration issues in the accounting curriculum). Although ethics can (and should) be successfully integrated into other subjects, a specialist and dedicated consideration of ethics is also necessary to facilitate depth of consideration and build an appropriate interdisciplinary perspective (Swanson 2005; Bean & Bernardi 2007; Williams & Elson 2010).⁵ Ideally, stand-alone ethics subjects would be taught by accounting teachers with relevant skills, thus imparting contextual and domain-specific ethical knowledge, but combinations of accounting and ethics/philosophy staff are also possible (Hartman & Hartman 2004; Abdolmohammadi 2008).⁶

An obvious practical resolution of this issue is to take an integrated approach while also offering one or more specialist stand-alone ethics subjects that provide relevant and appropriate depth of understanding (see Armstrong 1993). There seems little doubt that efforts to have accrediting bodies *require* at least one specialist ethics subject will continue, because history suggests that reliance on voluntarism in this domain is unlikely to produce needed change (Hartman & Hartman 2004).

3.2 Philosophical or applied ethics

Ethics education in accounting has rather unreflectively tended to take a 'practical' or 'applied' approach to ethics by focusing on the ethical norms of the profession as expressed in codes of ethics and related pronouncements and applying them to cases and scenarios (further discussed in section 3.5). By seeking to mimic 'real-world' decision-making contexts, this provides an avenue whereby educators may seek to engage students:

... business ethics education could be more effective and perhaps engender greater civic awareness and engagement among students ... It is crucial that business ethics education engages with students in a way that attempts to address the disconnectedness that often comes from a purely academic approach to the subject. (McPhail 2006: 308)

Leaving aside, for the moment, the issue of whether such approaches can or do achieve the aim of being 'realistic', there is a more fundamental debate regarding the appropriate orientation of accounting ethics subjects. Rossouw (2008: 161) notes an "unprecedented growth and demand for Applied Ethics", including business ethics, reflecting a desire (or

⁴ AACSB is a key business school accrediting body in the U.S.A, and, more recently, internationally. See Calderon, Chapter 22, and Apostolou & Gammie, Chapter 29 – both in this volume, for a discussion of the role of accreditation in accounting education.

⁵ There is some evidence that students prefer a stand-alone subject, where ethics is taught "all in one place" (Graham 2012: 599, 609), but the practical effect of this students' preference may run counter to the aim for integrated and contextualised understanding.

⁶ Over time, specialist subjects will build specialist and dedicated in-house academic staff expertise (Hartman & Hartman 2004).

preparedness) to address the ethical challenges which confront contemporary society. At the same time, Rossouw laments the turn away from philosophical ethics.

Philosophical ethics takes a more conceptual approach and gives attention to abstract moral concerns regarding the nature of ethical obligation, the formation and articulation of fundamental ethical principles, and meta-ethical principles that inquire into the nature of ethical reasoning and argumentation (see Fisher 2011). This approach may be criticised as being inadequate for the practical concerns of professional ethics education but, as with the question of integration of stand-alone courses (see section 3.1), the dichotomy drawn between philosophical and applied ethics is a false one. As Rossouw (2008) argues, applied ethics courses may engage meaningfully with ethical philosophy – and sometimes challenge it on the basis of insights that flow from attempts to *apply* ethical concepts and theories.

Even though educators may prefer to take a ‘practical’ and decision-oriented approach to ethics teaching, rather than a theoretical one (see Blanthorne *et al.* 2007), pure practicality is elusive because practice models are themselves grounded in theory, and theorisation is an everyday part of practical thought (Maclagan & Campbell 2011). “Unapplied” ethics buttresses applied ethics! (Klonoski 2003). Therefore, an adequate accounting ethics education must include both a rounded consideration of ethical theory and a considered application of theory to practice. This could include a theoretically-informed critique of practice models as expressed in codes of ethics.

By combining elements of both philosophical and applied ethics, students are likely to discover that seemingly contemporary ethical challenges have a long historical lineage. They should learn that ethical values and principles have a socio-cultural and historical character, and that particular approaches to ethical problems and problem-solving (including those expressed in professional codes) are mutable. In addition, the combination of philosophical and applied ethics can help in:

... bringing to light the tension or contradiction between the particularity of given social regimes of value and the universal reasons offered as legitimations for those regimes. When this contradiction is brought to light, the application of philosophy to a problematic reality takes the form of a fundamental calling into question of the generally unquestioned limitations given social forms impose upon what counts as a solution to a given problem. (Noonan 2003: 37)

The ethical responsibility of teachers in this context is to develop students’ intellectual capacities to grasp ethical philosophy *and* its practical application, while ensuring that ethics does not become “subservient to the agenda of business” (Rossouw 2008: 166). By helping students to appreciate both historical and contemporary ways in which people and collectivities may decide what is regarded as ethical, they should come to better understand the role of ethical values, reasoning, debate, discussion, decision-making, and action. Emphasis should be on informed debate and developing students’ capacity for judgement (Maclagan & Campbell 2011; Ponemon 2011).

Several key ethical philosophies that are relevant to accounting education are outlined in section 3.4. Section 4 includes discussion of a number of newer philosophies that underpin contemporary ethical thinking. The discussions in the remainder of section 3 and in section 4 also provide practical examples of the way in which philosophical and applied ethics may be combined.

3.3 Descriptive ethics

Descriptive approaches to ethics focus on two broad areas that may be treated independently or together:

1. The function, structure and content of professional codes of ethics, and modes of application and enforcement. This may include posited professional traits or characteristics, and examination of the profession's stated commitment to ethical behavior and serving the public interest.
2. Identification and analysis of the moral and ethical beliefs that underlie decisions and actions in particular circumstances.

Although the particular circumstances of specific decisions and actions may be popularly or generally judged to have been ethical or unethical, descriptive ethics does not seek to make normative ethical judgements about individuals. It is, instead, an effort to understand *how and why* accountants act or acted in particular ways. Codes of professional ethics may be applied to assist in explaining the ethical behaviour and beliefs that (may) underlie particular actions.

An important aspect of descriptive ethics may be to explain how personal (such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion) and structural (such as culture, institutional arrangements) characteristics influence and shape ethical attitudes and actions (Yuthas & Dillard 1999; Becker & Messner 2005; McPhail *et al.* 2005; Peace 2006; Gammie & Gammie 2009 ; Molisa 2010).

3.4 Normative ethics

In contrast to the non-judgemental ethos of descriptive ethics, normative approaches bring an evaluative orientation based on particular sets of *norms* (i.e. expectations regarding appropriate behaviour). By prescribing what *ought* to be done in certain circumstances, normative approaches also permit judgements about what has been done against normative expectations: a prescriptive approach is applied at the ostensible point of making an ethical decision, while an evaluative approach is applied after a decision or action. Therefore, the former may include some anticipation of likely consequences of alternative decisions or actions, while the latter judgements can be made in full knowledge of the consequences.

Consequences themselves may or may not be regarded as being ethically relevant, depending on the ethical approach adopted. There are a number of ethical 'schools' that consider the appropriate principles to inform judgements about what is ethical (see Singer 1994; MacIntyre 2002). Although normative approaches are often divided into two broad categories – consequentialist and non-consequentialist approaches – for the purposes of the present review, three major schools of thought that inform accounting ethics education are considered: deontology, teleology, and virtue ethics.

1. *Deontological* (or deontic) ethics focuses on *duties* or obligations: the locus of analysis is the ethicality of particular acts or decisions in themselves. Duties may be formally expressed in rules. Likely or actual consequences of an act or decision are not an immediate concern – thus, deontological ethics are non-consequentialist. Underlying this approach is the view that ethical agents should only be judged on actions within their control, since the future cannot be controlled and consequences of an action cannot be known, *ex ante*, with certainty.

2. *Consequences* are the realm of *teleological* (or teleic) ethics, which judges acts or decisions by analysing the (likely) outcomes or consequences. Consequentialist ethical philosophies focus normative judgements on the end-state or end-goal. Often this is expressed in the form of utilitarianism (i.e. that the ultimate consequence of concern is that the greatest good (utility) for the greatest number should be sought).
3. *Aretaic* ethics, also known as *virtue* ethics, focuses on the development of character or individual virtues. Under this approach, normative judgements are made with reference to the character of the moral agent rather than on the nature of the acts of the agent or on the particular consequences of those acts. The focus is on the nature of the ethical 'being' rather than on the ethical 'doing'.

Although aretaic ethics has a long historical lineage to match the other major schools, present-day accounting ethics education:

... appears to have focused on the choice dimension, and has not given equal attention to the values ... and to the character traits ... that help to drive the choices that accountants make in practice. (Gaa and Thorne 2004: 2)

Virtue ethics has also received some significant recent attention and interest in this approach is likely to grow (e.g. Armstrong *et al.* 2003; Jennings 2004; Mintz 2006; Everett 2007). Mintz (1995) argues that there is a pressing need for greater attention to virtue in accounting because ultimately only virtues such as honesty, integrity, impartiality, open-mindedness, and trustworthiness enable individual accountants to resist client and commercial pressures to act unethically. Francis (1990: 9–11) also argues that virtues fundamentally underlie accounting practice in many respects (see also Stewart 1997).

On the other hand, it may be argued that, as applied to accounting-in-practice, virtue ethics is naïve, narrow, and idealistic, since it is implicitly based on a premise that "*if only accountants (and others) were better people ... they would make more ethical decisions*" (Boyce 2008: 368). The significance of the ethical context within which people work may be ignored or marginalised.

There is considerable variety within all of the major ethical philosophies, and scope for much discussion and debate about appropriate rules or duties, *or* what constitutes the greatest good for the greatest number, *or* what characteristics should be regarded as being virtuous. A deeper understanding of the nature of codes of ethics may be derived from the critical interrogation of their underlying philosophical bases. For instance, codes of ethics often reflect a deontological approach, since their content is generally expressed in rules. However, the rules and requirements of codes may be based on an assessment of likely consequences (thus, rules may be designed to achieve particular outcomes), reflecting a consequentialist orientation. Further, some elements of codes may focus on the need for particular virtues, such as independence, reflecting an aretaic approach. To the extent that the differing philosophies which underlie ethical codes are recognised, there can also be an examination of their philosophical and practical integrity and consistency. The basis for practical ethical debates and arguments over the provisions of codes can be better understood.

3.5 Ethical decision-making

In 1990 the American Accounting Association (AAA) explicitly recognised the growing relevance of ethics to the education of future accountants through the publication of an important case book, *Ethics in the Accounting Curriculum: Cases and Readings* (May 1990).

May's seven-step decision-making model for analysing ethical issues, particularly via the use of case-studies (see Exhibit 24.1) provided a convenient and accessible way for teachers of accounting to introduce and enliven classroom discussions of ethics (see, also, the similar "Decision-Making Model for Evaluating Ethical Dilemmas" in Langenderfer & Rockness 1989: 68).

- I. Determine the facts
What? Who? Where? When? How?

What do we know or need to know that will help define the problem?
- II. Define the ethical issue
List the significant stakeholders.

Define the ethical issues.
- III. Identify the major principles, rules, and values
(For example, integrity, quality, respect for persons, profit)
- IV. Specify the alternatives
List the major alternative courses of action, including those that represent some form of compromise or point between simply doing or not doing something.
- V. Compare values and alternatives, see if there exists a clear decision
Determine if there is one principle or value, or combination, which is so compelling that the proper alternative is clear.
- VI. Assess the consequences
Identify the short- and long-term, positive and negative consequences for the major alternatives. The common short-run focus on gain or loss needs to be measured against the long-run considerations. This step will often reveal an unanticipated result of major importance.
- VII. Make your decision
Balance the consequences against your primary principles or values and select the alternative that best fits.

**Exhibit 24.1: Ethical decision-making model
(May 1990: 1–2)**

The use of ethical decision-making models has significant currency in classroom settings (see Fulmer & Cargile 1987; Armstrong *et al.* 2003; O'Leary 2009; Dellaportas *et al.* 2011). This approach encourages students to "develop a systematic approach to making decisions in any situation involving ethics issues" (Langenderfer & Rockness 1989: 66). Sometimes professional code of ethics may be applied to 'solve' ethical problems.

However, this approach brings a number of significant potential shortcomings (Boyce 2008). There is a danger that it may inculcate a narrow and rigidified understanding of professional responsibilities if it focuses significantly on applying professional codes. A focus on codes may reflect a banking model of education that disembeds students from their own personal context and isolates consciousness from the world (Freire 1996; Beverungen *et al.* 2013). Evidence suggests that mere knowledge of codes of ethics and how to apply their provisions do not change the actual or intended actions of students (Fulmer & Cargile 1987).

Therefore, it is wise to ensure that the analysis of practical ethical problems is not restricted to rule-bound application of codes of ethics. Broad ethical theories (such as those discussed in section 3.4 above) may also be applied within ethical decision-making models, providing less for quasi-mechanistic application of rules and more for the exercise of broader values-based moral judgement (Felton & Sims 1990; Maclagan 2012).

Ethical problems are typically constructed as ethical dilemmas, which may reflect a situation where “the rules are unclear, or there are conflicting principles, or conflicting interests of involved parties” (Pettifor & Paquet 2002: 262). However, if ethics cases are pre-coded and pre-interpreted as straightforward dilemmas in which ‘decisions’ must be made (see Stewart 1997), deeper and more contextual analysis may be precluded.⁷ Deeper analysis may discover ethical problems and issues where none were immediately apparent, revealing the complexity and socially structured nature of ethical decision-making.

Care must be taken to ensure that ethical scenarios are not constructed to steer students towards an ‘expected’ answer. It may also be helpful to prompt students to question their own pre-existing assumptions about the context of ethical decision-making. Many business case scenarios may come to be seen as not necessarily involving *ethical* dilemmas at all, because one side of the problem may be economically rather than ethically unfavourable. Although this does not make the *business* decision any less complex, it is not immediately obvious that profit should be regarded as being morally equivalent to human rights or environmental protection, for example (see Maclagan 2012 for a comparative perspective). In *ethical* decision-making, it may become “necessary to deny the relevance of economic calculations when essentially ethical principles are at stake” (Harte *et al.* 1991: 250).

If ethical decision-making is constructed as a kind of modular problem-solving, it is unlikely to encourage creative thinking or the development of a more expansive moral sensibility (McPhail 1999, 2001b; Armstrong *et al.* 2003). “Representation of moral problems as multiple-choice or “decision problem” abstracts away from temporal unfolding and from expression and development of moral character” (Whitbeck 1992: 123). In addition, it is problematic when each decision and/or case is treated as being an individual and discrete unit of analysis disconnected from broader organisational and social-political contexts (Fogarty 1995; Stewart 1997; Yuthas & Dillard 1999).

Classroom application of models and codes is necessarily abstracted from the complex and often contradictory realities of real-world decision-making. By prioritising set models or codes, this approach may not draw on or develop students’ own individual (or collective) ethical value systems and capacities for action that flow from them. Further, the social context of ethical decision-making may be effaced, denying the collective dimension of ethics. Ethical decision-making should involve critical thinking as well as individual, collective, and professional reflection.

⁷ Although common usage sometimes treats a dilemma as being simply a difficult situation, strictly speaking there are *two* equally unfavourable choices in a *dilemma* (Macquarie Dictionary 1991). Thus, in an *ethical* dilemma, there is no ‘right’ solution, as each available alternative is regarded as being likely to produce an ethically unfavourable outcome. As Whitbeck (1992: 127) points out, “*The only good responses to dilemmas are those that enable one to escape the dilemma, if this is possible*”.

3.6 Moral exemplars, and a case of whistle-blowing

The use of moral exemplars as a teaching tool may provide another means to interrogate actual ethical decisions (applied ethics) and to question the underlying ethical basis of such decisions (philosophical ethics). A number of authors have recommended this approach (Apostolou & Apostolou 1997; Knapp *et al.* 1998; Armstrong *et al.* 2003). In general terms, moral exemplars may be a practical outworking of a virtue ethics approach, since moral exemplars are, *prima facie*, regarded as virtuous characters. However, the analysis of exemplary decisions or actions may also be undertaken using any of the normative (or descriptive) approaches. At the same time, caution is warranted when highlighting exemplar cases because “the ‘genius of morality, the saint, the moral hero, cannot serve as a yardstick for human goodness’” (Heller, cited in Wray-Bliss 2013: 88).

Looking at contemporary ethical scandals (as discussed in the Introduction to this chapter) from a different perspective, the Enron and WorldCom cases produced two of *Time Magazine’s* 2002 “Persons of the Year”: Sherron Watkins, Enron’s Vice-President of Corporate Development, and Cynthia Cooper, WorldCom’s Vice-President of Internal Audit (Lacayo & Ripley 2002). The actions of Watkins and Cooper, in blowing the whistle on unethical corporate accounting practices at Enron and WorldCom, were regarded as being highly ethical. Cynthia Cooper was named as the AAA’s Public Interest Section Exemplar Award winner for 2003, cited for “notable contributions to professionalism and ethics in accounting education and/or practice” (AAA’s Public Interest Section, 2004).

It is worth asking what made Cynthia Cooper an exemplar of accounting ethics and professionalism. The ethically-valorised activity of whistle-blowing⁸ brought Cooper, and Sherrin Watkins at Enron, to public attention, because they were seen to be prepared to take an ethical stand (Curtis & Taylor 2009). But various explanations of their exemplary status are possible. Watkins and Cooper were described by *Time Magazine* as being:

... of ordinary demeanor but exceptional guts and sense ... heroes at the scene, anointed by circumstance. They were people who did right just by doing their jobs rightly—which means ferociously, with eyes open and with the bravery the rest of us always hope we have and may never know if we do. (Lacayo & Ripley 2002)

This extract and the Cynthia Cooper story illustrate how whistle-blowing may be interpreted as being an ethical act from a number of perspectives. For example, applying deontic ethics, whistle-blowing constitutes a form of truth-telling. From a consequentialist perspective, whistle-blowing may result in a better-informed market, or may result in wrongdoers being brought to account – consequences which could be regarded as ethically worthwhile. From a virtue ethics perspective, whistle-blowing exhibits courage and forthrightness, often in the face of considerable pressure. On Cooper’s own account (2008) it seems that her actions probably involved a combination of a number of these elements.

In an educational use of a case such as this, the rightness or goodness of a morally exemplary act like whistle-blowing may be held up against deontic, teleic, or aretaic norms as a basis for understanding and judging what was done. Competing ethical judgements

⁸ Note that such valorisation was not evidenced in the business-focused attitude which Cooper faced within WorldCom (Cooper 2008).

which are informed by different perspectives will not always come up with identical conclusions, but classroom debate about the differences is likely to prove very fruitful.

3.7 Teaching tools

It is not the purpose of this chapter to detail the range of teaching tools that can be used to aid ethics instruction. Many are canvassed in the literature (Geary & Sims 1994; Thomas 2004; Leung *et al.* 2006; Van Peurseem & Julian 2006; Cooper *et al.* 2008; Dellaportas *et al.* 2011). There is a strong argument for the use of ethics cases, which many educators believe are the most appropriate (Blanthorne *et al.* 2007) and effective (Wilhelm 2008) ethics teaching tool (Langenderfer and Rockness 1989; May 1990). Cases can be applied in varied ways to support different educational objectives (Boyce *et al.* 2001).

Broadly, active rather than traditional didactic approaches are likely to be more effective (Pettifor & Paquet 2002; Rockness & Rockness 2010). The use of reflective learning techniques, including class discussion, quick papers, and reflective journals, can all help to develop new understandings of previously known or unknown situations (Mintz 2006; McGuigan & Kern 2009). Role playing (Loeb 1988) and game playing (Haywood & Wygal 2009) can enliven topics and foster reflective thinking. Drawing on literature (Lister 2010), including seminal works (Jennings 2004), works from other disciplines (Fetters *et al.* 1989), and fiction (Young & Annisette 2009) can all help to cultivate ethical imagination.

A mixture of teaching approaches is likely to nurture development across the four stages of the “Ethics Education Continuum” recommended by the International Accounting Education Standards Board (IAESB) under the auspices of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC): ethical knowledge, ethical sensitivity, ethical judgement, and ethical behaviour (see also Dellaportas *et al.* 2011; Kidwell *et al.* 2013; IAESB n.d.: ¶ 14).⁹

4 CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

While the intended or expected role of accounting in organizations and society can be rationalized based on economic requirements, the actual use and form, as well as the information contained, are dependent on social values. (Velayutham and Perera 1996: 76)

4.1 Environmental, societal, cultural, and other dimensions

Broader ethics education can support a number of important emerging areas within the accounting curriculum (see Sangster, Chapter 15 – this volume). A number of writers have expressed particular concern at accounting educators’ failure to adequately address the social and political context of accounting (Cooper *et al.* 2005; Humphrey 2005). To address this lacuna, analysis of ethical concerns must move beyond the accounting profession’s self-expectations as expressed in codes of ethics, to explore social expectations of the profession. This must also extend beyond managerial perspectives on ethics and eschew the common assumption that internal organisational ethics is largely a matter of managerial prerogative (see Wray-Bliss 2013).

In one of the few available textbooks on ethics in accounting (McPhail & Walters 2009), both the traditional realm of the ethics of *accountants* and the ethics of *accounting* as a discipline

⁹ These four stages can be related to the four components or aspects of ethical capacity as outlined by Rest (1986): moral sensitivity, moral reasoning, moral motivation, and moral character.

are examined, effectively holding the discipline *itself* up to examination as a social and ethical practice. From this perspective, ethics education examines the ethical *effects* of accounting, including a range of environmental and social concerns. This draws on an understanding that “‘Accounts’, of whatever form ... profoundly affect employees, communities, societies, planetary possibilities, the State and civil society itself” (Gray 2007: 170). By shifting the locus of concern from the ethics of individuals within the profession to the profession and the discipline itself, accounting can be seen to be an ethical discourse which privileges certain values over others (Puxty *et al.* 1994; Williams 2002, 2010).

An important goal of ethics education should be for students to be able to understand “*the role the profession (collectively) plays in society, and their personal responsibility to take an active part in forming and revising professional policies*” (Armstrong 1993: 81). McPhail & Walters (2009) aim to shift the discussion from relatively narrow and inward-looking codes of ethics to the larger social trends that are likely to be constitutive of future accounting problems and issues. This approach seeks to assist in developing an understanding of the way in which accounting itself structures and influences individual and societal responses to these issues.

Coming at this problem in a different way, Boyce (2008: 256) argued that:

[G]reater attention must be paid to the wider economic and social systems within which individual (un)ethical actions occur, and that systemic features of globalisation, in conjunction with events at local, regional and national levels, must be central to the analysis.

Similarly, Ravenscroft & Williams (2004: 19) argued:

[E]thics in accounting is rather hopelessly mired in discussions of individuals facing dilemmas ... we should look not only at individual behaviour and thinking but also more broadly at the structures that have been created and the power that has been granted to various groups. It is the morality of our institutions that should be of the greatest concern to us now.

These considerations make it particularly important to move beyond individual approaches to ethical issues and dilemmas to a critical examination of how ethics inheres in social structures, systems, and power (Boyce 2008). This does not mean that the importance of the individual should be overlooked, but that ethics should not be reduced to individual decision-making. This perspective may also transcend the traditional privileging of the notion of ethical ‘leadership’ (see Wray-Bliss 2013), engendering respect for difference in ethical standpoints. This could also include a consideration of how accounting *institutions* support – or could better support – ethical *practice* in accounting.

A range of other perspectives and considerations may also be embraced in order to support broader ethical considerations within accounting education. These include:

- existentialism, critical theory, and post-modernism (James 2008; James & Walsh 2011);
- the power and the practice of ethics as subordination and obedience to authority (McPhail 2001b);
- feminist perspectives and ethics of care (Day 1995; Reiter 1997; McPhail 2005);
- an ethic of accountability around social sustainability (Dillard 2008);
- non-Western, non-white perspectives on ethics (Waldmann 2000; Dunn 2006; Boyce *et al.* 2009);

- the nature of, and need for, ethical commitment to the Other (McPhail 1999, 2001b; Shearer 2002; Kosmala & McKernan 2011).

4.2 Looking ahead: Overcoming inertia

As noted in Section 2, the history of efforts to include ethics within the accounting curriculum, as with efforts at accounting education reform generally, is rather dismal. In 2012 yet another opportunity emerged from the U.S.A. offering the promise of meaningful change in accounting education. The *Pathways Commission on Accounting Higher Education* (Behn *et al.* 2012) represents the most recent attempt to consider “the future structure of higher education for the accounting profession” (p.9). Outlining its approach and mission, the Commission stated that the “*educational preparation of accountants should rest on a comprehensive and well-articulated vision of the role of accounting in the wider society*” (Behn *et al.* 2012: 10). Perhaps surprisingly, the Commission did not mention ethics as part of its “Value Proposition for a Broadly Defined Accounting Profession” (Ch. 2). In general, the Commission placed economic concerns in a social context but did so in a way that reflects a fairly traditional view of accounting. Ethics was included in the “Foundational Body of Knowledge” (Ch. 7) as an element of “Professional Integrity, Responsibility, and Commitment”, but the accompanying narrative reflected orthodox rhetoric about professional characteristics and competencies. There was, however, a welcome advocacy that:

*[F]uture accountants must learn more than technical knowledge. To be successful, accountants should develop professional skills and the ability to act ethically in difficult situations. It is the integration of knowledge, skills, and ethical action that form competency and fulfill the accounting profession’s responsibility to society. (Behn *et al.* 2012: 134)*

It is somewhat surprising that so little substantive emphasis was placed on ethics, other than in largely rhetorical flourishes about the importance of integrity to the profession and the social and economic purposes of accounting (such as the one above). There was not a clear sense or expression of the ethical values or philosophy underlying accounting: ethical practice in accounting was not portrayed as being related to fundamental values. The envisaged social function of accounting was tightly circumscribed:

The definition of any profession begins with a commitment to provide a benefit to the public ... this commitment requires members of the profession to consistently provide accurate and reliable information to members of the public, which enables them to make sound investment decisions, and to managers to facilitate the efficient and productive use of resources ... (p.21)

To some degree, the Commission’s emphasis on the provision of reliable financial information is understandable in the post-Enron, post-WorldCom environment. However, the marginalisation of ethics, other than in its capacity to undergird technical skills, reflected a largely instrumental approach to the maintenance of accounting’s information-providing function in investment and capital market contexts. Thus, the Pathways Commission largely reflected traditional accounting practice and ideology, and presented little that is likely to challenge or change accounting education to infuse ethics.

Notwithstanding the above analysis, the inclusion of references to the social role of accounting and the recognition of the importance of ethics to the “next generation of

accountants” could be taken as an(other) opening for those who wish to take up the challenge of making accounting education more ethical. This endeavour could draw some support from the relevant pronouncements issued by the IAESB, in particular IES 4 *Professional Values, Ethics and Attitudes* (IAESB 2005).¹⁰ This Standard provides that:

*The program of professional accounting education should provide potential professional accountants with a framework of professional values, ethics and attitudes for exercising professional judgment and for acting in an ethical manner that is in the best interest of society and the profession. (¶ 13)*¹¹

The coverage of values and attitudes in education programs for professional accountants should lead to a commitment to:

(a) the public interest and sensitivity to social responsibilities ... (¶ 15)

Although the work of the IAESB and IFAC is potentially important in the endeavour to enhance ethics education in accounting, there is little evidence that these pronouncements have had much impact to date. The “mandatory” nature of the Standards (Dellaportas *et al.* 2006) applies in theory but, in practice, may operate more at the level of guidance. Loeb (2007: 6–7) describes these international education pronouncements as “crucial ... provid[ing] strong positive support for accounting ethics education”, but goes on to note, more modestly, that they “may be factors in increasing the demand for ethics education in accounting programs” over time (p.8). McPeak, Pincus & Sundem (2012) emphasise that IESs “are influencing accounting education and training worldwide” (p.750). They (and the IAESB) acknowledge, however, that the aim of “convergence in educational outcomes and the competence of accounting professionals worldwide” (p. 747) is tempered by differences in educational systems, professional programmes, and social systems including culture, language, and laws. Thus, a pragmatic consideration is that IESs must reflect “common ground” (McPeak *et al.* 2012), which could produce a level of generality that could increase an awareness of ethics education while limiting practical impacts in terms of changing day-to-day educational practice. The outcomes and impacts – at least in Western developed countries – is yet to be seen, and the IAESB is “little known among accounting educators unengaged in international discourse” (Kidwell *et al.* 2013: 7).¹²

¹⁰ A revision of this standard is expected to be completed by the end of 2013 (see IAESB 2011). A supportive *Practice Statement* is also available (IAESB n.d.).

¹¹ This construction problematically assumes that the “best interest” of society and the profession are coincident (see Van Peurseem & Julian 2006: 14). In the draft revised standard still under consideration at the time of writing (IAESB 2011), this wording is proposed to be amended to: “*IFAC member bodies shall provide, through learning and development activities, a framework of professional values, ethics, and attitudes for aspiring professional accountants to exercise professional judgment in the public interest*” (¶ 7). Otherwise, the possibility of a disjunction between the interests of the profession, or of the requirements of professional codes, and the public interest, is not effectively dealt with.

¹² In some senses, the key target of the convergence goal may be to influence and assist “developing countries” as they introduce their own systems of professional education and recognition (see IAESB 2009: 7; McPeak *et al.* 2012: 747).

There is little doubt that considerable and sustained effort will be required to overcome the ethical neglect which, on the whole, characterises outcomes to date. As a start, this will require recognition that questions of ethics are of fundamental significance and growing importance to accounting, and that significant change in educational programmes is required to grapple with the range of concerns in this realm. Ethics must come to be regarded as being central to the study of accounting and business.

5 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Neither the 'training' nor the 'education' of accounting students is satisfactory. This failure ... has been consistently and persuasively linked with the behaviour of accountants in practice ...

Educational experience seems to be an important factor in both intellectual development and ethical maturity ... and accounting education ... provides the intellectual framework within which practice – and the dialogues of practice – operate ... If there are ethical failures in accounting practice it is therefore probable that at least some of the responsibility must be laid at the door of the educators. (Gray et al. 1994: 52)

It has been argued that corporations should be regarded as amoral entities because the legal and business environment in which they operate practically constrains their practical ability to practice ethics and corporate social responsibility (Hazelton & Cussen 2005). This argument could be applied, by extension, to accounting but, in either case, the argument is unlikely to be widely accepted. There is an alternative (or perhaps complementary) view that corporations are pathological entities requiring fundamental reform in order to tackle the ethical and related problems that flow from the singular pursuit of profit, wealth, and power (Bakan 2004). Underlying this perspective is a belief that ethical problems are likely to persist unless and until systemic social and economic factors are addressed. This underscores the urgency of the case for taking a broader perspective on accounting ethics education.

Accounting ethics education matters because it can make a difference. It works best when it takes a broad view of accounting, and of ethics within the discipline, incorporating an appreciation of both philosophical ethics and application to common – and unexpected – real-world problems. It may lead to problematisation of both ethics, and of accounting itself, in the light of its effects on the lives of people who are subject to it:

Accounting is saturated with moral implications. As a practice, it influences the quality of life for millions of people in subtle and often complex ways. Its vocabulary is one of values, of evaluation, of welfare, of rights, of expectations, of obligations, of equity, of contracts, of punishments and rewards, of utility, satisfaction, responsibility and accountability. The moral force of accounting needs to be questioned in the light of the values that it promotes and the values that it impedes. (Arrington & Francis 1993: 105)

Ethics are fundamental to the practice and social functioning of accounting, and the challenges of integrating ethics into accounting education are likely to be a key continuing concern for accounting educators. Understanding the nature of ethics and its multifaceted relationship with accounting is vital to activating the possibilities for making a difference through ethics education.

As accounting educators we *can* make a difference in our students' lives by critically and thoughtfully exposing them to multiple facets of ethical philosophy and its application. Such exposure can enhance students' abilities to think more critically when confronted by ethical issues, and to become "thinking participants in the profession they will soon be entering"

(Armstrong 1993: 90). If we are prepared to regard ethics as being a domain within which “we wage our struggle to find the new and adequate ways of thinking of, about, and for the world we live in, and our lives within it (Bauman 2009: 1, original emphasis), we will truly be making a difference for accounting students, for society, for the future of the discipline, and for ourselves.

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