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``. Before we see how human beings judge the morality of their actions, let raise some puzzling questions: What things are good or bad?

- There are things which we consider good or desirable for their result-for what they lead to.
- There are also things which we consider good not because of what they lead to but because of what they are in themselves:
- this are considered as worth having or perusing not merely as way of getting other things but because of their own intrinsic nature. The first kind of good is called instrumental good because the goodness of these things lies in their being instruments towards the attainment of the other things which are considered good not simply as instruments.
- The second category of good is called intrinsic good because we value these things (whatever they may turn out to be) not for what they lead to but for what they are.

- 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.

- Applied to the processes of death and dying and the care provided at end of life, key values that arise include sanctity of life (the fact of being alive is itself deeply valued), quality of life (the fact of having positive experiences and avoiding negative experiences is considered deeply morally significant), autonomy (respecting someone's preferences in relation to where, how and when they die is, increasingly, considered to be deeply morally significant and challenging).

- 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. Applied to the processes of death and dying, reasons that are evaluated might be the arguments a health professional offers in support of resuscitating an incompetent terminally-ill patient or a parent's reasons for refusing medical treatment for a severely disabled neonate.

- Moreover, ethical problems are often not as clear as other kinds of problems and resolving ethical problems as definitively is not always possible.

- The 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.

- Good ethical thinking purposefully seeks out the grey in questions and concerns in order to acknowledge the diversity and complexity of roles, situations and circumstances that arise in human life and relationships.

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.

- 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. Does this mean that capital punishment is wrong? Is it wrong to kill animals? Is killing in self-defence wrong? Is the termination of pregnancy wrong? Is euthanasia wrong?

- If we try to apply our everyday notions of right and wrong to these questions, straightforward answers are not always forthcoming. 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. Whilst some people attempt to do this work individually, for themselves, philosophers attempt to find general answers that can be used by everyone in society.

Moral intuitions and Critical Reasoning

- The study of ethics involves reasoning about our feelings. In other words, it involves making sense of and rationalising 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 what Traer (2013) refers to as our moral sentiments; and ethical reasoning about these sentiments gives us our moral principles.

- The integration of these moral sentiments and principles, Traer (2013) argues, is our conscience. Our moral conscience, then, is based on emotions, but should also be supported by reason.

Rationalisation

- 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 that they hold, to support or refute those ideas with convincing arguments, and to be able to articulate and explain the reasons and assumptions on which those arguments are based.

- In moral philosophy, an argument is not simply about our beliefs or opinions; instead, it is about the reasons underlying those beliefs or opinions. This means that 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. Crucially, this requires careful listening to, analysis of and learning from the arguments that others make.

Types of reasoning

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 nonhuman animals as we do to humans?'

- 'Deductive reasoning applies a principle to a situation. 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 people use when making ethical arguments: religious faith. For many people, ’morality and religious faith go hand in hand’.

- 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. Some moral philosophers do not view arguments based on religious faith as being rationally defensible. They believe that we can determine through rational reflection what is right and wrong.

- If a god commands only what is right then, logically, this makes divine commands unnecessary; we are able to know what is right or wrong without relying on any divine commandments, as we can use 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?

- All of these questions that we ask about peoples' arguments may seem a little onerous and off-putting. With such rigorous criteria, some people may feel that they don't want to make any argument at all, as they are bound to make mistakes in their reasoning! However, most people already use critical reasoning when they make arguments and question other people's arguments.

- We have an idea of what we think is right based on our experience (our ethical presumptions), and we explain those ideas to other people based on our feelings (intuitions) and reasons. It is important and useful to develop the ability to test your own arguments and those of others, both to address the dilemmas that occur in our personal lives, our communities and the organisations for which we work.

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.

- Consider the example — of someone who maintains that giving aid to charities working in Africa is wrong because they believes that 90% of the money donated in fact goes to paying wealthy consultants and NGO workers, and only 10% goes to alleviate poverty. If this person were shown that this was factually incorrect, and that in fact 90% of all donations were used to alleviate poverty, then their moral argument would lose its force.

- (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. For example, the moral argument that debts owed by poorer nations to international lenders should be cancelled. Does this therefore mean that all poor people who owe money to banks should also have their debts cancelled? If you don't think that all individual debts should be cancelled but you do think that poorer countries' debts should be cancelled, then you have to show that there is a moral difference between the two. Otherwise your arguments are inconsistent.
- (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 overlooked.

But having the facts is not enough. 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.

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?

- 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 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 Rights Approach:

- **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.

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?

- Which course of action advances the common good?

- Which course of action develops moral virtues?

To Whom or What Does Morality Apply?

- **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

Who is Morally/Ethicaly 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.

Moral Judgments

- Finding the right course of action, choosing the right alternative, is not always simple. We can have no algorithm for judgment, since every application of a rule would itself need supplementing with further rules.

- **Onora O'Neill** argues that 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, as you have saw above. 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,

- 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. Though we expect people to use the best available means to carry out their purposes, we condemn them if their choice of means impresses us as unjust, cruel, or immoral. On rare occasions we may approve of an act when means are used that under other conditions would be condemned. However, there is a danger in proposing that any means may be used, provided the end is good, or that —the end justifies the means.Once chosen, the means become part of the general effect of an

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,

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?

The following are features that make an action moral:

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

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.

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.

- **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. However, it is not being suggested at this point that one ought to pursue one's own self-interest.

Rather, an argument is being presented that 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. An individual member of the group could say, —it's in my self-interest to do good rather than bad because I stand to benefit if I do and also because I could be ostracized or punished if I don't.‖ Therefore, even though it is not airtight, the argument from enlightened self-interest is compelling.

Argument from Tradition and Law

Related to the foregoing argument is the argument from tradition and law. 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

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.

- 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.
- There are two distinct components to the question “Why be moral?”
  - Why does society need moral rules?
  - Why should I be moral?

- 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.

("Why should I be moral?") Is more complicated as the game Cooperate or Cheat shows. Ultimately, I should be moral because, by occasionally allowing some disadvantage for myself,

I may obtain an overall, long-term advantage. Even when it seems as though I can break moral rules without getting caught,

I still need to consistently follow them because, although an individual moral act may sometimes be at odds with my self-interest, the complete moral form of life in which the act is rooted is not against my self-interest.

Chapter Summary

- Ethical reasoning ability is considered vitally important in the shared concepts and principles that guide common ethical issues.

  Ethical theories and principles are the foundations of ethical analysis because they are the viewpoints from which guidance can be obtained along the pathway to a decision.

- A person making an ethical decision needs a procedure to follow to insure that s/he makes her/his decision with rationality and respect--a decision procedure that can insure that s/he has considered all the relevant factors and have taken into account the interests of others as well as her/himself.
- Thus one has to develop a habit of pursuing justice or a disposition to be just if one wants to be a just person.

- What Aristotle means by saying this is that moral practice is a very important factor in being a moral person. One cannot have a moral character or become a moral person if one does not constantly practice to be moral, even though one might have correct moral ideas. This is just like a pianist who would not be a good pianist if she did not practice regularly even though she knows in her mind how to play the piano.

- One often has to give up some benefits for morality and one would not do so or at least would not be willing to do so if one did not know why one should be moral or why it is good to be moral. This is like taking medicine. Nobody is willing to take medicine not knowing what is good about it.

- But one would if one knew that it would promote health. What Aristotle wishes to bring out is the importance of moral theory that shows the significance or the good of morality. The focus is on why one should be moral and what the moral principles that one should observe are.