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Module 1: Human Flourishing, Individually and Together

Activities and materials in this module will help you meet:

**Learning Outcome 2:** explain the concepts of “social justice” and “advocacy for the most vulnerable” and their importance for the “common good” and present examples;

**Graduate Attribute 4:** think critically and reflectively.

**Warning**

Topics considered in UNCC LEO materials and in class discussions may be disturbing for some students.

If you are affected, please contact your Campus Leader and/or the [University Counselling Service](#).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are advised that this site may include voices or images of people who have passed away. It may also contain links to sites that may use images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now deceased.
1.1 The values of Australian Catholic University

ACU has high hopes and great expectations for its graduates. In its Mission and Vision, ACU proudly claims, “Our graduates will be skilled in their chosen fields, ethical in their behaviour, with a developed critical habit of mind, an appreciation of the sacred in life, and a commitment to serving the common good.”

Your ACU education is about becoming professionally competent, knowledgeable and skillful—yet it is also about so much more. It involves being ethically informed; being able to demonstrate respect for the dignity of each person and for human diversity; recognising a responsibility to the common good, the environment and society; and applying ethical perspectives in informed decision-making. The University’s Core Curriculum lies at the heart of this vision.

In this unit, you will be introduced to many of the ideas and principles that are the basis of what is known as Catholic Social Thought, with a particular focus on the common good. While much of this is not unique to the Catholic Church or even to Christianity, the development of a core of Church teaching on social justice and the common good forms a foundation for how ACU understands itself and its Mission, and therefore the calling of its students. These key principles promote human flourishing among all peoples.

On your UNCC100 LEO home page further exploration of the Core Curriculum Units and their purpose is provided.
1.2 The ACU Graduate Attributes

Like other Australian universities, ACU has a set of what is known as “graduate attributes”—characteristics that ideally, all graduates would have developed during their time at university. The ACU graduate attributes are embedded strategically in all units and sequenced as a whole across courses. You will see that they bear a close relationship with the ACU Mission, but that they also emphasise the sorts of skills that employers value (“employability skills”).

In this unit, four graduate attributes will be explicitly addressed. On successful completion of this unit, students will have developed their ability to:

- **GA2**
  recognise their responsibility to the common good, the environment and society

- **GA4**
  think critically and reflectively

- **GA5**
  demonstrate values, knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the discipline and/or profession

- **GA9**
  demonstrate effective communication in oral and written English language and visual media.

Remember that the graduate attributes are to be gradually developed across the course of your degree. They do not have to be perfectly developed by the time you reach the end of this unit.

In UNCC100, we will emphasise some of the basic building blocks for the four graduate attributes concerned.

Graduate attributes 2 and 5 will be addressed explicitly through the content of the unit. For example, in a number of activities you will be asked to consider your responsibility to the common good, the environment or society (GA2); in other activities, you will be asked to reflect on the kinds of values upheld by members of your profession, and how you see yourself in relation to these values (GA5).
Graduate attributes 4 and 9 will be addressed particularly through the processes employed in the unit, and to help you identify these processes we use icons to alert you to them. These icons are labelled “think critically” and “think reflectively” (for GA4), and “communicate effectively” (for GA9). Here is an example:

When you see an icon like this, it is also a sign that there are additional resources available to help you to develop this graduate attribute.

How are you going in developing the ACU graduate attributes?

Use the reflective tool: Graduate Attributes: Identify your strengths and weaknesses (on Homepage - Module 1), to assess your strengths and weaknesses at this point in your career.

You can use the tool as many times as you wish until close to the end of semester, when your last selections will be recorded. Indeed, we encourage you to revisit this tool a number of times as you refine your understanding of what the attribute means in a university setting, and judge your own capabilities.

The next task is for you to decide on what you need to do in order to develop them further. You will revisit this reflective practice in Module 4.
1.3 Human flourishing

1.3.1 WHAT CONSTITUTES A GOOD LIFE?

How do human beings thrive? What do we need to enable us to realise our potential? How do we judge what we really need as opposed to what we really want? How do we ensure that all people have the opportunity to reach their full potential as human beings, no matter what their circumstances? There are many challenges in this for modern, Western societies, where individualism, consumerism, and materialism often lead to great inequities.

**ACTIVITY 1.3.1**

Your first task involves thinking reflectively.

Before you read the following resource and consider the questions for reflection, have a look at the Thinking Reflectively guide. Reflective thinking is a process you will need to develop not just for this unit, but also for all your university work and in your professional life.

When reading, apply the “Secondary experience reflective practice model.” Try to observe both the thoughts and feelings of the author, as well as your own responses to the text. Make brief notes on both.

Then complete the questions for reflection: here the focus is on what you think, feel and value. Make brief notes on each of the points. If you keep a reflective thinking journal for the unit, you will see your reflection skills developing.

In “There’s more to life than being happy,” Emily Esfahani Smith argues that there is a difference between the search for happiness and the search for meaning in our lives. She maintains that the search for happiness is a “self-centered” approach, whereas the search for meaning extends this horizon to encompass others. Ultimately, the author claims that it is finding meaning of true and lasting value that constitutes “a good life.”
Questions for reflection

1. What do you think constitutes “the good life”?
2. How do you respond to the author’s proposals about happiness and meaning?
3. What do you value? In what way does what you value contribute to happiness and meaning in your life?
4. What, for you, are the indicators of success in life?
5. What role do your relationships with others have in the development of meaning in your life?
6. How would you categorise what is important in life and what is not?

Australian social researcher Hugh McKay discusses the proposition of his recent book “The Good Life” in this interview (or read the transcript). He proposes that the good life is based on a life lived for others and not for self.
1.3.2 Aristotle on human flourishing

The question of what constitutes a good life has concerned philosophers and thinkers for millennia. The famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle, considered this question as part of his thinking on what it is to be human and how humans could best order their society to allow for the flourishing of its citizens. Aristotle saw that the "good" of humans was to flourish as individuals, but he reasoned that as humans are also social beings, their flourishing is dependent on the flourishing of others as well.
ACTIVITY 1.3.2

Your second task involves thinking critically.

**Before** you do the readings below, think about how you are going to tackle them. You don’t want to get to the end and still not really know what you think about the author’s purpose and the strategies that have been used to convince you of his or her point of view!

**Go to** these guides and use the questions to help you unpick the resources (or, if you like, use a scalpel on them) as you read or listen.

**Make key critical notes** as you go to develop your thinking—including your own critical questions.

The following texts provide a very brief introduction to Aristotle’s theory of human flourishing. It is important to note that the Greek word Εὐδαιμονία (eudaimonia)—which is sometimes translated as “happiness”—really conveys more than what we might understand as mere “happiness” today (in the sense given to it by Emily Esfahani Smith in the previous reading). “Human flourishing” or “fulfillment” is really the best equivalent.


Quilter, John. *Eudaemonism in Ancient Greek Ethics*. Some background to the Catholic tradition of social teaching.

**Task:** Write a 100-word definition that covers the main features of Aristotle’s theory of eudaimonia.
1.3.3 Living together well so all may flourish

Human flourishing is dependent in many ways on the quality of our relationships, because human beings are social creatures. To truly flourish, humans need each other. *Ubuntu* is an African word which means “I am who I am because of who we all are.

It highlights the fact that we are all interdependent.

Read about the African concept of *Ubuntu*, and watch this video by [Global Oneness Project](http://globalonenessproject.com) (transcript here), which talks about Ubuntu as connectedness and compassion.
Watch this video on The Ubuntu Project (or read the transcript) which explores the role of storytelling in recognising our interdependence.

**Question for reflection:** What is it about story-telling that can lead us to overcome differences?


**Questions for reflection:**

1. What are the features of effective communities?
2. Think of a group to which you belong. How does it compare with the kind of community that Rogers describes?
1.4 Human flourishing and justice

Closely linked with the notion of human flourishing is the idea of justice. As Morton Deutsch explains: "the concept of justice is concerned with the distribution of the conditions and goods which affect the well-being of the individual members of a group or community. The essential values of justice are those values which foster effective social cooperation to promote individual well-being."
ACTIVITY 1.4

Read David Miller’s chapter and answer the questions below to aid your understanding.


1. What is the difference between distributive justice and commutative justice (you might need to look this one up!)?
2. What are the three core elements of justice, according to Miller (pp.76-77)?
3. Why is justice contextual (pp.77-78)?
4. What are the author’s two reasons favouring equality of outcomes when it comes to distributive justice (p.80)?
5. What is one reason not to treat people in the same way (p.81)?
6. What does the author mean by being “in need” (p.82)?
7. Why is merit a problem when considering distributive justice (pp.82-94)?
8. How does the author define social justice (p.84)?
9. What is the author’s view of Hayek’s first criticism of social justice (pp.85-86)?
10. What is Hayek’s second criticism of social justice (p.86)?
11. What are the differences between communist and some socialist views of social justice (pp.86-87)?
12. What are the three main characteristics of Rawls’ theory of justice (p.89)?
13. How does Miller modify Rawls’ theory of justice (pp.90-91)?

1.5 Principles that promote human flourishing

Human flourishing is a particular concern for most religious traditions; that is certainly true of Christianity, and the Catholic tradition has considered this in a particular way, developing a body of material known as Catholic Social Teaching (CST). This places human flourishing and developing flourishing communities at the centre of Church concerns. ACU shares this concern for human flourishing and the promotion of the common good and anchors its vision and mission in the principles of CST.

1.5.2 What IS CST

CST has its origins in the biblical concern for justice, and is a reflection of that concern as it has developed through Christian tradition over the centuries. However, it is also closely identified with a body of material initiated in 1891 by Leo XIII with his encyclical, Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of Labour). This extraordinary document addresses Leo’s concerns both with the emergence of communism, on the one hand, and for the plight of workers in the face of rampant capitalism, on the other. Since that time, many Church documents have dealt with significant matters of social concern, such as the role of government, the arms race, world peace, and racism. A list of these documents and their major interest is provided for your reference.
1.5.2 What are the main principles of CST

You will encounter many resources listing CST principles. Sometimes they are grouped or organised differently, so that there might be 10 listed in one place but 16 in another, for example. Here is a list to which we will give consideration, with some principles introduced on video:

- Dignity of the Human Person
  - Sean McKenna
  - Kath Boyle
  - Naomi Wolfe
  - Margaret Fyfe
- Common Good and Community (we will turn to this important principle in module 2)
- Preferential Option for the Poor
- Subsidiarity
  - David Carter
  - Kath Boyle
- The Universal Purpose of Goods
- Stewardship of Creation
- Promotion of Peace
- Participation
- Global Solidarity

For a general overview of a number of principles, see the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council.

What is important is not the number of principles listed, but the whole they represent. In fact, we should not really think of the principles in terms of a ‘list’ at all, but rather as a cluster or a cohort, since all the principles that we will explore are interrelated.

Of primary importance to all the principles are the first two: the dignity of the human person and concern for the common good of all people underpin all the other principles that promote human flourishing.

- The principle of the dignity of the human person recognises the value of each individual and demands that all people be treated with respect and provided with all the opportunities available to reach their full potential as human persons.
- The principle of the common good recognises that humans are social creatures and that we can only become all that we have the potential to be in relationship with others. Humans as communal animals can only truly thrive, flourish and “become” in relationship with others and all people should be enabled to do just that.

In Module 3 you will be asked again to think about these principles as they relate to the hot topics under investigation.
1.5.2 Activity

Task: Using the resources provided below, write a summary definition of these principles in your own words:

- Dignity of the Human Person
- Preferential Option for the Poor
- Subsidiarity
- The Universal Purpose of Goods
- Stewardship of Creation
- Promotion of Peace
- Participation
- Global Solidarity

Pssst...! Did you notice that we wrote “in your own words”? Remember the work you did on plagiarism at the start of the unit? Making notes always using your own words is a helpful way of avoiding plagiarism when you come to use those notes later on.

Resources

- Promoting Human Flourishing
- Major Themes from Catholic Social Teaching
- Principles of Catholic Social Teaching
- Catholic Social Teaching: Faith in a Better World
- Explanation of Preferential Option for the Poor
- Subsidiarity explained

The Caritas New Zealand website provides a brief definition and video for each of the Principles of Human Flourishing. Watch Caritas’ video, Subsidiarity: Empowering Communities (read transcript), then browse the other principles presented on this site.
1.6 Deepening our understanding of the principles

ACTIVITY 1.6.1

The following resource is written from a theological perspective. While it is more challenging than much of the material in this unit, it gives a very comprehensive explanation of the principles. Use the study guide to assist your reading and comprehension of this chapter.


The following resource provides a shorter explanation than that of Massaro; nevertheless, it will assist you to think more deeply about the principles and their applications.


In light of your reading in this activity, what would you add to each of your definitions from activity 1.5.2? More detailed definitions of these principles will assist you in approaching your assessment for this unit.

1.6.2 Something to pursue if you have an interest

The principles of CST do not belong exclusively to the Church, but they provide an important avenue for the Church to enter into dialogue with the world and a way to offer a critique of how societies and institutions function.

Listen to this BBC broadcast of “Analysis” for a discussion of CST in a contemporary political context.

The following reading is an academic article from the University of Navarra Business School and provides an excellent explanation of what subsidiarity means and the history of the term.