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# ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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# Ethics = answers to questions about what one should do, and what is desirable to achieve

- Have a fundamental nature; cannot be solved solely by referring to existing convention / regulation (may *question it*, though)
- Arise at all levels: individual, group, institution, state, international
- Always in *a context*...
  - that affects options: what can be done
  - that affects consequences and responses ...
  - Surrounded by established opinions, institutions and rules
  - All of which may vary across the world and change (be changed) over time
- Assuming a universal standard (that may not – yet – be applied)
  - Basic form: we should do things of type X, and strive for things of type Y
- Accepting frequent disagreement and/or uncertainty
  - Regarding the nature of the context
  - Regarding what ethical standard to apply
  - Regarding how a standard applies to a context



# Ethical Dilemmas

- **No option is perfect** according to a standard we agree on – what should we do?
- We know what different options involve and effect, but are **uncertain or disagree on how our ethical standard apply** – what should we do?
- We know all the facts, and also how different standards apply to them, but we **disagree on/are uncertain about what standard is the right one** – what should we do?
- **Very frequent situation when we strive for multiple values: Value tensions → possible ethical dilemmas**
- **Vague agreement/certainty on lofty phrases often hide underlying disagreement/uncertainty when more specificity is needed.**

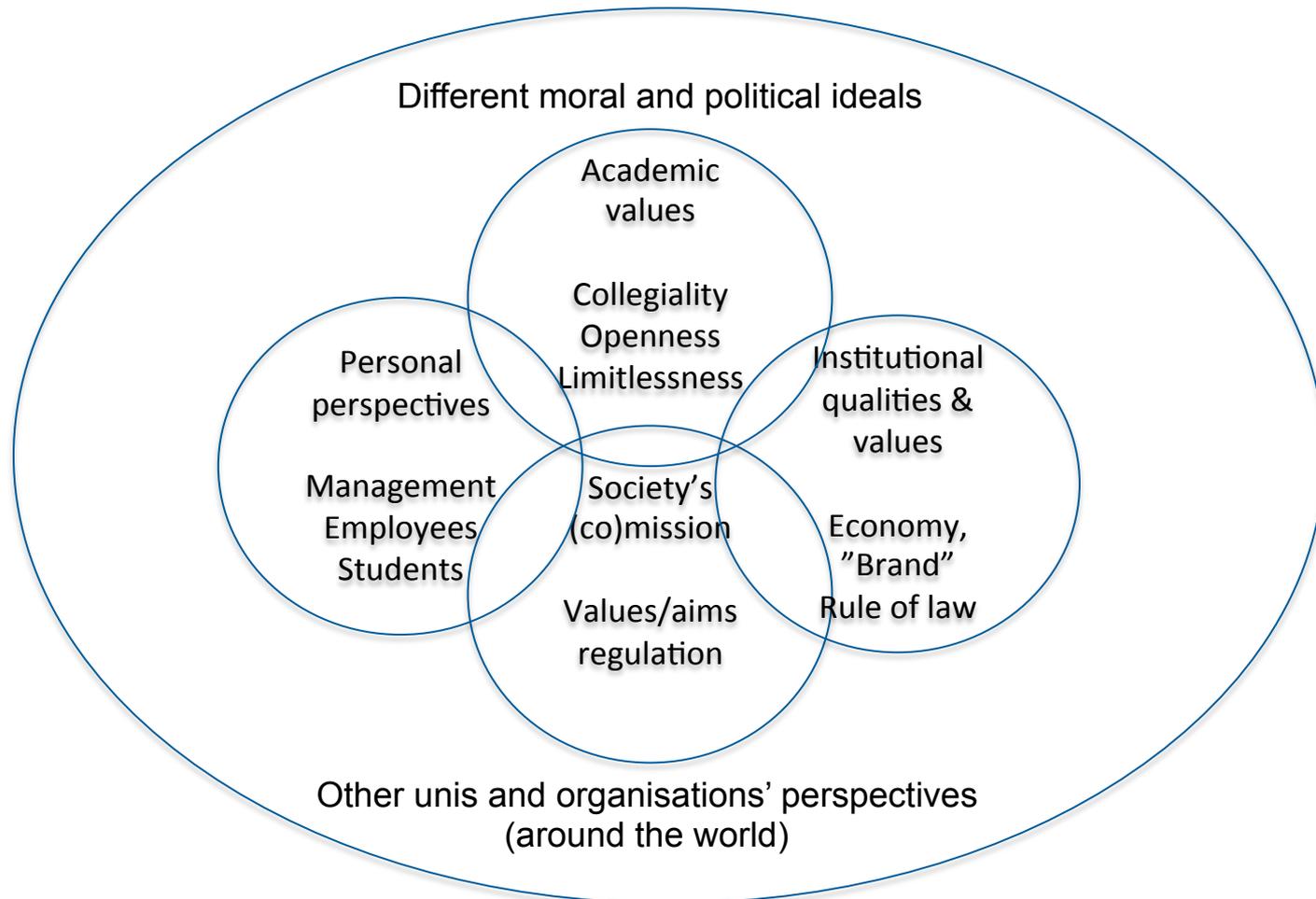


# Dilemmas that are *not* ethical

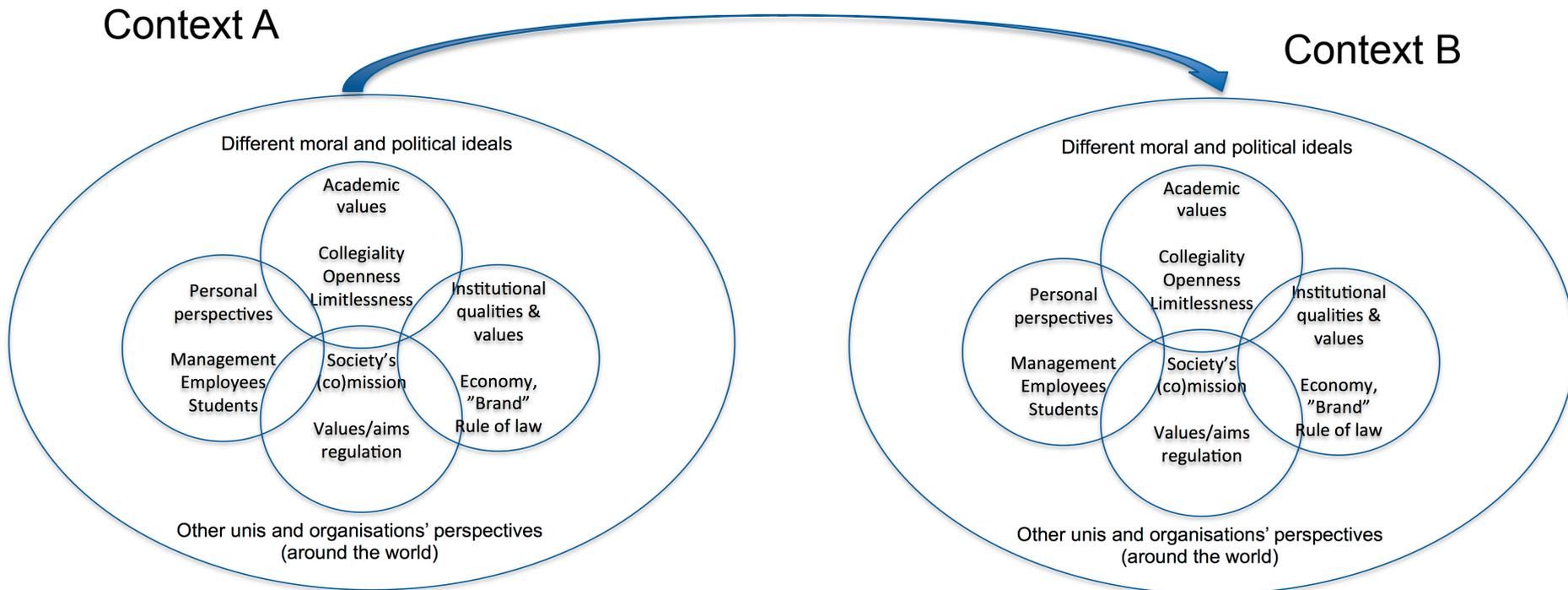
- You know what should be done, but it "feels hard" to do it
- You know what should be done, but it breaks a formal rule (that has been taken into account when determining what should be done)
- You know what should be done, but it may harm you (in a way that has been taken into account)
- You know what should be done, but you lack the power to do it



# Universities and Academia are themselves ridden with ethical dilemmas and value tensions



**When you move, assumptions and context changes. What used to be possible to take for granted on how dilemmas are handled cannot be taken for granted anymore ...**

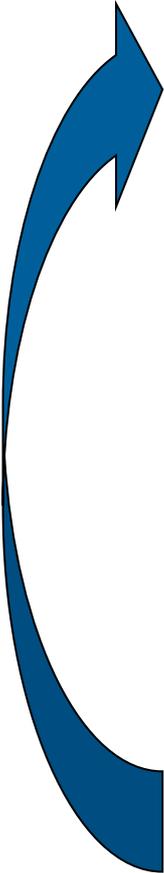


# Some examples

- Different ideals about **what academia and higher education are (good) for**
- Different standards of **academic excellence and good conduct**
- Different ideas about **what academic collegiality implies**, eg. regarding partiality
- Different standards **for interacting with authority and within hierarchical structures**
- Different **institutional ideals and values**, e.g. regarding corruption, academic independence, etc.
- Different ideals about **the relationship between academia and politics**
- Different ideals about the **relation between academia and private life**



# Analytic checklist for apparent ethical dilemma

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- Who is the agent? / Who faces a decision?
  - What are the options (faced by this agent)?
  - Who are affected by the options and how?
  - What are the (more or less likely) consequences of the options?
  - What values are at stake and how? (according to different standards)
  - What norms may apply and how? (according to different standards)
  - How may values and norms in potential conflict be balanced? (according to different standards)

**RESULT:** A description of the nature of an ethical dilemma, or a discovery that there are no value or normative conflicts (so that there is no dilemma)

**Solving a dilemma** requires a constantly motivated *normative judgement* regarding what values, norms and balances are most justified.

**Common phenomenon:** analysing a dilemma leads to discovery of new options → new apparent dilemma to analyse, or the dilemma resolves

**When solving the dilemma is hard:** do the analysis on another level of agency – maybe the dilemma is not for you to solve?