Can a Person Act Ethically in Violation of Their Moral Beliefs or Can a Person Act Unethically While Holding to Their Moral Beliefs?

by

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Definitions

- **Moral Beliefs:**
  - Rules about what we should do
  - Internally imposed

- **Ethical Behavior**
  - Rules about what we do
  - Externally imposed
In a perfect state the good man is identical with the good citizen.

Thus, a goal is to achieve harmony between moral beliefs (good man) and ethical behavior (good citizen).
St. Thomas Aquinas

- **Moral Beliefs**
  - Reside in the will
  - Humans know what good they must do to attain closeness to God

- **Ethical Behaviors**
  - Reside in human reason
  - Rules and laws by which humans achieve the ultimate good (God)

- Thus, Moral Beliefs prescribe what must be done and Ethical Behavior achieves it
Goals of Social Work

- Following the two philosophers prescriptions, achieve harmony between students' Moral Beliefs and the Code of Ethics.
Evaluators

- Weak evaluators assess alternatives, make discrete decisions without assessing the qualitative nature of the action being taken or considered.
- Strong evaluators assess the worth of an action.
- Social work education aims to teach students to be strong evaluators.
Conflict

- Rules of moral beliefs place strictures on assessing the worth of an action
- Thus, the person exercising such moral beliefs may in fact cause harm to the person they are supposed to be helping (either through action or inaction).
- The student coming into social work thus has the task of finding a way to resolve this conflict
Resolution

- Review moral beliefs and values in light of social work ethics
  - Achieve an understanding of self
  - Understand the origin of moral beliefs
  - Understand the purpose served by these beliefs
  - Achieve a tolerance of differentness
  - Learn the moral underpinnings of Social Work Ethics
Resolution, cont.

- Methods used to achieve resolution
  - Educators explain by example
  - Educators' assignments require self-reflection on various aspects of understanding and providing services to clients
  - Educators focus on students becoming competent in accurately assessing the worth of a considered action
Resolution, cont.

- Doing the worthy thing
  - Often is counter to societal demands
    - Individualism emphasized
    - Community well-being ignored
  - Often is counter to societal trends
    - Focus on face-to-face relationships
    - Takes the long-term vs. the short-term view
  - May experience negative reaction to the worthy action
Resolution, cont.

- Positive Reactions
  - Students become more assertive in advocacy
  - Students develop an empirical sense (as opposed to an intuitive) sense of the right thing to do
  - Students' moral beliefs accommodate social work ethics