GESOCSCI 5 – ETHICS

MODULE 1 – THE MORAL AGENT

At the end of this module, the students will be able to:

1. define ethics and morality;
2. explain the importance of rules;
3. determine the difference between moral and non-moral standards; and
4. describe a moral dilemma.

MODULE OUTLINE:

Orientation of the Course
The Moral Agent
Standards and Dilemmas

ORIENTATION OF THE COURSE

Introduction

It seems that people don't like rules as they represent a kind of restrictions, but in fact life can't be organized without rules. People always need rules and laws to be able to live and deal together. We need rules to help us get along together and show respect to each other.

All the rules and laws have the same purpose. They organized the relations between individuals and the society to make it clear what is right and wrong and what happens if someone breaks the rules. They are designed to ensure fairness, safety and respect for other people's right.

Rules and Its Importance

Rules refer to a set of guidelines which have been put in place in different countries and communities and have been accepted by all. Rules are useful tools in guiding and monitoring the interactions of humans in the society. A rule is a prescribed guide for conduct or action. Rules help guide actions toward desired results.

When used appropriately, rules provide a sense of predictability and consistency for people, thereby promoting physical, moral, social, and emotional safety. At the heart of ethics is a concern about something or someone other than ourselves and our own desires and self-interest.

Rules are specific sets of norms of behavior, regulations, and laws established on purpose to regulate the life in the community. These norms secure the order and allow avoiding total chaos. The sets of rules available nowadays have undergone a long formation process. The availability of rules is a crucial criterion allowing to call nowadays society civilized and well developed.

Why Do We Have Rules?

Rules help people in many aspects of life. They enable people to organize all the processes correctly, starting from house chores and ending with more complicated issues as the functioning of a whole country. Rules are specific modes of behavior that secure a regulated flow of all processes.

A well-developed system of rules help humanity to avoid chaos and many problems that may be caused by the lack of regulations. Laws dictate what is proper and what is wrong. In many spheres of life, we have guidelines to follow. Norms enable people to interact, to work together and contribute to the global development. Moral rules assist people in the establishment of shared values and norms in accordance to which an honorable member of society can be identified.

Importance of Rules

- Rules are important because they tend to protect the weaker class in the society as they might be in a disadvantageous position if rules are broken.
- They provide a stable environment and human co-existence in a society which leads to peace and development. The process of setting rules aims to craft rules in line with some desired results. For example, rules in schools and other institutions promote trust, fairness and discipline in a bid to establish desirable relationship among students and people.
- Rules are vital in one's life because peace and order are maintained, an important ingredient for society's development. As a way of maintaining these rules, many societies have adopted and changed them into law. These assure that no rules will be broken. If one violates the rule, a corresponding punishment is imposed.

Most of us are basically honest, and knowing the rules means that we usually try to follow them. One reason we do is to avoid punishment, but the strongest argument for following the rules is to make the world peaceful and fair.

The Subject: Ethics

Ethics, or **moral philosophy**, may be defined as the scientific study of moral judgments. Ethics is the discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad, right and wrong. The term is also applied to any system or theory of moral values or principles.

The subject of Ethics consists of the fundamental issues of practical decision making, and its major concerns include the nature of ultimate value and the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong.

At its simplest, ethics is a system of moral principles. They affect how people make decisions and lead their lives. Ethics is concerned with what is good for individuals and society and is also described as moral philosophy.

The term is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which can mean custom, habit, character or disposition. Our concepts of ethics have been derived from religions, philosophies and cultures. They infuse debates on topics like abortion, human rights and professional conduct.

Ethics is not only about the morality of particular courses of action, but it's also about the goodness of individuals and what it means to live a good life. Virtue Ethics is particularly concerned with the moral character of human beings.

Branches of Ethics

One way to try and define morality is through ethics, the philosophical study of morality. In the field of ethics, morality is often defined in one of two ways.

First is normative, in which actions are judged by their merits, allowing societies to develop codes of conduct for behavior. The Golden Rule, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, is a classic example of normative ethics, since you are determining morality through your actions. Other examples could include helping someone who is lost, or finding a wallet and turning it in to the lost and found. If your actions to another person align with how you want to be treated, they are moral.

The other side of this is descriptive ethics. If normative ethics try and define how people should act, descriptive ethics asks what do people think is moral? This branch of ethics does not actually claim that things are right or wrong, but simply studies how individuals or societies define their morals. What makes something right or wrong in a specific culture?

While normative ethics actually defines what is right and wrong, descriptive ethics defines morals in terms of their cultural or personal significance. Morals are seen as part of a greater system that is not objective or unbiased but is created by a culture, like language. So, while normative ethics we may say that it is moral to turn in a lost wallet, in descriptive ethics, we simply define that a certain society sees this as moral. We don't actually judge it as right or wrong.

Why Study Ethics?

- Your understanding of moral problems will be widened, as you become acquainted with the thoughts of other men upon problems of good and evil, justice and injustice, virtue and vice, the rights and duties of the individual and of society.
- Your critical faculties will be trained. You will know the reasons for your moral convictions, and also the reasons for the moral convictions of others. Your reverence for duty will be deepened. On the whole, you will become more tolerant, but your moral judgments in becoming discriminating will not become laxer.
- The study of Ethics will enable a person to understand better what his conscience is, how he acquired it, how far he is likely to be able to trust to its deliverances with safety, and how he can improve it and make it more intelligent. He will gain a clearer insight into his claims upon society, and the duties that he owes to society. He will learn to discriminate between the respects in which all individuals are mutually interdependent and those in which each is responsible for his own life, and ought to insist upon freedom of initiative.
- Finally, while a book on Ethics can by no means prescribe for anyone what should be his vocation in life, or his avocations, it can at least proffer some considerations, from the standpoints of self-realization, self-sacrifice, and service that ought to help anyone in making such decisions.

THE MORAL AGENT

Morality

Morality can be defined as the standards that an individual or a group has about what is right and wrong, or good and evil. Morality is not imposed from outside, but innate and be unconscious. Ultimately, it's our moral qualities that force us to live in harmony with the unconscious; doing so is the highest form of morality.

Morality is an informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal.

Morality is a complex of concepts and philosophical beliefs by which an individual determines whether his or her actions are right or wrong. Often, these concepts and beliefs are generalized and codified in a culture or group, and thus serve to regulate the behavior of its members. Conformity to such codification is called morality, and the group may depend on widespread conformity to such codes for its continued existence. A "moral" may refer to a particular principle, usually as informal and general summary of a moral principle, as applied in a given human situation.

The term "morality" can be used either:

1. descriptively to refer to certain codes of conduct put forward by a society or a group (such as a religion), or accepted by an individual for his/her own behavior, or
2. normatively to refer to a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons.

Key Features of Morality

1. **People experience a sense of moral obligation and accountability**. One cannot doubt successfully a phenomenon of his own existence – namely, his moral experience. Even secularists like Kai Nielsen recommend that one "ought to" act or follow some rules, policies, practices, or principles.

   Even atheist Richard Dawkins declares that there are "moral instructions on how we ought to behave."

2. **Moral values and moral absolutes exist.** It's hard to deny the objective reality of moral values – actions like rape, torture, and child abuse are not just socially unacceptable behavior but are moral abominations.

   Some actions are really wrong in the same way that some things like love and respect are truly good. These are moral absolutes – truths that exist and apply to everyone.

3. **Moral law does exist**. When we accept the existence of goodness, we must affirm a moral law on the basis of which to differentiate between good and evil.

C.S. Lewis demonstrates the existence of a moral law by pointing to men who quarrel – the man who makes remarks is not just saying that the other man's behavior does not happen to please him but is rather appealing to some kind of standard of behavior that he expects the other man to know about.

4. **Moral law is known to humans**. Moral law is also called **Law of Nature** because early philosophers thought that generally speaking, everybody knows it by nature. Different civilizations and different ages only have "slightly different" moralities and not a radically or "quite different moralities."

Men may have differed as to whether one should have one wife or four wives but people have always agreed that one must not simply have any woman he likes. Will and Ariel Durant: "A little knowledge of history stresses the variability of moral codes, and concludes that they are negligible because they differ in time and place, and sometimes contradict each other. A larger knowledge stresses the universality of moral codes, and concludes to their necessity."

5. **Morality is objective**. Morality is absolute – there is a real right and real wrong that is universally and immutably true, independent of whether anyone believes it or not.

Since almost all people assume certain things to be wrong – the best explanation is that such things really are wrong and morality is objective.

6. **Moral judgments must be supported by reasons**. Moral judgments are different from mere expressions of personal preference – they acquire backing by reasons, and in the absence of reasons, they are merely arbitrary.

Man as a Moral Agent

A *moral agent* is a being that is "capable of acting with reference to right and wrong." A moral agent is anything that can be held responsible for behavior or decisions." It is moral agents who have rights and responsibilities, because it is moral agents whom we take to have choices and the power to choose.

A moral agent is an intelligent being who has the power of choosing, and scope to act according to his choice; one to whom the Supreme Governor has given a cognizable law, with its proper sanction, by which to regulate his volitions and actions, and who is placed in circumstances which present no physical obstruction, either to obedience or disobedience. Moral action, therefore, is action which springs from choice, and it is not necessitated either by mental propulsions or external circumstances: intelligent, free, and accountable, it is distinguished on the other hand from instinctive action, which is the result of an undeviating and unfailing but blind propulsion, and on the other from Divine action, which though certain as instinct, is yet in the fullest sense intelligent and free.

When something or someone is deemed a moral agent, it does not necessarily mean that they are successfully making moral decisions. It means that they are in a category that enables them to be blamed. Being a moral agent means that they can be held responsible for their decisions and behaviors, whether they are good or bad.

A moral agent must be a living creature, as they must be able to comprehend abstract moral principles and apply them to decision making. They must have "self-consciousness, memory, moral principles, other values, and the reasoning faculty, which allows him to devise plans for achieving his objectives, to weigh alternatives, and so on." Also, in order to weigh the options in decision making, a moral agent must "attach a positive value to acts that conform to his moral principles and a positive value to some of the results that can achieve by violating his moral principles." This means that in order to be a moral agent "you must live in a world of scarcity rather than paradise." If all of your values could be easily and immediately be achieved, you wouldn't have to pick between your moral and non-moral goals, and you couldn't practice moral agency.

In order to be a moral agent who makes decisions about justice and takes action based on those decisions, one must live in a society with others who they consider to have moral rights. If one lives alone or with others who do not have moral rights, then they are unable to make decisions regarding other's rights. In order to act morally, one must be free to act. If one is unable to act, then they do not have moral responsibility. As long as each person does not violate the rights of other moral agent, then each moral agent has the right to make decisions and take action on these decisions.

A being capable of moral agency, is one who possesses the means of judging rightly, and power to act accordingly; but whether he will do so or not, depends on the voluntary exercise of his faculties.

Aristotle and Moral Responsibility

Aristotle was the first to discuss moral responsibility. He stated that it is "sometimes appropriate to respond to an agent with praise or blame on the basis of his/her actions and/or dispositional traits of character." He discusses that "only a certain kind of agent qualifies as a moral agent and is thus properly subject to ascriptions of responsibility, namely, one who possesses a capacity for decision." From Aristotle's perspective, "a decision is a particular kind of desire resulting from deliberation, one that expresses the agent's conception of what is good."

In reference to modern ethical theories, which separate actions and questions about them, Aristotle would not agree. "Praiseworthy and blameworthy actions are not those which match up to a particular template of rules or principles. Rather, they are ones which flow from, and reveal a certain type of character." Moral agency is not just about which rule to follow, it comes from a way of life which Aristotle called the virtuous life, which necessitates a unison of thought and feeling.

STANDARDS AND DILEMMAS

Differences Between Moral and Non-Moral Standards

- A *moral standard* refers to the norms which we have about the types of actions which we believe to be morally acceptable and morally unacceptable. Specifically, moral standards deal with matters which can either seriously harm or seriously benefit human beings. The validity of moral standards comes from the line of reasoning that was taken to back or

support them, and thus are not able to be formed or changed by particular bodies of authority. Some ethicists equate moral standards with moral values and moral principles.

The foundations of evolving moral systems rest on a complex cybernetic process, scientific study of control and communication that sustains and preserves the human species. This is a dynamic process that drives the creation of moral and ethical standards. Every human action inspires a corresponding reaction whether subtle in nature or violent. Emotions can get out of control if not regulated by laws, customs, moral codes, professional codes, and even rules of etiquette. Rules are a stabilizing force that enhances the survivability of the individuals, families and nations. The initial point evident in human behavior is the survival of the species. It is defined and redefined in many ways, such as a concern for public safety.

Developing a moral compass in children is a responsibility that should be shared by the family, educational institutions and the community at large. Each one of them has a role to play in instilling personal and collective values and supporting the development of the individual's ability to judge what is right and wrong and to know how to act accordingly.

It is important to remember that the moral development of young people depends on the ethical capacities of the adults who interact with them on a daily basis – especially parents, but also teachers, members of their extended family and other adults in the community. Every young person needs both a role model to inspire them and an environment that holds up good values and celebrates them.

- *Non-moral standards* refer to rules that are unrelated to moral or ethical considerations. Either these standards are not necessarily linked to morality or by nature lack ethical sense. Basic examples of non-moral standards include rules of etiquette, fashion standards, rules in games, and various house rules.

Technically, religious rules, some traditions, and legal statutes (i.e. laws and ordinances) are non-moral principles, though they can be ethically relevant depending on some factors and contexts.

- *Etiquette* refers to the norms of correct conduct in polite society or, more generally, to any special code of social behavior or courtesy. The rules of etiquette are prescriptions for socially acceptable behaviour. If you violate them, you're likely to be considered ill-mannered, impolite, or even uncivilized, but not necessarily immoral.

- *Statutes* are laws enacted by legislative bodies. The law that defines and prohibits theft is a statute. Congress and state legislatures enact statutes. Laws enacted by local governing bodies such as city councils usually are termed ordinances. Statutes make up a large part of the law and are what many of us mean when we speak of "laws."

People sometimes confuse legality and morality, but they are different things. On one hand, breaking the law is not always or necessarily immoral. On the other hand, the legality of an action does not guarantee that it is morally right.

Somewhere between etiquette and law lie *professional codes of ethics*. These are the rules that are supposed to govern the conduct of members of a given profession. Generally

speaking, the members of a profession are understood to have agreed to abide by those rules as a condition of their engaging in that profession. Violation of a professional code may result in the disapproval of one's professional peers and, in serious cases, loss of one's license to practice that profession.

Given their nature, professional codes of ethics are neither a complete nor a completely reliable guide to one's moral obligations. Not all the rules of a professional code are purely moral in character, and even when they are, the fact that a rule is officially enshrined as part of the code of a profession does not guarantee that it is a sound moral principle.

How Are Moral Standards Formed?

The moral standards are influenced by a variety of factors such as the moral principles we accept as part of our upbringing, values passed on to us through heritage and legacy, the religious values that we have imbibed from childhood, the values that were showcased during the period of our education, the behavior pattern of those who are around us, the explicit and implicit standards of our culture, our life experiences and more importantly, our critical reflections on these experiences. Moral standards concern behavior which is very closely linked to human well-being.

Characteristics of Moral Standard

1. **Moral standards involve serious wrongs or significant benefits**. Moral standards deal with matters which can seriously impact, that is, injure or benefit human beings. It is not the case with many non-moral standards. For instance, following or violating some basketball rules may matter in basketball games but does not necessarily affect one's life or well-being.

2. **Moral standards ought to be preferred to other values**. Moral standards have overriding character or hegemonic authority. If a moral standard states that a person has the moral obligation to do something, then he/she is supposed to do that even if it conflicts with other non-moral standards, and even with self-interest.

    Moral standards are not the only rules or principles in society, but they take precedence over other considerations, including aesthetic, prudential, and even legal ones. A person may be aesthetically justified in leaving behind his family in order to devote his life to painting, but morally, all things considered, he/she probably was not justified. It may be prudent to lie to save one's dignity, but it probably is morally wrong to do so. When a particular law becomes seriously immoral, it maybe people's moral duty to exercise civil disobedience.

    There is a general moral duty to obey the law, but there may come a time when the injustice of an evil law is unbearable and thus calls for illegal but moral non-cooperation.

3. **Moral standards are not established by authority figures**. Moral standards are not invented, formed, or generated by authoritative bodies or persons such as nations' legislative bodies. Ideally instead, these values ought to be considered in the process of

making laws. In principle therefore, moral standards cannot be changed nor nullified by the decisions of particular authoritative body. One thing about these standards, nonetheless, is that its validity lies on the soundness or adequacy of the reasons that are considered to support and justify them.

4. **Moral standards have the trait of   universalizability**. It means that everyone should live up to moral standards. To be more accurate, however, it entails that moral principles must apply to all who are in the relevantly similar situation.

    This characteristic is exemplified in the Golden Rule, "Do unto others what you would them do unto you" and formal Principle of Justice, "It cannot be right for A to treat B in a manner which it would be wrong for B to treat A, merely on the ground that they are two different individuals, and without there being any difference between the natures or circumstances of the two which can be stated as a reasonable ground for difference of treatment." Universalizability is an extension of the principle of consistency, that is, one ought to be consistent about one's value judgments.

5. **Moral standards are based on impartial considerations**. Moral standard does not evaluate standards on the basis of the interests of a certain person or group, but one that goes beyond personal interests to a universal standpoint in which each person's interests are impartially counted as equal.

    Impartiality is usually depicted as being free of bias or prejudice. Impartiality in morality requires that we give equal and/or adequate consideration to the interests of all concerned parties.

6. **Moral standards are associated with special emotions and vocabulary**. Prescriptivity indicates the practical or action-guiding nature of moral standards. These moral standards are generally put forth as injunction or imperatives such as, "Do not kill," Do no unnecessary harm," and "Love your neighbor." These principles are proposed for use, to advise, and to influence to action. Retroactively, this feature is used to evaluate behavior, to assign praise and blame, and to produce feelings of satisfaction or of guilt.

    If a person violates a moral standard by telling a lie even to fulfill a special purpose, it is not surprising if he/she starts feeling guilty or being ashamed of his/her behavior afterwards. On the contrary, not much guilt is felt if one goes against the current fashion trend.

Moral Dilemmas

A *moral dilemma* is a conflict in which you have to choose between two or more actions and have moral reasons for choosing each action. What is common of the two well-known cases is conflict. In each case, an agent regards herself as having moral reasons to do each of two actions, but doing both actions is not possible. Ethicists have called situations like these moral dilemmas. The crucial features of a moral dilemma are these: the agent is required to do each of two or more actions; the agent can do each of the actions; but the agent cannot do both or all of

the actions. The agent thus seems condemned to moral failure, no matter what he does, he will do something wrong or fail to do something that he ought to do.

A moral dilemma is a situation where:

1. You are presented with two or more actions, all of which you have the ability to perform.
2. There are moral reasons for you to choose each of the actions.
3. You cannot perform all of the actions and have to choose which action, or actions when there are three or more choices to perform.

Since there are moral reasons for you to choose each action, and you cannot choose them all, it follows that no matter what choice you make, you will be failing to follow your morals. In other words, someone or something will suffer no matter what choice you make. For example, your friend will suffer if you tell the truth, and you will likely lose your friendship. But if you don't tell the truth, you will be a liar and possibly a lawbreaker, and your friend will get arrested for a crime he did not commit.

The Three Levels of Moral Dilemmas:

1. Individual
2. Organizational (business, medical, and public sector)
3. Structural – network of institutions and operative theoretical paradigms, e.g. universal health care

Situation:

Your daughter is suffering from a debilitating disease that has put her in constant pain and agony. Finally, one day, she decides that she really wants to die. However, her condition is such that she cannot die on her own. She is begging and pleading with you to help her commit suicide. This would, of course, be illegal. What would you do?

Moral Dilemmas in the Organization

Even when organizations have great policies and procedures and follow the laws and regulations, there's still a high risk of unethical behavior.

For example, some employees may not know the resources exist to help in decision-making. They may not know who to turn to with questions. Anytime an organization is not fully supporting people, they are increasing the possibility of high risk behavior.

In many cases there are mixed messages, such as inconsistent application of policies or a tendency to overlook borderline or even directly unethical behavior. This is the "its not my job" mentality.

Some other common missteps:

1. Senior leaders fail to "walk the talk" – they are guilty of modelling inappropriate behavior.

2.   Leaders often have an irrational sense of entitlement, feeling "I should be allowed to do this," or "I deserve this."
3.   Individuals may begin cutting corners due to misplaced incentives. When an organization begins rewarding the wrong things, this can lead to cutting corners on safety, quality, etc.
4.   Individuals may also feel the need to be obedient to authority, even when they are being asked to do something they feel is wrong.
5.   Individuals also have the need for closure, which can lead to conflict avoidance. For example, an employee may not be sure how to approach a possibly unethical situation, so he or she may simply opt to close it out without having the difficult conversation about ethics.
6.   Defensive "logic" is prevalent. This manifests as "everyone is doing it, so why not me? Or why should I stick my neck out?"

In other cases, the ethical dilemmas organizations face are even more difficult because there is no "wrong" answer. The toughest ethical dilemmas in the workplace occur when two or more competing alternatives are present, each having its own set of ethical values, the choice of which always offers a less-than-ideal solution. This happens because we often are pitting two favorable outcomes against each other – often fairness versus compassion. "Right versus "right is the toughest ethical challenge to navigate.

Moral Dilemmas in the Health Care Service

Scenario 1: Carrie is a doctor working in a hospital. Due to an accident in the building next door, there are deadly fumes rising up through the hospital's ventilation system. In a certain room of the hospital are four of her patients. In another room there is one of her patients. If she does nothing fumes will rise up into the room containing the four patients and cause their deaths.

The only way to avoid the deaths of these patients is to hit a switch that will cause the fumes to bypass the room containing the four patients. As a result of doing this, the fumes will enter the room containing the single patient (against her will). If she does this, the woman will die, but the four patients will live.

Should Carrie hit the switch in order to save four of her patients?

Scenario 2: Your partner is dying from a rare disease. Luckily a cure has recently been invented buy one of the druggist who lives fairly close to you. This druggist is selling the cure for ten times the amount it cost him to make it. You try to raise the money, but even borrowing from friends and taking a loan from the bank, you can only raise half of the amount. You go to the druggist and offer to pay him half now and half later, but he refuses, saying that he invented the cure and is determined to make money off it. You beg him to sell it cheaper as your partner will die before you can raise the full amount, but he still refuses.

You believe you could break into his store one night after he has gone home and steal the cure. This would definitely save your partner, although you might be arrested for the crime.

What should you do? What if you could only steal the cure by killing the druggist?

The Philippine Health Care Dilemma:

Our geographical location and growing population are still the top and perennial reasons why developing the Philippine health care system remains a challenge.

The World Health Organization recommends that there should be 20 beds in a hospital per 10,000 people. The current population of the Philippines is over 100 million. The sufficiency of beds is one indicator of a good or a failing health care system. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has the smallest bed-population ratio and has the worst health care system in the Philippines.

Despite the challenges, the DOH hopes to welcome new innovative drugs into the country through its plans of reforming the Philippine National Drug Formulary (PNDF), which aims to make drugs available, accessible, and affordable. The PNDF has over 600 drugs listed and approved by the Food and Drugs Authority. Many drug innovations have happened since then; new drugs need to be listed and entered into the formulary. There are also a lot of drugs, which are not cost effective, that need to be replaced.

Sometimes, choosing more innovative and yet expensive drugs is more cost-effective than cheap but inefficient drugs.