

**Navigating Muddy Waters: Preparing Students to Handle Moral Compromise in
the Context of Managerial Roles**

CBFA Conference 2006

Cedarville University

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Educators in Christian business programs often encourage their students to “never compromise for the sake of profits.” Similar foci can be seen in post-Enron organizational settings such as corporate ethics initiatives which employ language such as “integrity without compromise.” If by the term compromise, we mean the easy abandonment of moral values/ principles, much of this focus is entirely appropriate. Encouraging moral fortitude is an important emphasis in both educational and organizational settings.

From an ethical perspective, moral values are seen as something “objective” (unlike tastes, prices, etc.) and thereby, not something to be bartered or negotiated (Kuflik 1979; Van Willigenburg, 2000). Thus, those who bow easily to pressure and surrender principles are seen as “moral chameleons” or “hypocrites.” Moreover, individuals and groups who stand for something and who are resolute amidst pressures to capitulate are highly admired. Heroes who have upheld principle even at a very high personal cost play a key role in the western values tradition (i.e. Socrates, Sir Thomas More, and Biblical figures such as Joseph and Daniel).

However, simply admonishing our students to refrain from compromise might do them a disservice if we are not exceedingly careful on at least two fronts. First, there are types of compromise that may not involve abandonment of moral values. For example, the term compromise may also be used to describe an “art” form used to “split the difference” on resource allocation problems such as prices or wages. As such, it is used to describe a *morally neutral* process, outcome, or both (Benditt 1979; Benjamin, 1990). Practiced in this light, compromise is seen as a highly admirable trait, as it reflects reasonableness and amicability on the part a manager and should be *encouraged* on moral grounds..

Second (and the focus of this paper), the lived experience of well-intentioned managers strongly suggests that, over the course of a career, avoiding *moral* compromise is difficult, if not altogether impossible at the “ground”/ “praxis” level of business. Managers often use phrases such as “picking one’s battles,” “living to fight another day,” or “accepting half of a loaf” to describe these situations.

These situations typically involve “double moral binds” in which two or more principles conflict *internally* – situations of “right vs. right” (Baradacco, 1997) or in which short term tradeoffs/harms must be made to achieve longer term aims – “necessary evils” (Molinsky & Margolis 2005), thereby “forcing” one to make a moral compromise.

Morally sensitive managers who encounter situations that seem to “require” compromise may wonder: Is it possible to be an agent for positive change in a complex global economy without getting my hands dirty? How should I act when confronted with “two rights” (or “two wrongs”) – surrender one principle to uphold the other? Is compromise the only option, or are the conflicts only apparent with a “third way” of escape around the corner, if I think creatively and/or “live faithfully”? Since I work with others, is compromise something to be entirely avoided, or is it sometimes necessary and even desirable from a moral standpoint since collegiality and “community” (vs. intractability/ stubbornness) also seem to be goals that are both reasonable and highly treasured?

Classic figures in literature (i.e. Machiavelli’s Prince, Sartre’s “Dirty Hands,” and Shakespeare’s Hamlet) have touched on these themes. More recent writing in some fields such as philosophy (Foot 19xx;), political science (Walzer 1973; Benjamin 1992 - - politics is often described as the “art of compromise”), health care (Winslow & Winslow 1991), and the intersections of the three (i.e. physician objection to abortion) have investigated these types of questions to some extent. However, with a few exceptions (Badaracco 1997, 2002; Goodstein 2000), scholarship on ethical compromise in management, is notably thin. Some recent work (Molinsky & Margolis 2005) maps the terrain of “necessary evils” (i.e. layoffs) performed in the context of managerial roles, but this is done after the fact and focuses on the psychological aspects.

Accompanying the dearth in applicable literature is the fact that conflicts which raise the specter of compromise will likely only grow in number and complexity as economic activity (and competition) becomes increasingly global (decreasing market inefficiencies, increasing cultural differences, etc). Furthermore, business professionals are now often encouraged to see their work as positive change agents in the service of

something broader than profit maximization within the owner-agency relationship. As managers come to envision their roles as serving the interests of multiple stakeholders (Freeman and Evans, 1984), as guardians of a “public trust” or as key decision makers in a “mediating institution” (Fort, 1996) this will undoubtedly magnify the number and intensity of role tensions. For managers who see the world through a Christian worldview and who believe their work has meaning when performed in the service of a divine agenda, these conflicts can be especially acute.

The purpose of this paper is to encourage educators in Christian business programs to better prepare students to handle compromise in managerial settings. Our strategy will be to proceed along the following lines: 1) Develop a more nuanced understanding of compromise, 2) Investigate historical Christian ethical options in handling apparent compromise situations, and 3) Identify some pedagogical directions based on spiritual disciplines to cultivate wisdom and character necessary to navigate compromise and 4) Raise questions/issues that need to be explored further.

Compromise of Interests

In order to facilitate a better understanding of compromise, it is useful to distinguish between situations in which a compromise may occur. One important distinction that can and should be made is between a compromise of *interests* and a compromise of *principles* (Benditt 1979). The latter usually involves direct moral principles while the former does not. When a buyer and seller negotiate and settle on an agreed price, one could characterize each of them as compromising. The seller wanted more than she received. The buyer wanted to pay less. In order to complete the deal, however, they each gave up something (i.e. compromised).

In general, we would not suggest that this form of compromise is unethical or reflects a lack of personal integrity. Indeed, far from being morally deficient, we often laud compromises of interests. Compromises of interests (as opposed to principles) are essential to business (or any social interactions). In general, the only moral issues raised by interest compromises are those of procedure. E.g. was the compromise reached fairly?

Did each party have adequate access to relevant information? Did either party enjoy unfair power in the negotiations? Were the representations made during the deliberative process honest? The available literature on conflict management can be very helpful with respect to decision making in these types of situations.

While a compromise of interests is easiest to portray in the context of multi-party interactions, it can also be operative at an internal, individual level. I may love chocolate cake. I may also want to lose a couple of pounds. At different moments I may resolve this conflict of interests differently. On my birthday, I may eat cake. On other days, I may decline dessert. In neither case would my personal integrity be in question. Rather, internal compromises of interests are often characterized as exhibiting laudatory virtues such as prudence and self-control.

It is important to note that there is far from a bright line between these two categories. What may be characterized as a conflict of interests by some might be recast by others as a conflict of principles. For example, suppose that a business had some unanticipated success and secured better than expected returns. How should these returns be divided up? Should they be plowed back into the business as capital investments, be given as bonuses to employees, used to lower costs to customers, or be donated to the community? Decisions such as these are often seen as “morally neutral” issues of resource allocation involving only conflicts of interests. There is another way of looking at them, however. Arguably, distributions of resources are full of ethical implications about the value of people, the priority of profit, the relative roles of labor and capital, the social utility of corporate giving and even the fundamental purpose of business itself. Thus, while we will focus our attention on conflicts of principles we do so with the understanding that this category may, at times, be broader than it appears.

Compromise of Principles (Moral Compromise)

While compromises of interests may be encouraged, what about compromises that directly involve moral principles? In order to illustrate compromise of principles (moral compromise), we provide the following examples. To be certain, these examples are by

no means exhaustive, but rather illustrate the types of conflicts that can occur. Each illustrates what Baradacco has described as an issue of "right versus right." "Sometimes, a manager faces a difficult problem and must choose between two ways of resolving it. Each alternative is the right thing to do, but there is no way to do both." (Badaracco at 1)

Necessary Evils

Sue is a production manager at a manufacturing plant in the mid-western part of the United States. As such, she has authority to evaluate and recommend revisions to production processes where appropriate. She knows that the employees in her plant are highly compensated (relative to other jobs in the area) and treated well. The plant is located in an area with a depressed local economy and her company is a major source of employment for those living in the region.

Sue has recently learned that certain of the raw materials that her employees work with may present hazards to their health and she is contemplating asking her company to provide safety equipment for the workers. Since the potential dangers of the raw materials are not yet fully known there is no legal requirement that the company make safety equipment available and the costs associated with providing this equipment would place the firm at a significant competitive disadvantage. Indeed, for Sue to insist upon the safety equipment might result in her termination or, in the worst-case, in a decision to shut down the plant. Moreover, she has been told by the human resources manager that disclosing the possible dangers to the workers in order to let them make a more informed choice regarding the risks would make the company more vulnerable to a lawsuit later on.

Sue wonders which of her "right" choices she should pursue. Should she try to persuade company executives to change course and provide the safety equipment and thereby put the jobs of all of the workers in jeopardy? Or should she keep quiet? Would this tradeoff be worth it to provide jobs and stable employment in an economically depressed area? Given the fact that she has on-going relationships with the other managers, should she give in for the sake of preserving her social capital for a bigger

cause down the road? Two right choices: one to protect safety - one to protect jobs.
"Each alternative is the right thing to do, but there is no way to do both."

Dirty Hands

Ron is a senior manager for a large bookstore. He sees his work as a "spiritual calling," and has a strong influence in the selection of the company's retail product lines. He is especially proud of the loyal and growing clientele he has helped attract in the art and religion sections of his company's stores. However, he also worries that he is violating treasured personal values in his role as lead buyer by purchasing soft pornography, a highly profitable product for his employer. "We sell a lot of Bibles", he reluctantly jokes, "but we sell more Playboy." After raising his objections in a meeting of senior managers, he is told that it is not the job of the bookstore to censor the materials it sells, especially since the products that Ron complains of do not violate community standards of "obscenity." Over Ron's objections, management determines that the questionable products will not be pulled.

What should Ron do? Ron believes that he has been called to this position and, at least at the margins, can serve as a positive change agent. If he leaves, someone else will do the job and that person may care less about this issue than he does. If he stays, he can continue to raise the issue from time to time and may encourage some half-way measures such as minimizing the promotion and/or placement of objectionable material even while continuing to offer it for sale. For Ron, however, to stay is to "get his hands dirty." He will continue to be personally responsible for ordering and offering pornographic material for sale. Does the positive possibility of serving as a change agent for good justify soiling his hands?

Staying in the Game

Nathan's small company is licensed to make baseball caps branded with a professional team's logo. Only one other manufacturer is licensed to produce baseball caps with the same brand. Both Nathan and his competitor have concluded that it will be most efficient to manufacture the caps in one of the Maquiladoras in Mexico and they set

up factories next door to one another. Independently, each calculates that the going market rate for the employees needed to operate the plants is \$5.00 a day.

Nathan, motivated by his religious faith, started the business in part to “provide meaningful and gainful employment” to the needy. Thus, he has a strong conviction that to pay less than a living wage is to disrespect the dignity of workers and believes that he has an ethical obligation to pay more than the going market rate. In fact, he determines that in this region, to pay an employee a sustainable, livable wage, he would need to pay a daily salary of \$10.00 a day.

Nathan's competitor does not share his compunctions and hires a work force paying only market wage salaries. After developing a number of pro formas and looking for creative solutions, Nathan nonetheless concludes that were he to pay a living wage he would price his hats out of the market and quickly go out of business. He concludes, however, that paying \$7.00 a day would allow for him to sustain his business. What should he do? Pay \$5.00 a day and remain fiercely competitive? This, in effect, would be to completely ignore his sense of an ethical obligation to pay a living wage. Conversely, he could pay a living wage for as long as his business stays afloat and simply close the doors thereafter (leaving his workers unemployed). Or he could "compromise" between an ethical duty on the one hand (i.e. the duty to pay a livable wage) and the need to keep the business afloat, on the other.

Some may look at these scenarios and argue that there are no actual conflicts of principles. They might argue that there is no ethical duty to make a profit or keep a business afloat. Thus, when a manager is confronted with the need to promote a harmful product, ignore worker safety, or pay less than a livable wage just to keep the business going, she is not really faced with a conflict of principles. Admittedly, she has a difficult decision given her desire to keep the business from failing but she does not face a true conflict of principles. A conflict of principles would arise only if there were a true ethical duty to keep a business viable.

Initially, it would seem difficult to identify the source of such an ethical obligation. But on a moment's reflection it is easy to see there may in fact be actual tensions between competing duties. For example, if the manager is not the owner (as in the first two scenarios above), she is acting as agent for others who have entrusted her with their capital. To fail to act in accordance with the intentions of her principals would be to violate an obligation and, indeed, in some circumstances, a fiduciary duty. Even if the manager is a sole proprietor (as in the third case above) she may have started a business enterprise at least partially motivated by the goal of providing goods and services needed by her community and/or providing opportunities for employment. Now the conflict is not simply between "keeping the business afloat" and the performance of a duty; rather it has been recast as a tension between the duty to behave in a certain fashion and a duty to serve.

It also needs to be stated that compromise/conflicting-duty situations come robed in many different garbs. At first blush, these three vignettes may seem to present very different categories/types of issues. On closer examination, however, it should be readily apparent that they can all be collapsed into a single paradigm. Each could be recast under the titles/categories of the other two.

Susan's situation could be recast not as necessary evil decision but as a "dirty hands" decision. Seen this way, Sue needs to get dirty by hiding potential risks from her workers for the sake of a greater good, i.e. preserving their jobs. Ron's case could be recast as a necessary evil issue. Ron could stay in his position and serve as a positive change agent, putting up with compromises along the way. And both Ron and Sue's decisions could easily be recast as "ethics up to the point where the market does not allow it." Likewise, Nathan's situation could be recast either as a dirty hands decision or, alternatively, as a "necessary evil" tension. Regardless of how these situations are characterized, however, they have one common thread. In each case, the manager is placed in a moral double bind and seems forced to choose between conflicting values.

Christian Ethics Options

There is a long history within Christian theology of addressing matters involving double moral binds. These issues have been subjects of theological concern because the types of moral conflicts faced by key Biblical figures (Moses, Rahab, etc.), seem to be antithetical to the idea of a rational God who would create a universe in which one would be “forced to do evil (sin).” Moreover, the Christian community has had a long history of dealing with “dirty hands” in issues related to violence (e.g., Augustine on “just war”). Perhaps most famously, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a life long pacifist, lost his own life to capital punishment when he was caught in the foiled Abwehr plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler during Nazi occupation of Germany. Bonhoeffer’s decision to “compromise” treasured principles by plotting to take a life for the sake of preserving others has continued to be a subject of spirited debate as seen in several recent texts (Kelly & Nelson 2003; Hauerwas 2004; Haynes 2004).

In what follows, we will review several options for dealing with “double moral binds” found within the historical traditions of Christian theological ethics. While they have been used to deal with issues such as prudential uses of violence, they also seem applicable to compromise in managerial settings. These options reflect the diverse thinking of members of the Christian faith community. It would seem that each has its place in certain circumstances. As we discuss further below, however, identifying what characteristics of any particular “double moral bind” will suggest one appropriate response is, at a minimum, a difficult pedagogical issue.

Exit/Avoidance

One traditional approach to handling double binds is to simply exit the situation. This may involve leaving the organization altogether, or merely transferring to a different position. As applied to managers, Ron, Sue and Nathan could each quit their jobs or ask that the decision be removed from their sphere of authority, and thereby avoid the particular ethical conflicts they are facing as managers. Exiting is a decision, in effect, to keep one's personal hands clean even at the cost of “losing a seat at the table.”

As such, this approach does have some rich Christian antecedents. It has strong parallels to what H. Richard Niebuhr categorized as "Christ Against Culture", an approach to life that begins with the philosophical assumption that the world is so evil that faithful Christians must withdraw from it or at least, in some fashion, stand over and against it (Niebuhr 1951). Some early Church Fathers (e.g. Tertullian), elements of the monastic movement, certain facets of the Anabaptist movement, and some elements of early 20th-century fundamentalism have all exhibited this underlying philosophical inclination to stand apart from a "dirty world" (Hollinger 2002).

One of the strengths of such an approach is its high valuation of fidelity to principles. The Christian scriptures portray a God that is morally pure ("holy") and one who expects and desires his followers live up to his high standards. The exit strategy, however, does not always make sense. There are both some theological and practical concerns with this approach. An "escape to personal purity" paradigm may fail to live out what many theologians understand to be an "incarnational imperative" to live in the midst of a fallen, confused world, much the way Jesus Christ himself did (Hollinger at 196). In terms of the grand Biblical narrative (the narrative that emphasizes the themes of Creation, Fall & Redemption), this approach may over-emphasize the effects of the Fall to the detriment of a creation theology which acknowledges that God made a "good" world. Moreover, it assumes that in leaving one setting one has the option to move to some other situation where purity is a possibility. In a "fallen," imperfect world it is unclear where this pure and isolated mountaintop can be found.

In very practical terms, the "exit" strategy preserves one's sense of purity only if one refuses to take responsibility for the consequences of what might happen after the fact. Unfortunately, exiting does not resolve the double-bind per se. Instead, it merely transfers the problem to others who may be less sensitive to moral issues at stake, and thus may actually serve to decrease the concern for moral behavior in the organization. In many instances, the ethically sensitive individual who leaves will be replaced by someone with a weaker conscience. If one is concerned about the effects of the departure on others, leaving may actually make things worse rather than better.

Still, there may be instances where the personal cost of staying in the conflict is so high or the minimum requirements of the job so antithetical to one's personal beliefs that exit is an appropriate strategy. In addition to preserving the “deontological purity” of the person quitting, an exit under those circumstances may also constitute a symbolic “no” to the unethical practices of the business. On occasion, taking a “prophetic” stance represents an act of “conscientious objection” that may actually result in significant changes.

Third Way

Another approach is to look for a creative third alternative that negates the apparent conflict of principles. Wherever possible, one should act according to principles, which are absolute and admit of no exceptions but to work harder to arrive at previously unidentified options. “Compromise,” in the sense of betraying one moral principle for another is thereby avoided.

From a Christian theological lens, the belief that double moral binds are only apparent is based on the historical understanding of God as just and rational, a view reflected in the created order. In its extreme form, this position would suggest that true conflicts of principles would never occur. Indeed, the apostle Paul writes in his first letter to the church at Corinth that “we are not tempted beyond what we are able.” (I. Cor. 13) Theologically speaking, to permit the possibility that there are circumstances in which there is no holy “way out” is to raise serious questions about the sinless character of Christ (a key historical Christian doctrine) who entered into and participated in the systems of the “fallen” world. If there is no third option, how could Jesus have avoided making sinful compromises.

Undoubtedly, there is much wisdom to trying to find a “third way.” If one can be found that does not require a compromise of principles, it should be taken. In fact, some, perhaps even many, cases of poor ethical choices occur because of a lack of effort at finding a creative solution or third way.

The belief, however that an escape can always be found, whether as a result of patience, imagination, or divine intervention, does not seem to correspond well with human experience. Moreover, a position that treats all conflict as only apparent often can only be rationalized experientially by the diminishment of the true extent of one's ethical duties. That is, often it appears that the only way out of a conflict is to reduce the demands of one or more of the conflicting principles.

Higher Duties

A third approach acknowledges the existence of moral double binds. Such binds are not only apparent; they are real. Moreover, “third ways” are not always available. Dilemmas such as those facing Rahab (faced with lying to save the lives of Hebrew spies), and the Hebrew midwives (lying to save children) amount to Biblical support for the idea that conflicts of principles are not merely apparent.

When such a conflict occurs, however, some would argue that there may still be a way of keeping one's hands clean -- one's obligations can be determined by a hierarchical ranking of principles or duties where obedience to a higher duty renders the disregard of the lower duty free from moral culpability.

Under a theory known as “graded absolutism,” Christian philosopher Norman Geisler argues that the following hierarchy of principles can be deduced from the Bible itself: Love for God over love for man; obedience to God over obedience to government; and mercy over veracity (Geisler at 120-21). Geisler appeals to the scriptural references to the “weightier matters of the law” and the “greatest commandment” to support the idea that there are gradations within the divine moral order. Instead of just relying on the scriptures, others who, on occasion, would adopt the “higher duty” approach might emphasize the role of reason in discerning a hierarchy of natural laws (reflections of the divine will).¹

¹ Work by Norm Frohlich and Joe Oppenheimer and their colleagues (e.g., Cooper, C., Dyck, B., and Frohlich, N. (1992). “Improving the effectiveness of gainsharing: The role of fairness and participation.” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37: 471-490.) develop an experimental methodology to develop a rational grounded moral decision rule to solve the age-old debate in the distributive justice literature on

For example, in the case of telling a lie to save a life, the principle of protecting innocent life would outweigh one's obligation to tell the truth. In a conflict, one can choose the "greater/ higher good" -- defined as a higher norm, rather than a greater "end" or result (as under consequentialism). Since one is choosing a "higher good," no moral culpability is attached to the act.

This option can be helpful. In some cases (such as mercy vs. truth-telling), a hierarchy surely seems detectable and is intuitively (perhaps even in a near universal manner) appealing. However, rankings are not so readily discernable with respect to many other complex issues (Adeney, 1996). With respect to the situations discussed earlier, does the need to protect against the possible and as yet unquantified risk of health dangers from the use of certain raw materials supersede the need to protect and preserve jobs for a disadvantaged community? Does the duty to inform employees of essential facts necessary to allow them to make an informed decision supersede a duty to shareholders to minimize potential damages in civil lawsuits? Does the duty to avoid promoting pornographic materials which degrade women and God's gift of sexuality supersede the duty to serve as a consistent voice for godly values within a corporate structure? Does the duty to pay a living wage always supersede the duty to provide a job in the first instance? Or, conversely, does the duty to provide a job in the first instance always supersede the duty to provide a living wage?

It is extremely difficult to find, within the bounds of the Judeo-Christian scriptures, natural law or some combination thereof, a timeless, universal, and consistent ranking of these more nuanced duties, one against the other. Often, what are perceived as Biblical or natural rankings turn out to be more the product of pre-existing cultural and/or personal biases than of objective insight into the divine will.

whether it is right to pay according to productivity or based on need. Essentially, they take a group of subjects participating in a laboratory experiment and place them behind a "veil of ignorance" informing them that they must decide the most just way of getting paid for a task that they are about to do. Subjects are motivated to create a just decision rule because they have no idea of the nature of the task or of their relative performance compared to others (e.g., subjects do not know if the task is shooting basketballs, singing, sorting beads, or something else). This experiment has been performed in a variety of countries (e.g., U.S., Canada, Japan, Poland) and the resulting decision-rule is always similar: everyone should be paid a minimal "floor" pay (to meet the very basic needs of food and shelter) and then be paid based on their performance beyond the floor (i.e., high performers get paid more than low performers).

Getting dirty

Another approach within the Christian tradition holds that there are no easy escape hatches or algorithms, and relatively few, if any rankings to be deduced from natural law or the pages of the scriptures to keep one's hands clean when dealing with possible compromises. The reality of the Fall - "sin" and its individual and social/structural consequences reminds us that ethical problems are to be approached with "Christian realism," to use the language of Reinhold Niebuhr (brother of H. Richard). The best one can do is find a course that represents a lesser of evils and confess one's wrong doing. Thus, there may not be *one* right course of action to resolve a moral double bind. Choosing one course of action usually, if not always, leaves something else undone.

Looking to the life of Jesus as recorded in the synoptic Gospels, some Christians are more willing to accept that Jesus faced compromises similar to the ones we face. He healed some people, but not everyone. He ministered mostly to the Jews; why not non-Jews? He treated women as equals, yet chose only male apostles. He could have gone up to Jerusalem much earlier in his ministry, but waited for the time to be right. He could have spent more time on earth teaching and healing more people, but went the way of the cross after only three years of public ministry. In short, there are many "good" things that Jesus seemed to leave un-done.

According to Lutheran Theologian Helmut Thielicke, "we constantly fall into sin in a borderline situation." Conduct in a fallen world, is "de facto a compromise between the divine requirement and what is permitted by the form of this world." Addressing the tension faced by the "businessman" with regard to profit versus social responsibility, Thielicke, states, "Yet we must not make the mistake of thinking that in the distinctively human sphere compromise really is the object of calculation and can thus be executed with "assurance." To think this is to deceive ourselves." (Thielicke at 491) Likewise, theologian Stanley Grenz notes, "try as we will, we can never bring final resolution to any difficulty. In fact, we may discover to our dismay that our "final answers" generate new problems." (Grenz at 267).

A variation of this approach has been developed in Roman Catholic moral theology. As an alternative to graded absolutism, the doctrine, *prima facie*, is founded on the notion that we live in a fallen, sinful world where it is not always possible to act as we should. Moral principles are "on the face of it" universal and absolute. Christian ethics requires compliance with these principles. To break one of these moral duties (even when it conflicts with another moral duty) is to engage in evil and to be in need of forgiveness. Still, because of the fallen nature of our world, at times we are confronted with circumstances that leave us only with a choice between the lesser of two evils. Choosing one or the other may, in a more limited sense, be justified but it does not make the breach of the lesser moral duty guilt-free. In this sense, this doctrine differs from the gradated absolutism which argues that one may comply with the highest ranking duty without moral complicity.

This fourth approach rejects a more rational and formulaic approach to ethics. While its strength lies in its approach to life with a deep seated sense of "realism," the primary theological challenge to this approach is the belief that one would be "forced to sin." Practically speaking, those that drift to this option quickly may increase the risk of short-circuiting the process of seeking a "third way" (imagination, faithfulness, patience, etc.). They can also easily grow discouraged. Instead of spending time trying to discern a course of action (even if one is just a lesser evil)– they may simply choose, apologize, and move on.

Pedagogical Directions

Now that we have briefly reviewed four historical options within Christian Ethics for handling moral compromise, how might we move forward in the classroom environment in order to enable students to better navigate the muddy waters of compromise? A first step might be to use a case study or vignette (like the one's presented above) to introduce the topic of moral compromise and the four options. This should lead into a discussion about the relative strengths and weaknesses of each option, and would hopefully educate students about the possible tradeoffs that each entails. In discussing the options, it is important for the instructor to avoid the one extreme of being

too preachy (telling students what to believe) and the other extreme of promoting a tactic for relativism by communicating to students that each option is as good as the other.

A second possible step is to combine these options into series of questions that could be used as a helpful, albeit limited, heuristic. For instance, someone facing a situation of moral compromise might first ask whether or not there is a viable third option. If one is not available, they might then ask whether or not there is a clear hierarchy within the existing choices. If not, they might proceed to ask if exiting the situation is a must. Finally, if staying engaged is important, this would leave them to the forth option.

A third step is to assume a worse case scenario. That is, in order to best prepare students, we should assume that we are left with the forth option and proceed from this point. In other words, none of the first alternatives will be viable— i.e. exiting will just leave the decision in someone else’s hands; no third way is forthcoming; and no clear hierarchy of duties is readily apparent. In these situations are our students to be left simply to “muddle through” and/or “throw themselves on the mercy of the cross”, as it is often said?

Let us pause on this question for a moment longer. A theistic (vs. a deistic) theological understanding of God believes that he remains active in the world he created, so we are not simply just “left alone” to muddle through on moral matters. While there may not be neat formulas, algorithms, or rankings to be found through reason (natural law) or the pages of scripture (divine revelation) on dealing with compromise, there are means of guidance to be found.

The first three options (exit, “third way” and moral hierarch)all rely on an understanding of God and the Holy Scriptures that is more “rational” in its orientation. In some respects, these approaches tend to look to Scriptures as a timeless book of moral principles. One discerns the correct ethical choice by referencing this matrix of principles much like an umpire in baseball would reference the baseball rule book.

There is another approach to God and Scriptures, however. One school of Christian ethics focusses more on the “relational” aspects of God. According to Stanley Grenz, “The purpose [of Scripture] is to bring us not into a relationship with either a body or mass of timeless laws of universal moral axioms, but into relationship with the self-revealing God, and as a consequence with one another and with all creation – the central purpose of scripture is to facilitate fellowship or community.” (Grenz at 245) In effect, rather than functioning like a baseball rulebook, Scriptures functions like a telephone receiver. It facilitates a personal interaction and relationship with God.

Based upon the doctrine of the trinity (Trinitarian theology), a stronger relational component should receive emphasis in the formation of Christian ethics. To be clear, by emphasizing “relationship,” we are not advancing an “autonomous” approach to ethics that responds to a mystical moment-by-moment nudging without regard to principles or boundaries. What we are suggesting, however, is that within the framework of boundaries clearly discernible from Scriptures there is much room for listening to God.

Two implications of “relationship” seem most pertinent to discussions of moral compromise. The first is a strong focus on character/ virtue development. This is based on the belief that God desires that human beings be the type of creatures that will be in relationship with him for all eternity. Thus, his actions toward us shape us so that we can become these types of people (Lewis 194x). Dennis Hollinger points out that it is not an accident that the Bible is not simply a rule book that chock full of casuistic laws to guide us on moral matters (Hollinger 2002). Simply following rules is not good for our moral development. Doing so would deprive us of the growth that comes with taking responsibility, living with consequences, exercising our judgment, and relating with others.

Within this framework, compromise should not be shunned but be seen as an opportunity to grow and develop, so that we can recognize and act appropriately in “double moral binds.” Rather than dread situations of moral compromise, they are to be embraced as opportunities for moral development and to enhance moral action. This positive view results from the fact that double-bind are often one outcome of virtuous,

spiritual and Christian living. Double-binds come to the fore when managers (as in the earlier vignettes) seek to enhance justice in the workplace, and when they are sensitive to the needs of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized (compassion).

The second aspect of relationality to be emphasized is the role of community. In addition to the human-divine relationship, the Trinity models relationship on the level of “neighbors.” For multi-party conflicts of principle considerations such as humility, respect for others, and community building may be relevant ones for purposes of dealing with compromises. In interpersonal conflict situations, respect for others necessitates that we try to see the world through their eyes, and admit that we may not have all of the necessary facts. Moreover, acts that build community may necessitate that we give up or modify our cherished positions. These decisions can be seen as extensions of integrity rather than betrayals (Goodstein 2000). Thereby, there are instances in which we can support a group decision with integrity even where that decision differs from one we would have made on our own. To be certain, we are not suggesting that managers should simply act as moral chameleons for the sake of getting along. However, the opposite extreme of sticking to sticking to one’s guns in an obstinate fashion is inconsistent with a proper understanding of what it means to live in community with others.

What then are the pedagogical implications? Specifically, how in the context of the classroom might we cultivate individual character and virtue, a relational orientation toward God and Scriptures and a deeper respect for the possibility that God speaks through the voice of the community? No doubt there are a number of answers to this question but one answer that has deep historical roots lies in the instruction and practice of spiritual disciplines.

Of course, by themselves, spiritual disciplines do not create character or change one’s outlook toward God or the community. Dallas Willard (1998), a leading author on the spiritual disciplines, describes them as “activities that we can do in the present which permit doing other things later that we cannot do directly now.” He sees the practice of the disciplines as “taking appropriate measures” (Willard, 1988: 153) toward the results of spiritual growth and character development. Richard Foster (1978: 3), another

influential contemporary writer on the spiritual disciplines, underscores how practicing the spiritual disciplines facilitates change by serving as a means to break free from “ingrained habits.” He describes them further as the narrow “path to inner transformation” that lies between moral bankruptcy through human striving (“moralism”) and the way of moral bankruptcy through the *absence* of moral striving (“anti-nomianism”).²

In other words, practicing spiritual disciplines is a form of cultivating the ground – that is, making the ground ready for the seeds that God will plant, water and cause to grow. The regular practice of spiritual disciplines seems to play a part in facilitating the development of the character in the right relation with God. This would be a character more likely to hear and obey. This would be a character more likely to make the “right” choice in a double moral blind or, put differently, to compromise pursuant to God’s directions.

Spiritual disciplines also have the advantage of being specific and practical. That is, these are activities that can be explained and that students can implement, at least on a trial basis, immediately. In some of our Business Ethics classes we have taught students to use the ancient discipline of *lectio divina* to facilitate a contemplative reading of Scripture that engages the heart and soul in a manner that bypasses the traditional rational deconstruction of a scriptural passage. We teach fasting as a spiritual discipline that may counter the intense consumer pressures of our culture. We teach Sabbath keeping as a means of responding to the ever increasing pace of business and setting appropriate boundaries between work and other areas of life. We teach confession as an antidote to the ever increasing emphasis in business on spin and positioning to the detriment of truth and integrity. We encourage students to participate in small groups where each participant gives the group authority to hold him or her accountable and where students are encouraged to seek God’s will in difficult situations in the context of group prayer.

² Neither should the practice of the disciplines be seen as ways to earn divine favor. Rather, their practice should be viewed as a form of “training.” As such, they bear resemblance to Aristotle’s ideas about virtue acquisition (i.e., “the arts”), and to author M. Scott Peck’s idea of “going through the middle” to reach “sainthood” and/or psychologists Carl Jung’s idea of “legitimate suffering” as a means to human development (Willard, 1988: 7).

And finally, we teach prayer and a variety of prayer techniques. It is somewhat remarkable that in so much Christian business ethics literature there seems to be so little emphasis on prayer. Sometimes it may be that the right answer to an ethical dilemma is just to ask God what to do.

We would welcome further discussion about the use of spiritual disciplines in business ethics courses. And of course, this approach raises a number of questions. Can the practice of spiritual disciplines be required? Does the mandatory nature of a class assignment that requires the exploration of spiritual disciplines undercut their utility? In one quarter or one semester can students be meaningfully introduced to spiritual disciplines? Would this be better handled through extracurricular opportunities? If the practice of spiritual disciplines was understood to be a key component of successful ethical behavior in business by Christians should instruction on spiritual disciplines be spread throughout the business curriculum? Which disciplines, in specific, should be taught? Are there some that relate more closely to business issues or respond to factors that press against otherwise ethical behavior?

Further questions and areas for development

In addition to the questions raised above, a number of additional pedagogical concerns can be identified from the preceding discussion. First, how can we help students distinguish between interests and principles? This is a particularly difficult and timely issue in a post-modern context where, in the name of tolerance, each person's principles are treated as mere interests. Each person is free to believe what he or she wants to and the only limitations on that belief is that it should not be exercised in such a way as to impinge upon the belief of another or be understood as being applicable to others who have not elected it as their own. When two such belief systems clash, the resolution is a resolution of conflicting interests. Compromises are made to accommodate each belief system as well as possible and arrive at an admittedly imperfect but mutually acceptable solution. This is the moral counterpart to the buyer-seller negotiations over price.

As Christians, we would affirm that there are principles which cannot be bargained away. Thus the post-modern tendency toward relativism would seem to have a distinctly unchristian flavor. On the other hand, in our experience, many Christian students (often coming from relatively sheltered – single culture – backgrounds) have a tendency to find principles in situations where differences in approach might be better characterized as differences in interests. Put differently, sometimes Christians in a reaction to the elevation of “tolerance” as the ultimate value tend to become overly rigid and make everything a matter of principle. This has significant adverse consequences for society. Indeed, the very success of the American experience in democracy (as compared to other democratic systems) has been attributed to the propensity and willingness of Americans to recast what others have characterized as conflicts of principles into mere conflicts of interests.

The question, then, is not only how we will draw lines between principles and interests for ourselves. We suspect that there will be no single rule that can simply be taught and then applied as a formula. Rather, we believe additional work needs to be undertaken to consider how best to teach and equip our students to make these decisions on a case-by-case basis for themselves.

Second, what pedagogical tools are available to us as instructors to help cultivate courage in our students? It often takes tremendous courage to choose to exit a situation where moral disagreements with the majority persist after discussion and efforts at persuasion. Far too often, managers are co-opted into accepting the majority position through a wide variety of techniques. “You can’t see the whole picture.” “How can you be sure you are right when so many other ethical and moral people have come to a different conclusion?” “Even if the final decision is, in your judgment, unethical, certainly the limited tasks we are asking you to perform raise no ethical issues.”

Management literature has recently begun to extol the importance of moral courage as a key component of leadership. More research needs to be done, however, to consider whether courage is a virtue that can be taught in a business school. Are there

curricular or extracurricular activities that can nurture our students' capacity for courageous choices?

Third, how can we help our students exercise ethical creativity in pursuit of the "third way"? Because of the growing importance of creativity to business productivity, in general, there is a growing body of management literature that focuses on how to unleash the creativity of one's workforce. What can we learn from this literature that may be applicable to the classrooms? How do we nurture the patience and persistence that may be needed to create the time and space out of which the "third way" may emerge?

Fourth, how can we help our students better identify key ethical principles applicable to business (a general concern for most of business ethics classes) and then, where possible, rationally sort and prioritize these duties? Can this skill set be taught in a lecture format? Or does it require the use of live cases, case studies, or hypotheticals? To the extent that we believe there may be some hierarchical ranking of duties, how can we best enable our students to "practice" finding and applying these hierarchies to the kinds of moral dilemmas that they will likely confront in business "on the ground"?

Conclusion

Preparing students to handle compromise (particularly the moral variety) may be one of our most important tasks as Christian business educators. As we stated earlier, encouraging students to stand resolute in a post-modern world that is increasingly hostile to universal truth claims, particularly moral ones, is appropriate and necessary. However, we must not fall into the trap of believing that simply admonishing students to "never compromise" is enough. While well intended, such admonitions undermine student preparation for managerial/ business roles as they fail to adequately capture important nuances and dimensions of compromise.

In this paper, we have delineated two broad categories of compromise (interests and principles), and have suggested that compromises of interests, when they can be clearly identified and segregated, can be morally laudatory. We have also reviewed

options within Christian ethics for handling compromises of principles, and suggested pedagogical directions which focused on the “worst case scenario” presented by the fourth option. We have also raised a number of important questions about pedagogical strategies to help develop aspects of student character that seem especially relevant to the task of navigating the murky and often dangerous waters of compromise. While we may have raised more questions than offered solutions, our hope is that the topics we have raised will represent one step toward improving our shared efforts at educating students to expand the presence of God’s kingdom in the world of commerce.

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