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| **Unit title:**  **Managing the Factors involved in Ethical Decision-making** | **Term /date:** | **Duration:** (number of sessions / hours / weeks)  **100 minutes** |

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| **Big ideas:** (What is the main theme/s? What do you want the students to specifically cover? What misconceptions do you want to challenge?) | **Essential questions:** (What will inspire /extend / support inquiry / challenge thinking?) |
| * There are several different approaches we can take to manage the many factors that influence ethical decision-making, such as reason, emotions and other dispositions, past experience, conscience and context. * A common position is to use reasoning to manage other factors. * Plato used the metaphor of a charioteer controlling two horses to explain that our reason should control our desires and emotions. * The philosopher Peter Singer used a thought experiment involving a drowning child in which he claims that everyone, unanimously, would save the child. It is contestable whether this is established through reason alone or something else. * If ethical decisions are made through strict rational application of a principle such as the greatest happiness, this could lead to decisions being made that go against common sense morality, for example where people including family and strangers are treated impartially. * We can explore the dangers of purely rational approaches to making ethical decisions through fictional texts (such as the 2004 science fiction film iRobot directed by Alex Proyas) * The concerns raised by requiring purely rational robotic processes/Artificial Intelligence to make ethical decisions is very relevant in an increasingly automated world. | * How do we make ethical decisions when there are several different influencing factors such as emotions, reason and conscience to consider? * Is using reason to manage other influencing factors both necessary and sufficient? In other words, is rationality the best approach to ethical decision-making? If so, does this mean using reason to manage other influencing factors, or acting on reason alone, ignoring other factors as best as we can? * Is pure rationality at odds with our sense of what it means to be human? If so, does this matter? |

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| **Learning –**this sample unit targets Levels 9 and 10: Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups (VCECD023). This content description is part of a learning continuum, as show below: | | |
| **Ethical Capability strand and Levels** | **Dimension / Content descriptions** | **Achievement standards** |
| Ethical Decision-Making  (Levels 5 and 6) | Discuss the role and significance of conscience and reasoning in ethical decision-making (VCECD013) | Explain the role and significance of conscience and reasoning in ethical decision-making. |
| Ethical Decision-Making  (Levels 7 and 8) | Discuss the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and actions [(VCECD018](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD018)) | Analyse the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and action. |
| Ethical Decision Making  (Levels 9 and 10) | **Target content description:** Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups[(VCECD023)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD023) | Explain how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed. |

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| **Assessment Evidence / Activities** | | |
| **Pre-assessment:** | **Ongoing formative assessment/s:** | **Summative assessment/s:** |
| Student response to the thought experiment on the drowning child (Introductory phase) | Teacher observation during Shared and Independent Learning phases. | Of students’ work completed in the Independent and Reflection phases  **5&6 Achievement:**  Student explains the role and significance of conscience and reasoning in ethical decision-making.  **7&8 Achievement:**  Student analyses the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and action.  **9&10 Achievement:**  Student explains how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed. |

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| **Learning Sequence Overview** | |
| **Session** | **Major focus / intention** |
| Session 1 | Students explore rationality as a common strategy to manage factors that influence ethical decision-making. They consider whether being purely rational is possible and desirable or necessary and sufficient when making ethical decisions, using a well-known thought experiment and a film excerpt to stimulate discussion. |

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| **Further Resources** |
| **In Lesson:**  Two handouts provided:  Handout one: ‘Thought experiment - the Drowning Child’ for Introduction and Shared phases.  Handout two: ‘The Robot and the Drowning Girl – a film case study’ for Independent phase.  Optional: <http://www.philosophyexperiments.com/singer/> (introductory: an interactive website which presents Singer’s thought experiment and variations).  **Additional Resources:**  <https://youtu.be/eCgmPRxUYDY> (2 min video of Singer explaining and discussing his Drowning Child thought experiment)  <https://youtu.be/rBMZiaD-OYo> (3 min video of Singer explaining and discussing his Drowning Child thought experiment)  **Further Teacher Reference:**  <https://www.aaai.org/Papers/Symposia/Fall/2005/FS-05-06/FS05-06-007.pdf> (specifically on the ethics and other philosophy of the film)  <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/199704--.htm>l (Shorter article by Singer on the Drowning Child thought experiment)  <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm>l (Original and longer article by Singer featuring the Drowning Child)  <http://philosophycourse.info/platosite/3schart.html> (Fairly accessible resource on Plato’s theory of the tripartite soul)  <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ancient-soul/#3> (More academic resource on Plato’s theory of the tripartite soul) |

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| **Reflections** | | |
| **Date** | **Comments** | **Teacher** |
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| **‘Managing Ethical Factors’ (Stand-alone Lesson) 100 minutes** | | |
| **Learning intention** | **For students:** *“Today we are considering how the different factors involved in making ethical decisions could be managed.”* | |
| **Focus/ Inquiry question(s)** | * How do we make ethical decisions when there are many different factors to consider? * Is rationality the best approach to managing ethical decision-making? * Is there a single approach which we can always use to make ethical decisions, or should we select which approach best suits the context of the decision? * Is pure rationality at odds with our sense of what it means to be human? | |
| **Key Teaching Points** | **General points**   * When making ethical decisions we must consider a variety of different factors such as the emotions of those involved; the dispositions of those involved (their tendency to be brave, selfish, honesty and so on); or what past experience is telling us, and we must manage these factors in relation to each other. This is a complex process. * When making decisions, we must use some strategy, or approach, which manages these factors. * We must manage these factors even if we are not doing so deliberately, that is to say, we may be managing them based on assumptions or unexamined habits. * If we are more aware of how we are managing the factors involved in an ethical decision, we can make better decisions. * One of the most common approaches to intentionally managing ethical decision-making is a rational one. For many people this will be a default process for managing the factors involved in an ethical decision, but there are other approaches, such as ethics of care, compassion, and conscience. * In some cases (or by some people) these other (irrational or non-rational) processes might be dismissed as ‘emotional’, and therefore somehow less valid, for example because it is assumed that emotion undermines impartiality, which is thought to be needed when weighing up competing alternatives. * However, when the decision is seen as ‘too rational’ or ‘devoid of emotion’ there is often a reaction against that decision and/or against the way in which the decision was made. * Many see the emotional/conscientious influence on our ethical decision-making as a crucial aspect of what it means to be human. * It may be that different circumstances require different responses. Compare government agencies negotiating with communities to personal decision-making.   **Further points to support discussion of the drowning child thought experiment (Introduction and Shared Practice Phase):**   * Once the premise that we would rescue the drowning child is established, it is possible to reason from it. * It is contestable whether the truth of this premise itself can be established using reason alone, or indeed reason at all. Those who argue against it claim it is not a calculated reasoned decision to rescue a drowning child, but rather a response from one human to another based on shared common humanity. It is argued that this is self-evident and cannot be reasoned for, but only *from*, once it is accepted. Those who favour reason claim deliberations are involved such as weighing the ruining of clothes against the life of the child, and so on. The counter claim is to say that what is at stake here is establishing the worth of the child’s life in the first place, which is however already assumed when making such a calculation. | |
| **Success criteria** | * I can explain how reasoning could help us to manage the many factors involved in making ethical decisions. * I can apply different approaches to managing ethical decision making to hypothetical or fictional scenarios. * I can evaluate the connections between emotions, conscience, and the concept of ‘humanity’. | |
|  | **Activities** (considering different levels) | **Resources** (considering different levels) |
| **Introduction**  **(prior learning & context)** | Prior Learning: It is assumed that students have undertaken learning for other factors that influence ethical decision-making and actions:  VCECD003: Explore the effects that personal feelings can have on how people behave in situations where ethical issues are involved  VCECD008: Discuss the role of personal values and dispositions in ethical decision-making and actions  VCECD013: Discuss the role and significance of conscience and reasoning in ethical decision-making  VCECD018: Discuss the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and actions  To begin the session, students engage with a thought experiment on rescuing a drowning child (see resources for further information on this thought experiment). They are given Handout One, included with this sample unit (see below) or work interactively with an on-line version of the thought experiment (see resources column at right).  Students write down whether they would save the child and how they made the decision, identifying any reasoning involved and any other factors.  (It’s most likely that the vast majority of students (perhaps all) will claim that they used a rational thinking process to arrive at their decision. It is also likely that most of these students will be unaware of that, or unable to articulate why they applied a rational process – see key teaching points. Be aware that there will likely be exceptions).  At this stage the teacher simply notes student responses and that there will be opportunity for further discussion later in the lesson. | **Handout one**: Thought Experiment – the Drowning Child  or  <http://www.philosophyexperiments.com/singer/> |
| **Explicit teaching phase** | The teacher introduces the teaching points, for example:  The idea that we can use our reason, or rationality, to manage the many factors involved in ethical decision-making is a very old one. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato described the ‘soul’ as being in three parts: our desires, our emotions (spirit) and our mind (reason). He used the analogy of a charioteer with two horses to explain this. The horses were our desires and our emotions, while the charioteer was our reason. For Plato, it was good for our reason to control these other parts of ourselves.  Today, we can think of this as our head (brain/mind) controlling our heart and our body. People are told to follow their head, not their heart, and not to give in to the desires of their body.  Since Plato’s time, this idea has been expanded, so that we might now consider our conscience, our dispositions (the characteristics of people such as their bravery, selfish or honesty), the virtue of an action and many other factors when making an ethical decision, but the fundamental question still remains, which of these should be in charge? Which should be our charioteer? Is it more than one of these depending on the circumstances?  How we answer that question will be important in explaining how we manage the factors involved in making ethical decisions because when we make an ethical decision we might reach different conclusions based on which of these we prioritise.  Let’s return to the pond and the example of the drowning child. |  |
| **Shared practice phase** | As a group, the teacher leads the class through the ten variations on the original thought experiment, focussing on whether any of these variations alter the students’ responses. This should be quite quickly, seeking decisions under pressure in this phase, not slow, deep, considerations.  Where a student decides, on the basis of one of the variations, to change their decision, the teacher asks that student make a note of which variation led them to change, and to try and articulate for the class how they decided to change. Was it a rational decision? Or was it due to conscience? Emotion? Disposition? Or something else?  This may happen multiple times, and students may reverse their change of decision. For instance, a student might say that they would not attempt to save a child where there is significant personal risk but little chance of success (on rational grounds of a risk/reward calculation), and then decide that they would make an attempt under those same circumstances if the child were a friend or relative (based on an emotional connection).  The key to this phase is that students can articulate not only whether the variation changes their decision, but if it changes the process they use to make the decision.  Students should recognise that we can manage our decisions through our emotional, rational, conscientious, dispositional and other processes. If this is realised early during this phase, the teacher can some variations and take students more quickly to the final variation involving the family member.  The teacher then gives students Handout Two: ‘The Robot and the Drowning Girl – a film case study’, included with this sample unit (below).  The teacher asks students to read the explanation and transcript contextualising a scene from iRobot (Film directed by Alex Proyas, released 2004).  In pairs the students discuss the student questions on the handout to analyse the character’s reaction to the robot’s decision, and the assertion that a human would make a different decision to the robot.  Each pair should have 3 minutes to discuss the question, then a minute to find a new partner with whom to discuss the next question. This process will take 20 minutes for the 5 questions. | **Handout One**: Thought Experiment – the Drowning Child  **Handout Two:** ‘The Robot and the Drowning Girl – a film case study’ |
| **Independent practice phase** | Students individually complete the writing task on the second handout, using notes made during the session.  Extension: The teacher works with the class to consider the implications for driverless cars and whether they could be programmed to be more, less or equal to a human in making ethical decisions, for example on whether to swerve in a particular case. | **Handout Two**: ‘The Robot and the Drowning Girl – a film case study’ |
| **Reflection/ evaluation phase** | With the class, the teacher leads a reflective discussion using the focus questions as a guide, for example:   * ‘Is pure rationality at odds with our sense of what it means to be human?’ * ‘Is rationality the best approach to ethical decision-making?’ * ‘How can we best manage the different factors involved in making ethical decisions?’ Should reason have the final decision or something else? * Does this depend on the situation?   The teacher asks students consider whether any of their pre-existing assumptions were challenged or reinforced by the lesson, and whether they see things now in the same way, or in different ways.  The teacher asks students to use writing prompts (in the resources column) to record their reflections. | * At the start of the lesson I thought… * Now I think that… * Today’s lesson made me reconsider… * Today’s lesson confirmed for me… |
| **Assessment and Feedback** | Students submit their written reflections and class tasks | Success Criteria. |

**Handout One: Thought Experiment - the Drowning Child**

This is a version of a famous thought experiment proposed by the Australian ethicist Peter Singer:

Imagine that you’re walking in the park on your way to school (or home from school), and you happen to be walking past a shallow pond. You know that the pond is shallow because you’ve walked here often and it’s familiar to you, but today you see a child has fallen in and appears to be drowning.

You could easily wade out into the pond and pull the child out, but you are wearing your favourite shoes and good clothes. You won’t have time to take them off, and they’ll be ruined in the muddy pond. To make matters worse, if you stop to save this drowning child, you may be late to school! (or home from school)

Would you choose to save the child, or not?

What did you take into account in making this decision?

How did you make this decision? Was there a process you followed, or a method you used?

**Variations on Singer’s ‘Drowning Child’ thought experiment**

Using the same premise as the previous thought-experiment, consider the variations below:

* If there were an adult drowning in the pond?
* If the shoes of yours which would be ruined were your personal favourites, or had sentimental value (a gift from a late Grandparent, or similar)?
* If a whole set of your clothes would be ruined, and they would cost a lot to replace?
* If there were others around who could save the child, but weren’t trying to?
* If there were others around who could save the child, and were trying to?
* If there were others around who were trying to save the child and looked like they were very likely to succeed without your help?
* If you were alone, and couldn’t be certain that the child would be saved by your efforts, would you still try?
* If you couldn’t be certain that the child would be saved by your efforts, and trying posed a risk to your own personal safety, would you still try?
* If making an attempt was very risky, and there was only a tiny chance that you could save the child, would you?
* If it was very risky, and very unlikely to succeed, but the child was your brother/sister/friend/cousin… would you take the risk and try?

Did any of these variations make you consider the decision in non-rational (emotional, conscientious, dispositional) terms?



Does this prove that rationality alone is the means by which we should make ethical decisions?

Is it ever justifiable to make ethical decisions which are not rational?

Does this mean that we may sometimes need something more than rationality alone to make ethical decisions?

When is it justifiable to make ethical decisions which are not rational?

**Handout Two: ‘The Robot and the Drowning Girl’ – a film case study**

In the 2004 Science Fiction film, iRobot, (Dir: Alex Proyas) Artificially Intelligent (AI) robots are common. The film is based on the short stories of Isaac Asimov, and as with his stories the robots in the film are programmed to follow the ‘Three Laws of Robotics’ which were developed by Asimov and his editor, John W Campbell, in the late 1940s.

**Isaac Asimov's "Three Laws of Robotics"**

* A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
* A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
* A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

<http://www.auburn.edu/~vestmon/robotics.html>

In the film, Will Smith plays Detective Del Spooner, a cop with an intense distrust (even a dislike) of technology generally and Robots specifically. In the scene below, he reveals the reason for his distrust. (‘NS4’ refers to a type of AI Robot)

[**Susan Calvin**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005256/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): What happened to you?

[**Detective Del Spooner**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000226/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Headed back to the station. Normal day, normal life. The driver of a semi fell asleep at the wheel. Average guy, wife and kids, working a double. \*Not\* the devil. The car he hit, the driver's name was Harold Lloyd. Like the film star, but no relation. He was killed instantly. But his twelve-year-old was sitting in the passenger's seat. Never really met her. Can't forget her face, though. Sarah.

[*fingering the necklace*]

[**Detective Del Spooner**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000226/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): This was hers. She wanted to be a dentist. What the hell kind of twelve-year-old wants to be a dentist? Yeah, um... the truck smashed our cars together and pushed us into the river. You know, metal gets pretty pliable at those speeds. She's pinned, I'm pinned, the water's coming in. I'm a cop, so I know everybody's dead. Just a few minutes until we figure that out. NS4 was passing by and jumped in the river.

[**NS4 Robots**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0371671/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): [*from flashback*] You are in danger!

[**Detective Del Spooner**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000226/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): [*from flashback*] Save her!

[**NS4 Robots**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0371671/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): [*from flashback*] You are in danger!

[**Detective Del Spooner**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000226/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): [*from flashback*] Save her! Save the girl!

[**Detective Del Spooner**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000226/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): But it didn't. Saved me.

[**Susan Calvin**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005256/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): The robot's brain is a difference engine. It's reading vital signs. It must have done...

[**Detective Del Spooner**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000226/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): It did. I was the logical choice. It calculated that I had a 45% chance of survival. Sarah only had an 11% chance. That was somebody's baby. 11% is more than enough. A human being would've known that. Robots,

[*indicating his heart*]

[**Detective Del Spooner**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000226/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): nothing here, just lights and clockwork. Go ahead, you trust 'em if you want to.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0343818/quotes>

In this excerpt, Detective Spooner admits that the robot made the logical choice, that it was a considered (or at least calculated) and thus deliberate choice, and that the choice was justified (or at least justifiable) on rational grounds. That is, this was a decision in which the many ethical factors were managed by a purely rational process.

It is clear though that he disapproves of this choice. He considers that the robot made the ‘wrong’ choice and that a human would have made the ‘right’ choice, to save the girl. He implies that the reason it was wrong to save him instead of the girl is because “(she) was somebody’s baby.” He also implies that the reason a human would have ‘known’ to act differently, is because they have a heart instead of “lights and clockwork”.

Let’s unpack each of these:

**Student Questions**

* “It was the logical choice.” Did the robot make the right choice, or the wrong choice? On what basis are you evaluating the decision?
* “…somebody’s baby.” Should the decision of who to save be determined by each person’s relationships to other people? Why? Is it a rational perspective or something else?
* “11% is more than enough. A human being would have known that.” Is it true that a human would have saved the girl instead of Spooner? Is there some emotional or other intuition which is unique and essential to our humanity?
* “…nothing here, just lights and clockwork.” Is the heart (our emotional aspect) better at managing a decision like this than the brain (our reason)?
* “…you trust ‘em if you want to.” Do you think that Asimov’s Three Laws of Robotics and a purely rational approach to decision-making make robots more, or less trustworthy than humans?

**Writing task:**

Imagine we could we program a robot with certain ethical dispositions, or with emotional responses to factor into their decision making. If we could, should we?

In writing your response, consider whether this new programming would improve their ethical decision making, or make it worse. Overall, how should we program them to manage the different, sometimes opposing, influences on their ethical decisions?