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CHAPTER THREE
Ethical Decision Making and Moral Judgments

How Can We Make Ethical Decisions And Actions?

- In real life conditions we may get difficulties to always do the right thing. What we often considered as right and correct might put us in difficult condition with others and affect our social relation adversely.
- Individuals could give their own justification to testify that they are Right or correct! We often claim that we make right decision and actions.
- We regret when we make wrong decision and action. The ethical nature of our action and decision, however, is very much dependent upon our notion of ``*Good*'' *and* ``*Bad,* `` *Right and*`` *wrong*``.

- One of the key tasks of ethical reasoning, generally, is to analyze and critically consider the values we hold and the claims we make in relation to the perceived obligations that we might have towards one another.
- A second key task of ethics is to evaluate the adequacy of reasons that we give for our actions: it considers, for example, whether the reasons offered to support a particular course of action are based on sound evidence and/or logical argument.

Ethical Principles and Values of Moral Judgments

- ✓ The branch of philosophical study that focuses on ‘ethics’ is concerned with studying and/or building up a coherent set of ‘rules’ or principles by which people ought to live.
- ✓ The theoretical study of ethics is not normally something that many people would regard as being necessary in order for them to conduct their everyday activities.

Think about a significant decision that you have made that had an effect (either for good or bad) on the lives of other people.

This could be a decision about changing a job, moving home, responding to a dilemma, helping somebody who was in difficulty, etc

Moral intuitions and Critical Reasoning

- The study of ethics involves reasoning about our feelings. In other words, it involves making sense of and rationalizing our intuitions about what is ‘right’ or ‘good’.
- Almost all people, to a greater or lesser extent, are capable of experiencing feelings of empathy towards others. Empathy provides us with a sense of what others are feeling and may thereby allow us to identify with other people.
- Empathy therefore gives us 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.

Rationalization

* Studying ethics, then, involves attempting to find valid reasons for the moral arguments that we make.
* Most people already have general ideas – or what philosophers call ‘intuitions’ or ‘presumptions’ – about what they think is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.
* But a philosophical approach to ethics requires people to think critically about the moral ideas

- In moral philosophy, an argument is not simply about our beliefs or opinions; instead, it is about the reasons underlying those beliefs or opinions.
- the real value of discussing and debating ethical questions is not to 'win the argument' or to 'score points' against the other person! It is more important to provide carefully considered arguments to support our ideas, and to allow for rational – and deeper – understanding of the reasons underlying our beliefs, ideas and attitudes.
- One common fault with many arguments about what is 'right' or 'wrong' – and – involves what is known as ***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.
  - ***For example,*** *if a landowner seeks to build a plastic recycling plant and states that this is driven by a desire to create local employment opportunities – whereas in fact their true motive is to make a profit – then this is a rationalization.*

Types of reasoning

We can uncover these types of errors in our own and others' arguments by using what he calls 'critical reasoning'. Three forms of critical reasoning that individuals can use to justify their arguments are outlined below;

Three forms of critical reasoning:

'Reasoning by analogy explains one thing by comparing it to something else that is similar, although also different. In a good analogy, the similarity outweighs the dissimilarity and is clarifying. For instance, animals are like and unlike humans, as humans are also animals. Is the similarity sufficiently strong to support the argument that we should ascribe rights to

- For instance, if every person has human rights, and you are a person, then you have human rights like every person.' 'Inductive reasoning involves providing evidence to support a hypothesis.
- The greater the evidence for a hypothesis, the more we may rely on it.'
- The fact that there is mounting evidence that the burning of fossil fuels is having a detrimental effect on global climate, for example, is used to substantiate the argument that we have a moral duty to reduce carbon emissions.

Ethics and Religious Faith

There is another important argument that

Rather than relying on rational arguments, some people view actions as being right or wrong in terms of whether they are commanded by a god. faith-based arguments are relevant to moral philosophy for several reasons.

For a start, 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.

Testing moral arguments

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

- What kind of reasoning are they using? If they are using a principle to support their argument (deductive reasoning), then what kind of principle is it?
- Is the principle rational? If they are providing evidence to support their argument (inductive reasoning) then is the evidence reliable?
- Have any motives that might be behind their arguments been clarified (ie are they giving rationalisations, not reasons)?
- Does the conclusion drawn make sense, given the reasons they have given?

Three ways to test a moral argument:

(1) Factual accuracy- The 18th century philosopher David Hume (1711—1776) argued that we should not derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. This means that we cannot say that something is wrong or right simply based on how things are.

This is reasonable, but it does not mean that ethical discussion should be divorced from fact; the accuracy of the factual content of a discussion is very important.

(2) Consistency- Arguments need to be consistent. One can only argue that it is morally wrong to kill one person and yet morally acceptable to kill another, if one can demonstrate that there is a morally relevant difference between the two individuals.

(3) Good will- This one is the most difficult criterion to quantify. 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.

Thinking Ethically: A framework for Moral Decision Making

The first step in analyzing moral issues is obvious but not always easy: **Get the facts**. Some moral issues create controversies simply because we do not bother to check the facts. This first step, although obvious is also among the most important and the most frequently

Facts by themselves only tell us what is; they do not tell us what ought to be. In addition to getting the facts, resolving an ethical issue also requires an appeal to values.

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. Of course, there are situations that are wrong by any standard. But there are other issues where right and wrong is less clear.

To guide our reflection on such difficult questions, philosophers, religious teachers and other thinkers have shaped various approaches to ethical decision-making.

The **five** different approaches to values to deal with moral issues are: ***Fairness and Justice, the common Good, the Utilitarian, the Rights, and the Virtues.***

Fairness and Justice Approach

The fairness or justice approach to ethics has 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

- Aristotle believed that ethical knowledge is not precise knowledge, like logic and mathematics, but general knowledge like knowledge of nutrition and exercise.
- Also, as it is a practical discipline rather than a theoretical one; he thought that in order to become "good", one could not simply study what virtue is; one must actually be virtuous.
- Analogously, in order to become good at a sport like football, one does not simply study but also practices.
- Aristotle first establishes what was virtuous. He began by determining that everything was done with some goal in mind and that goal is 'good.'
- The ultimate goal he called the Highest Good: happiness. Aristotle contended that happiness could not be found only in pleasure or only in fame and honor.
- He finally finds happiness "by ascertaining the specific function of man".

- A 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. A person that does this is the happiest because he is fulfilling his purpose or nature as found in the rational soul.
- Depending on how well he did this, Aristotle said humans belonged to one of four categories: the virtuous, the continent, the incontinent and the vicious.
- Generally, this approach focuses on how fairly or unfairly our actions distribute benefits and burdens among the members of a group.
- This approach asks what is fair for all stakeholders, or people who have an interest in the outcome.” Fairness requires consistency in the way people are treated.
- The principle states: “Treat people the same unless there are morally relevant differences between them.”

The Common Good Approach

- This approach suggests that the interlocking relationships of society are the basis of ethical reasoning and that respect and compassion for all others especially the vulnerable are requirements of such reasoning.
- This approach also calls attention to the common conditions that are important to the welfare of everyone.
- This may be a system of laws, effective police and fire departments, health care, a public educational system, or even public recreation areas.
- This approach to ethics assumes a society comprising individuals whose own good is inextricably linked to the good of the community.
- Community members are bound by the pursuit of common values and goals.

- The common good is a notion that originated more than 2,000 years ago in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero.
- More recently, contemporary ethicist John Rawls defined the common good as "certain general conditions that are equally to everyone's advantage.“
- In this approach, we focus on ensuring that the social policies, social systems, institutions, and environments on which we depend are beneficial to all.
- Examples of goods common to all include affordable health care, effective public safety, peace among nations, a just legal system, and an unpolluted environment.

- Appeals to the common good urge us to view ourselves as members of the same community, reflecting on broad questions concerning the kind of society we want to become and how we are to achieve that society.
- 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.
- It presents a vision of society as a community whose members are joined in a shared pursuit of values and goals they hold in common.

The principle of the common good approach states;

“What is ethical is what advances the common good.”

- The other important approach to ethics has its 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.
- According to these philosophers, 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. Many different but related rights exist besides this basic one.
- These other rights can be thought of as different aspects of the basic right to be treated as we choose. Among these rights are:

- **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**: We have the 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**: We have 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**: We have 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?*** Actions are wrong to the extent they violate the rights of individuals; the more serious the violation, the more wrongful the action.

The Rights Approach identifies certain interests tests or activities that our behavior must respect, especially those areas of our lives that are of such value to us that they merit protection from others.

Each person has a fundamental right to be respected and treated as free and equal rational person capable of making his or her own decisions.

This implies other rights (e.g. privacy free consent, freedom of conscience, etc.) that must be protected if a person is to have the freedom to direct his or her own life.

Generally, in Ethical Problem Solving;

Once facts have been ascertained, consider five questions when trying to resolve a moral issue:

- What benefits and what harms will each course of action produce, and which alternative will lead to the best overall consequences?
- What moral rights do the affected parties have, and which course of action best respects those rights?
- Which course of action treats everyone the same, except where there is a morally justifiable reason not to, and does not show favoritism or discrimination?

To Whom or What Does Morality Apply?

In discussing the application of morality, four aspects may be considered: ***religious morality, morality and nature, individual morality, and social morality***

1. Religious Morality

- 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.
- By 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.

The Ten Commandments

1. I am the Lord, Your God; do not worship false gods.
2. Do not take the name of God in vain.
3. Keep holy the Sabbath Day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. Do not kill.
6. Do not commit adultery.
7. Do not steal.
8. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. Do not covet your neighbor’s spouse.
10. Do not covet your neighbor’s belongings.

Morality and Nature

- “Morality and nature” refers to a human being in relationship to nature. Natural morality has been prevalent in all primitive cultures, such as
- that of the Native American, and in cultures of the Far East. More recently, the Western tradition has also become aware of the significance of dealing with nature in a moral manner.
- 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.
- With this viewpoint there is no question about whether a Robinson Crusoe would be capable of moral or immoral actions on a desert island by himself.
- In the morality and nature aspect, he could be considered either moral or immoral, depending upon his actions toward the natural things around him.

Individual Morality

- 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.

Social Morality

- ✓ 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.

- Returning briefly to the desert-island example, most ethicists probably would state that Robinson Crusoe is incapable of any really moral or immoral action except toward himself and nature.
- Such action would be minimal when compared with the potential for morality or immorality if there were nine other people on the island whom he could subjugate, torture, or destroy.
- Many ethical systems would allow that what he would do to himself is strictly his business, “as long as it doesn’t harm anyone else.”

Who is Morally/Ethically Responsible?

Morality pertains to human beings and only to human beings; all else is speculation. If one wants to attribute morality to supernatural beings, one has to do so solely on **faith**.

If one wants to hold animals or plants morally responsible for destructive acts against each other or against humans, then 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.

Recent experimentation with the teaching of language to animals suggests that they are at least minimally capable of developing some

- It is even possible that they might be taught morality in the future, as humans are now. If this were to occur, then animals could be held morally responsible for their actions.
- At the present time, however, most evidence seems to indicate that they, as well as 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.
- Therefore, when we use the terms *moral* and *ethical*, we are using them in reference only to human beings.
- We do not hold a wolf morally responsible for killing a sheep, or an eagle morally responsible for killing a chicken. We may kill the wolf or fox for having done this act, but we do not kill it because we hold the animal *morally* responsible.

- We do it because we don‘t want any more of our sheep or chickens to be killed.
- At this point in the world‘s history, only human beings can be moral or immoral, and therefore only human beings should be held morally responsible for their actions and behavior.

Moral Judgments

- Moral judgments refer to *deciding what is right and what is wrong in human relations*. Individuals are continually judging their own conduct and that of their fellows.
- They approve of some acts and call them —right‖ or —good. They condemn other acts and call them —wrong‖ or —evil or bad. Moral judgments always have to do with the actions of human beings and, in particular, with voluntary actions - those actions freely chosen.

- *Involuntary actions* - those over which people have no control - are rarely open to moral judgment, as a person usually is not held responsible for an action that she or he did not initiate.
- Moral judgments are **evaluative** because they place value on things or relation or human actions; determine what is right or wrong, good or bad.
- They are also **normative** because they evaluate or assess the moral worth of something based on some **norms or standards**.
- When conflicts of interest arise, the solution may require the greatest sensitivity, experience, discernment, intelligence and goodwill, and even then we may doubt whether we have acted rightly.
- However, in judging conduct or action we have to consider **motives, means,** and **consequences** and sometimes the **situation.**

1. **Motives:** Motives, as Jesus, Kant, and others have pointed out, are basic for a determination of morality. The motive refers to the *intention* or *why an action is done*.

- A good motive is a prerequisite to conduct that we approve without qualification. If a good motive is present when an act, through some unforeseen factor, leads to harmful effects, we tend to disapprove less severely and to say, —Anyway, he meant well.

2. **Means:** Just as there may be many motives for desiring something, there may be many means for achieving it. The term *means* can be defined as an agency, instrument, or method used to attain an end.

3. **Consequences:** Consequences are the effects or results of *a moral decision* based on a value. We expect the consequences of an act that we call —right‖ to be good.

- Ordinarily, when people ask, —what is right? they are thinking about the consequences of the action. This depends on what ethical principle is in operation. Kant agrees to the good motive, utilitarians to the result.

4. **The Moral Situation*:*** A moral situation 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 ***alternative***s, and we can better weigh those alternatives when we have an understanding of the ingredients of the moral situation.

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, that is, 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. Many of the actions we perform in life , such as putting on a raincoat, sharpening a pencil, or counting apples, standing on your head, are not in themselves either good or bad acts.

Such actions are morally neutral or non-moral. By contrast, stealing from your libraries, punching people or helping the disadvantage are considered as morally significant actions.

But, what makes an act enter the moral arena or what features of action make us judge them to be good or bad, right or wrong? The following are features that make an action moral:

A. A moral act involves an agent: If something is a 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.

B. A moral act involves intention: An intention here refers to our motives that are important to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action.

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.

C. A moral act affects others: A moral action needs not only an agent and to be deliberate but also needs to affect others (those we might call moral patients) in significant ways, that is, an action that has harmful (be it physical, psychological, emotional, or depriving others of happiness) or beneficial consequences for others.

- Generally, a moral action is one which:
- Is 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.

Why Should Human Beings Be Moral?

- The question that is worth mentioning at this point is ―Why should human beings be moral?‖ Another way of putting the problem is as follows:
- Is there any clear foundation or basis for morality - can any reasons be found for human beings to be good and do right acts rather than be bad and do wrong acts?
- Let us assume for the moment that there is no supernatural morality and see if we can find any other reasons why people should be moral.

- There can be no society without moral regulation; man is man only because he lives in a society; take away from man all that has a social origin and nothing is left but an animal compare with other animals.
- We should be moral because being moral is following the rules designed to overrule self-interest whenever it is in the interest of every one alike that everyone should set aside his interest. ***John Hospers***

A. Argument from Enlightened Self-Interest

- One can certainly argue on a basis of enlightened self-interest that it is, at the very least, generally better to be good rather than bad and to create a world and society that is good rather than one that is bad.
- As a matter of fact, self-interest is the sole basis of one ethical theory, ethical egoism.

This argument suggests that because traditions and laws, established over a long period of time, govern the behavior of human beings, and because these traditions and laws urge human beings to be moral rather than immoral, there are good reasons for being so.

Self-interest is one reason, but another is respect for the human thought and effort that has gone into establishing such laws and traditions and transferring them from one historic period and one culture to another.

This can be an attractive argument, even though it tends to suppress questioning of traditions and laws - a kind of questioning that is at the core of creative moral reasoning.

It is interesting to note that most of us probably learned morality through being confronted with this argument, the religious argument, and the experiences surrounding it. Don‘t we all remember being told we should or should not do something because it was or was not in our own self-interest, because God said it was right or wrong, or because it was the way we were supposed to act in our family, school, society, and world

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C. Common Human Needs

- Are there any other reasons we can give as to why human beings should be moral?

- If we examine human nature as empirically and rationally as we can, we discover that all human beings have many needs, desires, goals, and objectives in common.
- For example, people generally seem to need friendship, love, happiness, freedom, peace, creativity, and stability in their lives, not only for themselves but for others, too.
- It doesn‘t take much further examination to discover that 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 that they will lose their lives, be mutilated, or be stolen from, lied to, cheated, severely restricted, or imprisoned.

- Morality exists, in part, because of human needs and through recognition of the importance of living together in a cooperative and significant way.
- 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.*
- In general, in a society wherein morality is declined, crime, death, looting, instability, social deviance, suicide, human right violation/ gross human right violation/, corruption and other socio, economic and political crises will prevail.

“**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

However, many of these answers won’t apply to every person: nonbelievers, nonparents, people who don’t respect themselves, people who think that they can escape punishment.

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. More specifically, **the five social benefits** of establishing and following moral rules accomplish the following:
- **Keep society from falling apart.**
- **Reduce human suffering.**
- **Promote human flourishing.**
- **Resolve conflicts of interest in just and orderly ways.**
- **Assign praise and blame, reward and punishment, and guilt.**
- All these benefits have in common the fact that morality is a social activity: It has to do with society, not the individual in isolation..