



**ETHICS AND THE MARITIME PROFESSION: AN ARGUMENT  
FOR TEACHING IN MARITIME TRAINING AND STRATEGIES  
FOR MAKING ETHICAL DECISIONS**

**T. R. Moore**

Maine Maritime Academy, USA

**ABSTRACT**

The teaching of ethical decision-making should be included as an integral part of professional mariner training. While traditional training must cover essential areas such as power plants, navigation, personnel management, and communication, it is equally important to teach a basic knowledge of ethical reasoning.

In our competitive, global business world we must subscribe to the maxim that good business is ethical business. To that end, mariner training should include an historical overview of the philosophy of ethics as well as discussions of case studies. Even more important, however, is to articulate and discuss paradigms for making ethical decisions. Training should provide a framework for thinking that will generate insight and provide direction for final decisions. The work of Dr. Rushworth Kidder at the Institute for Global Ethics in Camden, Maine, provides a language and a methodology for such decision-making.

**INTRODUCTION**

"and the expensive delicate ship that must  
have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling from  
the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed  
calmly on."

---W.H. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts"

A recent edition of the New York Times featured six front-page stories of corruption and ethical lapses: local, state, national, and international examples of leaders swindling the public or otherwise violating the public trust. Both legal and ethical problems abound in modern society, and, if indeed the past held as many examples of corruption as the present, today we seem more willing to address fundamental ethical issues. Ethics is in the air, the Zeitgeist of our times, and as global commerce shrinks our planet, the call for all to act ethically rings louder than ever before.

Good business is ethical business. With that proposition as a starting point, I will present an argument for the teaching of ethics in maritime training schools. I will then offer examples from history and literature that I use teaching ethics at Maine Maritime Academy, and go on to explore a case study of the October 1998 Fantome maritime disaster and the consequent ethical questions. Finally I will present strategies for ethical decision-making drawn from Dr. Rushworth M. Kidder's Ethical Fitness Seminars at the Institute for Global Ethics in Camden, Maine.

The history of ethics and strategies for ethical decision-making should be included as an integral part of professional mariner training. While traditional training includes essential areas such as power plants, navigation, safety of life at sea, international maritime law, personnel management, and

communication, it is equally important to teach a basic knowledge of ethics and ethical reasoning. It is not so much that ethics is now avoided as an academic topic--STCW for example, includes a section on Social Responsibility--but rather that the strategies for teaching ethics are not systematized and that practical ways to apply ethical knowledge are unstructured at best.

## **ETHICAL AWARENESS**

Each of us owns an ethical system and the full right to discuss and determine ethical behavior. Ethicist Dr. Michael K. Hooker, who served as president of several American colleges and universities, wrote recently in an essay entitled "How to Think about Ethics" that "[t]here is nothing that I, as a professional philosopher, know that you don't know, the knowing of which would better enable you to engage in tough ethical disputes" Hooker [1]. Whether they choose to acknowledge it or not, students entering colleges and professional schools arrive with a knowledge of ethics, however vague or untested that knowledge may be. What they do not carry with them is a language with which to discuss ethics or a framework for ethical decision-making. Although students, we earnestly hope, have an innate sense of right and wrong pieced together from religious, societal, or parental teaching, ethical codes are harder to locate and more difficult to articulate. Decision-making in ethics is even more arduous, a product of much reading, rigorous discussion, and real-life application.

Conventional wisdom often stymies the teaching of ethics by arguing that ethics cannot be taught, that our value systems and moral beliefs are determined by family and religious influences long before adulthood. Freud would agree. But such is not the case according to Sharon Daloz Parks, a Senior Research Fellow at the Harvard Business School. Drawing on several recent studies, Parks argues in her 1993 essay, "Is it too late? Young Adults and the Formation of

Professional Ethics," that "moral development can continue into adulthood, and . . . particularly dramatic changes can occur in young adulthood in the context of professional school education" Piper [2]. On the basis of my own thirty-five years of teaching in both high school and college classrooms, I strongly concur with Parks. While high school students tend to echo their parents' religious and political views, college students, often living away from home for the first time, will explore and reevaluate ethical positions and codes of behavior. College is a time to test old dicta and try on new ways of thinking. If we can agree that college students are indeed open to reevaluation of core beliefs, that ethics can be taught to young adults and professionals in business, that moral understanding and growth can occur, we must next address the questions of what to teach and how to teach it.

Contrary to what some would argue, I believe that there are fundamental, universal ethical beliefs that cut across all nations and all cultures. If we own property we don't want others to steal it; we want others to respect how we live our lives; we ought not to kill. As Rushworth Kidder, President of The Institute for Global Ethics in Camden, Maine, points out in his book, How Good People Make Tough Choices, every major world religion has a statement that articulates in some way the golden rule of the Christian bible: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. But Kidder goes further, arguing after extensive research and interviewing that there is a "common ground" and "list of core values" shared by all humans. That list comprises "love, truth, fairness, freedom, unity, tolerance, responsibility, respect for life" Kidder [3].

## **READINGS IN THE HISTORY OF ETHICS**

What are the origins of these values and how do we teach them? Instead of seeking out maritime issues for a discussion of ethics in my Humanities courses at Maine Maritime

Academy, I choose to broaden the base to include early texts from the Western tradition in the belief that a knowledge of the history of ethics will inform--and perhaps reform--the belief systems of the students. We look at Hammurabi's code which delin-eates some of the earliest statutes and ethical codes in such areas as no-fault divorce, women's rights, and builders' liability. We read the Ten Command-ments from the Judeo-Christian bible and selections from the Koran and discuss them in relation to our own times. We read Sophocles' Antigone and discuss the ethical decisions in the play: Antigone's defiance of the law of the state; Creon's arrogant and insecure wielding of power; Haimon's reasoned challenge to his father's authority. The play is rich with ethical questions and with the conse-quences of impetuous and arrogant behavior. Antigone's decision to bury her brother after weighing the law of the gods against the law of the state is a provocative example of right versus right thinking. From Plato's Republic we read the "Allegory of the Cave" and discuss the sources of basic truths, especially the meaning of justice and what comprises a just society. Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics" shows the reasonable middle way, the way of moderation between cowardice and recklessness, between arrogance and timidity.

In the Enlightenment era we read excerpts from Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke and observe the influences of inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, natural law, and the social contract on the formation of the democratic governments of the United States and France, especially as articulated in Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence." In the nineteenth century we read John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham and discuss Utilitarianism, and in the twentieth century we read Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" with its echoes of Platonic justice. W.H. Auden's poem (quoted above) about the fall of Icarus opens a lively debate about commercial shipping schedules and profit versus human compassion: should "the

expensive delicate ship" stop to offer assistance, or having "somewhere to get to," should it sail "calmly on"?

The key ethical issues are the oldest ethical issues. "Musée des Beaux Arts," a twentieth-century poem about a sixteenth-century painting depicts a myth from ancient Greece. This tale of Icarus' flight to escape the Minotaur introduces two timeless ethical issues. First, the ship in the poem has a deadline to keep; customers are waiting. Stopping to aid the drowning boy will put the ship behind schedule and the owners may lose money to speedier competitors. Commercialism and profit override compassion. Second, one could argue that, since the boy has been on a risky, reckless adventure, his fate is his just reward, and thus of even less concern to the mariners. Although Section 2304 of the United States Code navigation rules states that "a vessel shall render assistance to any individual found at sea in danger of being lost," USCG [4] both legal and ethical questions surface: Is the person actually in danger of death? Will the operation endanger the larger vessel? Does the law of the flag country require a vessel to render such assistance?

The list of readings for teaching ethics is arbitrary and will of course differ from instructor to instructor, but the pedagogical objective remains the same: a grounding in the history of ethical philosophy provides the equipment for students to begin to think ethically in a self-conscious way. In a February 2000 article by Captain Mark N. Clemente of the U.S. Naval Academy entitled "Why We Teach Leadership and Ethics at the Naval Academy," Clemente underscores my point about the history of ethics. He writes:

We want them to graduate with a true understanding of timeless principles, so whenever they encounter situations where the rules have yet to be written, or where conflicts of duty are encountered, they can dig into their conscience and apply the critical

thinking skills they learned during their four years at the Naval Academy and do the right thing—and for the right reasons. Clemente [5]

Clemente is on the mark: the history of ethics provides us with a general groundwork, the theory for practical decisions, and although Clemente is addressing military engagement, engagement in the commercial world draws upon the same ethical precepts. Practicing with the tools for ethical decision-making will give students confidence in those gray areas of global business where equally right solutions must be weighed. Case studies furnish a practical dimension.

### **THE FANTOME: A CASE STUDY**

On October 27, 1998, thirty-one seamen lost their lives when the 282 foot, four-masted schooner Fantome sank in the Caribbean. Second-guessing Captain Guyan March's decisions in the days before Hurricane Mitch struck is not the issue here. He acted as a highly experienced mariner should have acted in accordance with the best information available to him. But several decisions made by the Fantome's owners do call for rigorous examination. After the ninety-three passengers were disembarked in Belize City to avoid the impending hurricane, thirty-one persons remained on board. Only two of them were white, Captain March and Chief Engineer Bucur. Would the decision to save the ship by sending it out to sea to ride out the storm have been different if the crew had been white? And, as Captain Andy Chase, a Professor of Marine Transportation at Maine Maritime Academy, argues in a recent analysis of the disaster, "'going to sea at all costs is an outmoded tactic . . . . Human life is worth more now than it was fifty years ago'" Vaillant [6].

John Vaillant's October 1999 article on the Fantome raises further questions about Windjammer, the company that ran the cruise ship. "Windjammer," Vaillant points out, "has long been held in dubious regard by the East

Coast's professional sailing community, members of which describe the fleet as haphazardly renovated and poorly maintained" Vaillant [7]. In order to create "legal fire walls" Windjammer's ships are "registered in Equatorial Guinea" and "owned by an independent corporation based in Panama" Vaillant [8]. The ethical questions pile up: Did pursuit of profit compromise safety? Was risky behavior condoned, even encouraged, by the owners? Did the owners place lesser value on non-white lives? Should the Fantome have put to sea to escape Mitch, a Category 5 hurricane, in response to an outdated, romantic code of maritime valor? Should the Fantome have been operating at all in the Gulf of Honduras where hurricanes can easily box in a slow-moving ship? And the larger question looms of the company's encouraging the current craze for thrill-seeking, rum-inspired behavior on what Vaillant calls "the benignly piratical" cruises where "mock battles ensue, complete with cannon fire" "when Windjammer vessels are encountered" Vaillant [9].

### **A LANGUAGE FOR ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING**

With the history of ethics in mind and a case study before them, students still lack a methodology to think through a situation, to balance right action against right action, to predict consequences, and to determine action. They still lack a language with which to defend their decisions with clarity and confidence. Kidder's Ethical Fitness Seminars offer that methodology and that language.

Kidder proposes a four-step process: "Moral Awareness, Values Definition, Ethical Awareness, and Dilemma Resolution" "Preparation" [10]. In the first section Kidder stresses that "Ethics is not a luxury or an option. It is essential to our survival" "Preparation" [11]. He goes on to argue that if we do not regulate ourselves, we will be regulated soon enough by "externalities." He cites the example of throwing trash out the



window of the car, and how we used to self-regulate such behavior. Now, he points out, we "don't throw litter out of the car window because there is \$500 fine" "Preparation" [12]. In our age of fragile worldwide eco-systems, this example speaks loudly to the maritime industry in such issues as trash and oil disposal at sea where ethical and legal issues can become confused. The abnegation of self-regulation will produce industry-wide regulation by "externalities." "What used to be regulation by our own good habits," Kidder writes, "has become regulation by the will of the legislators" "Preparation" [13]. It is this thinking that propels Kidder to a definition of ethics in our modern world as "obedience to the unenforceable" "Preparation" [14].

Kidder's second definition of ethics is more useful in decision-making: ethics, he says, is not the battle between right and wrong but "the battle of right versus right" "Preparation" [6]. If something is evil or illegal, for example, there is no ethical dilemma. It is not unethical to cheat on an exam, it is illegal to do so, and there is no ethical dilemma. Kidder ends the first part of his presentation by arguing that there is no "such thing as 'medical ethics,' or 'business ethics,' or 'legal ethics,' or 'journalism ethics.' There is only ethics." He warns against the illusion that we can separate personal ethics from business or political ethics. "The public no longer credits that line of reasoning," he writes. "There is no dividing up ethics into compartments: There's only ethics" "Preparation" [16].

The second section of the seminar focuses on values definition. Here the goal is first, "to create an understanding of the nature of and the purposes for a code of ethics" "Preparation" [17]. In separate groups of five or six the participants create a code of ethics, and it is astonishing that these groups working discretely come up with essentially the same list, with such core values as trust, compassion, and responsibility. Participants from all over the world, Kidder says, come up

with the same lists. The groups then measure their codes against other codes such as the Ten Commandments, the West Point Honor Code, and the list of personal values generated by the Institute for Global Ethics.

The third part of the presentation is called Ethical Analysis, and here the goals are "[t]o explore the nature of 'right versus right' dilemmas, [t]o practice identifying the dilemma paradigms" and "[t]o gain experience analyzing a variety of dilemmas" "Preparation" [18]. The four dilemma paradigms in right versus right situations are truth versus loyalty, individual versus community, short term versus long term, and justice versus mercy. "Tough choices," Kidder writes, "don't always involve professional or criminal laws" "Preparation" [19]. "Tough choices, typically, are those that pit one 'right' against another. That's true in every walk of life—corporate, professional, personal, civic, international, educational, religious, and the rest" "Preparation" [20]. As an illustration of the justice versus mercy paradigm, let's say a student has plagiarized a paper and that the punishment is expulsion from school. The professor knows that the student has a lot of potential and probably was unaware of the implications of her action. The situation could be turned into a positive learning experience. Justice dictates dismissal, but mercy suggests she re-write the paper. Both actions are right. Similarly, the truth versus loyalty paradigm might be illustrated by the example of one student seeing another student cheat on an exam. Truth and the school's honor code require the observer to report the incident, but loyalty to the friend counsels silence. The Fantome incident could illustrate the short term versus long term paradigm. A short-term view would argue that it is right for Windjammer to operate its ships, entertain its clientele as they see fit, and make a profit. A long-term view would argue that it is right to be much more cautious when operating an old, slow-moving vessel in the Gulf of Honduras where a hurricane could easily box it in.

The last section of the Ethical Fitness Seminar presents "a systematic framework for seeking resolutions for right versus right dilemmas" "Preparation" [21]. Kidder suggests three principles for guidance: "ends-based thinking," "rule-based-thinking," and "care-based think-ing" "Preparation" [22]. Ends-based thinking is essentially Bentham's Utilitarianism, or the greatest good for the greatest number. Making that determination, however, can be a sticky problem. For example, should some humans be sacrificed in medical experiments in order to develop useful medical knowledge for the majority? Simpler to decide is whether a flooded compartment with a seaman trapped inside should be sealed in order to save a ship at sea, a situation graphically illustrated in the recent movie Crimson Tide.

Rule-based thinking would dictate that one follow "the highest sense of principle" in decision-making "Preparation" [23]. But impossibly strict and rigid rules can impede and complicate decisions based on universal rules. The right of gun ownership as a response to the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution becomes an issue in rule-based thinking. Similarly, rule-based thinking could argue that the Fantome should put to sea in order to save the ship. But here we must evaluate the rules. Is the Second Amendment based on high principle? The current turmoil over gun ownership in the United States challenges this Constitutional "right to bear arms." Is putting to sea to save the ship an outdated principle when lives are in jeopardy? Care-based thinking invokes the Golden Rule, but things aren't so simple here either. We must ask, for example, who the "other" is in "do unto others." These resolution principles are not infallible, but they do provide a framework and a language for working toward a solution of an ethical dilemma. As Kidder says, they "are the most helpful in confronting the choices we commonly face in today's world" Kidder [24].

## CONCLUSION

Based on the two fundamental propositions that ethics is, first, "obedience to the unenforceable," and second, "the battle of right versus right," Kidder's strategies open up the decision-making process and offer a language of resolution for us all: professionals, professors, and students. For mariners already at work in the profession, ethical training courses are available from other sources as well. One such course is described in the Fourth Quarter 1999 edition of the Global Marine News. Tim Hinote, an electrician on the Adriatic VIII drilling rig, describes a course he took with the Randy Smith Training School. Hinote found the sessions provocative and useful. They drew on philosophies, in his words, that "date back to the earliest times" and were focused on a three-step philosophy: "Always do your best. Do the right thing. Treat others as you want to be treated" Hinote [25].

The similarity of this language to Kidder's principles is clear because the basic precepts are the same. Our concern should be less on what we teach than on the thinking process itself, our only saleable commodity. The process of ethical decision-making may not generate a facile solution, but it will generate insight, provide a framework, and suggest a direction. Ethical fitness should be expected of all educated persons and surely should not exclude mariners. If we don't teach principles of ethics and ethical-decision making, who will? If we don't lead them, who--or what--will? We cannot afford that risk.

## CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE AUTHOR

Professor Thomas R. Moore, Department of Arts and Sciences, Maine Maritime Academy, Castine, Maine 04420, USA Tel: 207-326-2344; email: <tmoores@bell.mma.edu>

## REFERENCES

1. Hooker, Michael K. "How to Think about Ethics." Camden, Maine: The Institute for Global Ethics, 1992. p. 1.
2. Piper, Thomas R., Mary C. Gentile, and Sharon Daloz Parks. Can Ethics Be Taught?. Boston: Harvard Business School, 1993. p. 13.
3. Kidder, Rushworth M. How Good People Make Tough Choices. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. p. 91-92.
4. United States Coast Guard. Navigation Rules, International-Inland. Washington: U.S. Department of Transportation, 1990. p. 200.
5. Clemente, Captain Mark N. "Why We Teach Leadership and Ethics at the Naval Academy." Proceedings: U.S. Naval Institute. February 2000. 86-88. p. 88.
6. Vaillant, John. "The Ship That Vanished." New Yorker 11 October 1999: 44-54. p. 53.
7. Vaillant. p. 53
8. Vaillant. p. 52
9. Vaillant. p. 44.
10. "Preparation for the Ethical Fitness Seminar: Readings in Ethics." Camden, Maine: The Institute for Global Ethics, 1995. p. ii.
11. "Preparation." p. 1.
12. "Preparation." p. 6.
13. "Preparation." p. 6.
14. "Preparation." p. 6.
15. "Preparation." p. 6.
16. "Preparation." p. 6-7.
17. "Preparation." p. 24.
18. "Preparation." p. 70.
19. "Preparation." p. 72.
20. "Preparation." p. 72-73.
21. "Preparation." p. 80.
22. "Preparation." p. 83.
23. "Preparation." p. 83.
24. Kidder. p. 155.
25. Hinote4, Tim. "Adriatic VIII, Focusing on Safety." Global Marine News. Fourth Quarter 1999. p. 4.