Lecture summary

The topic of lecture 2 is Theoretical Underpinnings of Ethics. The lecture talked about the composition of moral and ethical concepts in society and some significant ethical theories.

The lecturer started with two ethical examples followed by two essential questions, what should I do and what kind of person should I be. The former refers to descriptive ethics, which focus on people’s thoughts and values, and the latter refers to prescriptive ethics, which pays attention to people's code of conduct and morality. In general, ethics can be classified into three categories, rules (Golden rule, play fair etc.), consequences and outcomes (maximize happiness and utility etc.) and public morality (professional code and obeying law etc.). The rest of the lecture focus on demonstrating normative ethical theories in terms of teleological ethics, deontological ethics, and others.

People who have deontological ethical thinking, such as Kant, supposed the highest moral ethics is based on the behaviour itself and will not be affected by external factors. In Kant’s book, he argued that autonomous will is significant, and people should put duty and the will of taking responsibility first while doing something. Specifically, the duty can be divided into perfect duty and imperfect duty. People doing something with perfect duty have must-do reasons from all kinds of aspects to complete, while imperfect duty means it is acceptable to fail to do something. However, as a utilitarian, Mill thought that the essence of people doing anything is to get happiness. He opposed Kant’s view and said consequence is what really matters. Apart from Mill, Ross takes a neutral view of Teleological and Deontological. On one hand, he partly agreed with Kant about his theory of duty. On the other hand, he emphasized happiness as a consequence of doing something. Besides, he introduced moral pluralism, which is no one holds the best point of view. Moral principles can be contradicted and various. By contrast, relativism admits values in other cultures, times, and places. The different point of view can be all correct and judgement of other values are useless, while pluralism does not agree with it, even though the ethical theory allows multiple moral theories or principles exist.

Additionally, Hobbes and Rawls held another perspective. Society is the most important thing to form ethics because individuals only care about self-interest. In a society, people can have equal rights, wealth can be balanced between people, and power can be transferred to a third party. To them, ethics is a contract, society is built based on ethics.

The last part of the lecture is about virtue ethics. According to Plato, virtue to people is as a sharp edge to a knife. The good features and characteristics of a person are called virtue. In terms of what Aristotle said, the characteristic that makes people happy is called virtue, which should give a moderate feeling. Take the battlefield as an example, if one never be afraid of gunfire on a battlefield, this is called reckless. Nevertheless, if one can't walk when he hears gunfire on the battlefield, he's too timid. Virtue like courage should be between the two feelings.

The topic of lecture 3 is moral reasoning and professional ethics. More concepts about moral reasoning and moral dilemmas are introduced.

Followed by some moral concepts, the lecture started with the question “What prevents us from making moral choices”. The first factor is partisanship. Partisanship may cause one to consider things from the client’s view rather than a professional view and loss objectivity. Additionally, rationalization is another barrier, which is one does something for his or her own interest but in name of morality. Implicit bias and The Dunning‐Kruger Effect also cause bad moral behaviour. People can underestimate or overestimate due to insufficient self-cognition and real situations. Apart from that, ethical blindness and ethical illiteracy describe a kind of moral issue that people cannot be aware of the ethical issue is or they don’t regard them as problems. If an advertiser regards the advertisement as a true comment rather than a well-prepared compliment, he or she is considered morally blind. What ‘s more, people who have reasoning with a false equivalency draw an equal sign between morality and law. In their eye, everything that doesn’t violate the law is fine to do. The last factor introduced in the lecture was ethical scripts. In the example of Ford Pinto, the company used the wrong template and perspective to measure the defect of their car. Therefore, the company failed.

Next, the lecture talked about moral dilemmas and judgement. Different from problems, moral dilemmas do not have an exact answer. When solving moral dilemmas, we compared which solution is preferable. Besides, when considering dilemmas, there are three categories for cases, exception, which both accept rules and the exception, counterexample, which is against rules, and anomaly, which does not have any attitude towards rules even though they contradict. We should think about in which way should we treat moral dilemmas. In terms of making moral judgements, we need to consider the rational and general principles behind them. Moral judgements should be integrated, they cannot come up without reasons.

When conducting moral actions, people are accountable according to moral rules and regulations. Accountability here means our behaviors should obey and rely on the rules and regulations, it is historical. On the other hand, our judgement and discretion should be responsible with more subjective. Correspondingly, the code of ethics matches responsibility and the code of conduct match accountability. Code of ethics emphasizes general points of view and ethical judgement, while code of conduct offers particular rules and restrictions for behaviors.

Then, some ways to raise people’s moral awareness were introduced. First, we can focus on any possible moral dimension to the problem to avoid moral negligence. Besides, how much moral concern did we address is another thing we need to notice. Moral blindness and illiteracy mentioned above are worthy to be paid attention to avoid. At last, people need to develop moral competence, that is being able to behave ethically and to make moral judgements.

The last part of the lecture is about dirty hands situations and the agency role people played in moral dilemmas and problems. A dirty hands situation is a situation that you intend to do something good that brings collateral damage at the same time. In this situation, the damage you caused cannot be ignored. Some might choose to dirt their hands, while others called innocent bystanders won't. Innocent bystanders stand by moral dilemmas to avoid taking responsibility. In the trolly dilemma, some people choose not to switch so that they don’t engage in the dilemma. To deal with this kind of situation, “Good Samaritan” laws and “Duty to Rescue” laws are introduced. The former prevents helpers from taking extra responsibility while the latter requires people to do something rather than stand by.