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Chapter Three: Ethical Decision Making and Moral Judgments

3.1 Chapter Introduction

function of morality

- **How to make a right or correct decision** and by what standard that one decision is right and another wrong **is always a puzzle**
 - ✓ functions of morality is to **give guidance in dealing with these puzzles**
- Another function of morality is to **provide principles and rules** that are acceptable to everyone and **encourage people to live together peacefully and cooperatively**

3.2. Chapter Objectives

3.3. How Can We Make Ethical Decisions and Actions?

- In life, we may get difficulties to always do the right thing. **What we often considered as right and correct might put us in difficult condition**
- Individuals could give their own justification to testify that they are Right or correct
- The **ethical nature of our action and decision**, however, is very much **dependent upon our notion of “Good” and “Bad”, “Right” and “wrong”**

What things are good or bad

➤ instrumental good

- ✓ things which we consider good or desirable for their result for what they lead to
- ✓ they are instruments towards the attainment of the other things which are considered good not simply as instruments

➤ intrinsic good

- ✓ things which we consider good not because of what they lead to but because of what they are in themselves
- ✓ worth having or perusing because of their own intrinsic nature

➤ instrumentally bad and intrinsically bad

- ✓ Some things can fulfill both qualities/ unethical or bad or evil practices
- ✓ Female Genital Mutilation, early marriage, poverty, corruption

Task of ethics

- analyze and critically consider the values we hold and the claims we make
- evaluate the adequacy of reasons that we give for our actions
 - whether the reasons offered to support a particular course of action are based on sound evidence and/or logical argument

- The **tasks of weighing ethical values** and evaluating different ethical arguments are **unlike many other kinds of human tasks**
 - ✓ Ethical values are usually **not as easy to understand as other kinds of values**
 - it is easier to test a person's blood pressure than it is to determine whether or not they are virtuous
- **Aim of ethics** then, is not, despite popular opinion, to take the high moral ground and tell people what to do, but, rather, to **offer tools for thinking about difficult problems**
- As complex as ethical situations may be, however, **there is still an obligation on everyone involved in ethically challenging situations to resolve any problems that arise in the most sincere, reasonable, and collaborative way possible**

3.3.1. Ethical Principles and Values of Moral Judgments

- The **branch of philosophical study ethics** is concerned with studying and/or **building up a coherent set of 'rules or principles by which people ought to live**
- In place of systematically examined ethical frameworks, **most people instead carry around a useful set of day-to-day 'rules of thumb'** that influence and govern their behavior
 - commonly, these include **rules such as 'it is wrong to steal', 'it is right to help people in need', and so on**
- But **sometimes the vicissitudes and complexities of life mean that these simple rules are sometimes put to the test. Consider the idea that it is wrong to kill**

- We need to examine these questions in more detail; and we need theoretical frameworks that can help us to analyze complex problems and to find rational, coherent solutions to those problems
 - ✓ philosophers attempt to find general answers that can be used by everyone in society

3.3.2. Moral intuitions and Critical Reasoning

- The study of ethics involves reasoning about our feelings
 - making sense of and rationalising our intuitions about what is 'right' or 'good'
- Our moral sentiments and ethical reasoning about these sentiments gives us our moral principles.
 - The integration of these moral sentiments and principles is our conscience
 - Our moral conscience, then, is based on emotions, but should also be supported by reason
- All societies are characterized by their own ethical ideas expressed in terms of attitudes and beliefs
 - ✓ Some of those ethics are formalised in the laws and regulations of a society influence the consciences and the moral sentiments of those living in a society
 - ✓ Philosophical ethics, however, asks us to take a step back from these influences and instead to reflect critically on our sentiments and attitudes

3.3.2.1. Rationalisation

- Studying ethics involves attempting to find **valid reasons for the moral arguments that we make**
- an **argument is not simply about our beliefs or opinions**; instead, **it is about the reasons underlying those beliefs or opinions**
 - ✓ real value of discussing and debating ethical questions is not to 'win the argument' or to 'score points' against the other person
- **One common fault** with many arguments about what is 'right' or 'wrong' – and – involves what is known as a rationalization

Rationalization

- occurs when we **use what at first glance seem to be rational or credible motives to cover up our true (and perhaps unconscious) motives**
- Example: **landowner seeks to build a plastic recycling plant**
 - states that this is driven by a desire **to create local employment opportunities**
 - **their true motive is to make a profit**
 - however, they argue that they want to make a personal profit and create local jobs, then they may be giving two true reasons for their motives

3.3.2.2. Types of reasoning

➤ Reasoning by analogy

- ✓ explains one thing by comparing it to something else that is similar, although also different
- ✓ good analogy, the similarity outweighs the dissimilarity and is clarifying
- ✓ Example: animals are like and unlike humans
 - Is the similarity sufficiently strong to support the argument that we should ascribe rights to nonhuman animals as we do to humans?

➤ Deductive reasoning

- ✓ applies a principle to a situation
- ✓ Example: if every person has human rights, and you are a person, then you have human rights like every person

➤ Inductive reasoning

- ✓ providing evidence to support a hypothesis
- ✓ The greater the evidence for a hypothesis, the more we may rely on it
- ✓ Example: moral duty to reduce carbon emissions

3.3.2.3. Ethics and Religious Faith

- For many people, morality and religious faith go hand in hand
 - ❖ people view actions as being right or wrong in terms of whether they are commanded by a god

- Some moral philosophers do not view arguments based on religious faith as being rationally defensible
 - we are able to know what is right or wrong without relying on any divine commandments, as we can use rational reflection
- faith-based arguments are relevant to moral philosophy for several reasons
 - ✓ people do not always agree on what is right or wrong It is not therefore clear that we can determine what is right and wrong simply through rational reflection
 - ✓ Many people in the world do look to religion for moral guidance
 - we should not underestimate the ability of 'the moral teachings of a religious tradition [...] to persuade the public to embrace a higher moral standard
- moral principles and decisions should be justified by rational arguments, and thus consideration of religious arguments should not be excluded from the study of ethics

3.3.2.4. Testing moral arguments

- Critical reasoning is about asking questions whenever anyone gives us a reason to support an argument

- It is important and useful to develop the ability to test your own arguments and those of others

Three ways to test a moral argument

➤ Factual accuracy

- we should not derive an 'ought' from an 'is'
- we cannot say that something is wrong or right simply based on how things are
- the accuracy of the factual content of a discussion is very important otherwise their moral argument would lose its force

➤ Consistency

- Arguments need to be consistent
- you have to show that there is a moral difference between the two. Otherwise, your arguments are inconsistent
 - Example: moral argument that debts owed by poorer nations to international lenders should be cancelled.
 - What about poor people owe money to banks should also have their debts cancelled?

➤ Good will

- While arguments may be factually correct and consistent, they also need to 'exemplify good will'
- This involves resorting to our intuitions and emotions, which are notoriously difficult to integrate with rigorous theoretical debate

3.3.3. Thinking Ethically: A framework for Moral Decision Making

- first step in analyzing moral issues is **Get the facts, but having the facts is not enough**. Facts by themselves only tell us what is; they do not tell us what ought to be
- Although **ethics** deals with right and wrong, it **is not a discipline that always leads everyone to the same conclusions**
 - ✓ Deciding an ethical issue can be equally difficult for conservatives and liberals
- **To guide our reflection on such difficult questions**, philosophers, religious teachers and other thinkers have shaped various approaches to ethical decision-making
 - Fairness and Justice
 - the common Good
 - the Utilitarian (remember this idea is discussed previously),
 - the Rights
 - the Virtues

3.3.3.1. Fairness and Justice Approach

- its roots in the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle who said that
“**equals should be treated equally and unequal's unequally**”
- The basic moral question in this approach is:
 - ✓ **How fair is an action?**
 - ✓ **Does it treat everyone in the same way**, or does it show

favoritism and discrimination?

- Favoritism gives benefits to some people without a justifiable reason for singling them out
- discrimination imposes burdens on people who are no different from those on whom the burdens are not imposed
 - Both favoritism and discrimination are unjust and wrong
- ethical knowledge is not precise knowledge, like logic and mathematics, but general knowledge like knowledge of nutrition and exercise
- it is a practical discipline rather than a theoretical one
 - ❖ in order to become "good", one could not simply study what virtue is; one must actually be virtuous/ practices it
- everything was done with some goal in mind and that goal is 'good.'
 - ✓ The ultimate goal called the Highest Good: happiness
 - ✓ finds happiness "by ascertaining the specific function of man"
 - human's function is to do what makes it human, to be good at what sets it apart from everything else: the ability to reason or logos
- humans belonged to one of four categories:
 - ✓ the virtuous
 - ✓ the continent

- ✓ the incontinent
- ✓ the vicious
- this approach focuses on how fairly or unfairly our actions distribute benefits and burdens among the members of a group
- The principle states:
 - “Treat people the same unless there are morally relevant differences between them.”

3.3.3.2. The Common Good Approach

- Greek philosophers: life in community is a good in itself and our actions should contribute to that life
- interlocking relationships of society are the basis of ethical reasoning
 - ✓ respect and compassion for all others especially the vulnerable are requirements of such reasoning
- approach also calls attention to the common conditions that are important to the welfare of everyone
 - system of laws
 - effective police and fire departments
 - health care, a public educational system
 - peace among nations
 - an unpolluted environment
- ethicist John Rawls defined the common good as
 - ✓ "certain general conditions that are equally to everyone's advantage"

- While respecting and valuing the freedom of individuals to pursue their own goals, the common good approach challenges us also to recognize and further those goals we share in common
- The principle of the common good approach states;
“What is ethical is what advances the common good”

3.3.3.3. The Rights Approach

- roots in the philosophy of the 18th century thinker Immanuel Kant and others like him who focused on the individual's right to choose for her or himself
- what makes human beings different from mere things is that people have dignity based on their ability to choose freely what they will do with their lives, and they have a fundamental moral right to have these choices respected
 - ❖ People are not objects to be manipulated; it is a violation of human dignity to use people in ways they do not freely choose
- related rights exist besides this basic one
 - The Right to the Truth
 - We have a right to be told the truth and to be informed about matters that significantly affect choices
 - The Right of Privacy
 - right to do, believe, and say whatever we choose in our personal lives so long as we do not violate the rights of others

➤ The Right not to be injured

- the right **not to be harmed or injured** unless we freely and knowingly do something to deserve punishment, or we freely and knowingly choose to risk such injuries

➤ The Right to what is agreed

- the right to **what has been promised** those with whom we have freely entered into a contract or agreement
- In deciding whether an action is moral or immoral using this approach, we must **ask**

❖ **does the action respect the moral rights of everyone?**

3.4. To Whom or What Does Morality Apply?

3.4.1. Religious Morality

- refers to a human being in **relationship to a supernatural being or beings**
- In the Jewish and Christian traditions, for example, the **first three of the Ten Commandments** (See the figure below) **pertain to this kind of morality**
- These commandments **deal with a person's relationship with God, not with any other human beings**
 - ✓ **violating any of these three commandments**, a person could, according to this particular code of ethics, **act immorally toward God without acting immorally toward anyone else**
 - I am the Lord; Your God do not worship false gods.
 - Do not take the name of God in vain.

- Keep holy the Sabbath Day

3.4.2. Morality and Nature

- refers to a human being in relationship to nature
- Natural morality has been prevalent in all primitive cultures
- Some see nature as being valuable only for the good of humanity, but many others have come to see it as a good in itself, worthy of moral consideration
- In Robinson Crusoe desert-island example
 - ✓ he could be considered either moral or immoral, depending upon his actions toward the natural things around him

3.4.3. Individual Morality

- refers to individuals in relation to themselves and to an individual code of morality that may or may not be sanctioned by any society or religion
- It allows for a “higher morality,” which can be found within the individual rather than beyond this world in some supernatural realm
- A person may or may not perform some particular act, not because society, law, or religion says he may or may not, but because he himself thinks it is right or wrong from within his own conscience

3.4.4. Social Morality

- concerns a human being in relation to other human beings
- It is probably the most important aspect of morality, in that it cuts across all of the other aspects and is found in more ethical systems than any of the others
- In Robinson Crusoe desert-island example
 - ✓ He is incapable of any really moral or immoral action except toward himself and nature

3.5. Who is Morally/Ethically Responsible?

- Morality **pertains to human beings and only to human beings; all else is speculation**
 - ✓ If attribute morality to supernatural beings - one has to do so solely on faith
 - ✓ If attribute morality to animals or plants - one has to ignore most of the evidence that science has given us concerning the instinctual behavior of such beings and the evidence of our own everyday observations
 - most evidence seems to indicate that animals, as and plants should be classified as either **non-moral or amoral** - that is, they should be considered either as **having no moral sense or as being out of the moral sphere altogether**
- **only human beings can be moral or immoral**, and therefore only human beings should be held morally **responsible for their actions and behavior**

3.5.1. Moral Judgments

- refer to **deciding what is right and what is wrong in human relations**

Moral judgments are:

- have to do with the **actions of human beings** and, in particular, with **voluntary actions** - those **actions freely chosen**
- **Evaluative**; because they **place value on things or relation or human actions; determine what is right or wrong**, good or bad
- **Normative**; because they evaluate or assess the moral worth of something **based on some norms or standards**
- **We can have no algorithm for judgment**, since every

application of a rule would itself need supplementing with further rules

- ✓ moral principles do not provide us with an “auto-pilot” for life and that “judgment” is always needed in using or following – and in flouting – rules or principles

In judging conduct or action, we have to consider

➤ **Motives:**

- ✓ motive refers to the intention or why an action is done
- ✓ It basic for a determination of morality
- ✓ A good motive is a prerequisite to conduct that we approve without qualification
 - ❖ Kant state - Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a good will
- ✓ rational being strives to do what he or she ought to do and this is to be distinguished from an act that a person does from either inclination or self-interest
 - ❖ a person must act out of duty to the moral law - that is, ought what one to do
 - the good will acts out of a sense of duty

➤ **Means**

- ✓ There may be many means for achieving something
- ✓ The term means can be defined - as an agency, instrument, or method used to attain an end
- ✓ we expect people to use the best available means to carry out their purposes condemn them if their choice of means impresses us as unjust, cruel, or immoral
 - there is a danger in proposing that any means may be used, provided the end is good, or that — the end justifies the means

➤ Consequences

- ✓ the effects or results of a moral decision based on a value
- ✓ Ordinarily, when people ask, - what is right? they are thinking about the consequences of the action
 - Kant agrees to the good motive, utilitarians to the result
- society judges conduct “right” if it
 - proceeds from a good motive
 - through the use of the best available means
 - to consequences that are good

➤ The Moral Situation

- ✓ It involves moral agents - human beings who act, are empowered to make choices, and consciously make decisions
 - As moral agents, demands are made on us and place us under obligations: we have both duties and rights
- ✓ We are faced with moral alternatives, and we can better weigh those alternatives when we have an understanding of the ingredients of the moral situation

3.5.2. What Makes an Action Moral?

- Sometimes we think of “moral” means morally good
 - But, philosophically, it refers to an action which comes within the scope of morality
 - an action which is morally significant either in positive way (because it is good or right) or in a negative way (because the action is good or bad)
- Not all actions have a moral sense
 - ✓ putting on a raincoat, sharpening a pencil, or counting apples...
 - ✓ are not in themselves either good or bad acts - Such

actions are **morally neutral or non-moral**
features that make an action moral

➤ **A moral act involves an agent**

- ✓ **natural event** or an **action performed by animals**, then it is **morally neutral** - it does not appear on our moral radars
- ✓ **Humans** can be moral agents, or **any creatures that can freely and thoughtfully choose its actions** will count as a moral agent.

➤ **A moral act involves intention**

- ✓ **intention here refers to our motives**
- ✓ If an **action is done accidentally**, it may be counted as a **morally neutral action**
 - **However, some unintentional acts, such as those done through negligence, can be moral.** Neglecting our duties, even accidentally, make us morally culpable

➤ **A moral act affects others**

- ✓ Moral action is an action that **has harmful (be it physical, psychological, emotional, or depriving others of happiness) or beneficial consequences for others.**
- ✓ Confusion about the content of morality arises because morality is not always distinguished from religion

Generally, a moral action is one which

- **performed by agents:** creatures that are **capable of free choice/ free will**
- **Is the result of intention:** the action was done on purpose with a particular motive
- **Has a significant consequence on others:** in respect of harm or benefits it brings about

3.6. Why Should Human Beings Be Moral?

- There can be no society without moral regulation; man is man only because he lives in a society
 - **Argument from Enlightened Self-Interest**
 - ✓ generally better to be good rather than bad and to create a world and society that is good rather than one that is bad
 - ✓ if everyone tried to do and be good and tried to avoid and prevent bad, it would be in everyone's self-interest
 - For example, if within a group of people no one killed, stole, lied, or cheated, then each member of the group would benefit
 - **Argument from Tradition and Law**
 - ✓ because traditions and laws, established over a long period of time, govern the behavior of human beings
 - ✓ these traditions and laws urge human beings to be moral rather than immoral, there are good reasons for being so
 - most of us probably learned morality through being confronted with this argument, the religious argument, and the experiences surrounding it
 - **Common Human Needs**
 - ✓ that all human beings have many needs, desires, goals, and objectives in common
 - Example: people generally seem to need friendship, love, happiness, freedom, peace, creativity
 - ✓ in order to satisfy these needs, people must establish and follow moral principles that encourage them to cooperate with one another and that free them from fear

- why should human beings be moral?
 - ❖ generally, can best be answered by the statement that adhering to moral principles enables human beings to live their lives as peacefully, happily, creatively, and meaningfully as is possible
- “Why be moral?” Among the more common answers are these:
 - ✓ Behaving morally is a matter of self-respect
 - ✓ People won’t like us if we behave immorally
 - ✓ Society punishes immoral behavior
 - ✓ God tells us to be moral
 - ✓ Parents need to be moral role models for their children
- There are two distinct components to the question “Why be moral?”
 - Why does society need moral rules?
 - Why should I be moral?
- From Hobbes’s perspective, morality consists of a set of rules such that, if nearly everyone follows them, then nearly everyone will flourish
 - ✓ These rules restrict our freedom but promote greater freedom and wellbeing
- The five social benefits of establishing and following moral rules accomplish the following:
 1. Keep society from falling apart
 2. Reduce human suffering
 3. Promote human flourishing
 4. Resolve conflicts of interest in just and orderly ways
 5. Assign praise and blame, reward and punishment, and guilt
- Morality is a social activity: It has to do with society, not the individual in isolation
 - ❖ Morality is thus a set of rules that enable us to reach our collective goals

