

(1) Can ethical problems be solved in a completely algorithmic way, by following a fixed sequence of unambiguous, logical steps? Justify your answer.

Yes, in certain circumstances and situations. Each ethical theory that was covered in the chapter succeeds in encountering certain types of ethical problems. These systems of thought can be broken down into steps, such as the hypothetical situations and solutions that Quinn cites when looking at each ethical theory. For example, he describes how an act utilitarian could break down the costs and potential benefits in making a decision on whether or not to invoke eminent domain in order to create a railroad (as a hypothetical: much of the analysis is debatable in itself). Virtue theory does well to describe our individual actions and understanding within ethical dilemmas. Utilitarianism does well with a full picture of accounting for two possibilities that can be somehow quantified.

The issue is that there are weaknesses in every theory as well. Virtue theory does not deal well with our understanding of enforcement of crime. Utilitarianism may yield an ethical answer that benefits most, but perhaps it does not succeed for equitable distribution of that 'good'. Social Contract can struggle with conflicting rights, as Kantianism does with conflicting moral rules, even in cases of ethical objectivism.

What these weaknesses also suggest is that there is no universal moral theory that perfectly solves every ethical situation, and that these theories of ethical problem-solving can also clash. What happens when a relativist rejects the social contract? Or a utilitarian view that allows what a divine command view might fully disallow?

So it is difficult to connect an algorithmic and pragmatic problem solving theory with moralistic thinking. Stanford Philosophy's article *Moral Reasoning*(1) also offers a warning, saying, "a general account of moral reasoning that does not want to presume the correctness of a definite moral theory will do well to remain agnostic on the question of how moral reasoning relates to non-moral practical reasoning."

People's beliefs, and creation of a system of ethics and morality are formed over years of learning and experience. A child's exposure to religion, to a Kantian's morality or the morality provided by the social contract are all competing forces in the development of their understanding of personal morality. And if these forces are to be discovered, even if we believe certain morals as ethically universally true, we have .

As Quinn concludes the chapter, "If analyses from all of these perspectives result in a consensus on the right course of action, you can make the decision with confidence. For more challenging cases, however, you will find it impossible to come up with a virtuous course of action that respects everyone's rights absolutely and maximizes the total increase in happiness." In cases like these, there may be no true ethical solution, only a solution that is mutually agreed upon due to it being the most beneficial by a specific lens.

(2) Most ethical theories agree on a large number of moral guidelines. For example, it is nearly universally held that it is wrong to steal movies. What difference, then, does it make whether someone subscribes to the relativism, divine command theory, egoism or Kantianism?

Consequentially, it likely means very little. Stealing a movie is stealing a movie. However, it is still important to understand the intent of the actor. In this hypothetical scenario, let's say that we are considering electronic 'theft' of stealing movies by downloading them from a website. Looking at it through the different lenses:

Relativism can break down into several different types. IP may not be treated the same in different cultures as it is in the US. Subjective relativists may claim that they personally do not see anything wrong with their action, that in their mind there is nothing wrong with stealing.

The egoist's assertion, which centers on self, could argue that it was beneficial for themselves and did not hurt anyone.

Divine command theory suggests that the action is morally compromised by its explicit forbidding in religious texts. Within Christianity, the command "Thou shalt not steal. (Exodus 20:15)" could be cited as reason for disallowing any kind of piracy.

Kantianist thought holds a similar line of thinking with Christianity, a sense of logic, "right" and "wrong", but considers their ethics within a different context. As it considers some universal moral guidelines, and stealing likely would fall into that, it would be considered as 'wrong'.

For a functioning society, it is important to recognize the intent of the actor. In some circumstances, it may be dangerous. If the actor is a subjective relativist, a weakness of the subjective relativist's theory is the ability to rationalize actions that we would consider immoral, immoral. "If individuals decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong, they can reach their conclusions by any means they see fit" he says.

I would align closest to the idea of the social contract theory, where we are constantly balancing our rights and duties, and where "everyone receives certain benefits in return for bearing certain burdens". Certain actions can be justified within a social contract framework, such as injustices. However, there are consequences for breaking the social contract; breaking a law by doing something that is considered immoral. In that sense, the greatest danger for the social contract is those who do not accept it. Thus, understanding the rationale by the actor who decided to steal- were they willingly and knowingly breaking the law while having accepted the contract- is important.

Works Cited

(1) Quinn, Michael J. *Ethics for the Information Age*. 2nd ed., Pearson, 2017.

(2) Richardson, Henry S. "Moral Reasoning." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

Stanford University, 27 Aug. 2018,

plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasoning-moral/#DefiMoraReas.