



Republic of the Philippines
Polytechnic University of the Philippines
Quezon City Branch

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL

on

GEED 10093

ETHICS

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GEED 10093 – ETHICS

Module 3

Week 4: Moral Dilemma and the Resolution of Moral Disagreements

Topics

1. Moral Dilemmas
2. Things not to consider in answering moral problems/dilemmas
3. There is a correct way of answering moral problems: resolution of moral dilemmas.

Learning Outcomes

1. Exhibit critical thinking: Coming up with best decision and good judgment on dilemmas;
2. Integrate values and facts; weighing advantages and disadvantages; and best possible outcomes in decision making;
3. Understand that the “good” is pursued for itself, not because of any attachment value

Teaching Learning Activities

1. 3rd 3-hour video conferencing lecture session;
2. Read the following Readings in Ethics:
 - a. Tom L. Beauchamp and Leroy Walters, “Ethical Theory and Bioethics,” Contemporary Issues in Bioethics, 3rd Edition (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 3 – 7.
 - b. Tom Regan, pp. 4-15.
3. Watch the following YouTube links:
 - a. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwOQ7ZqDWN4>
 - b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfF5N1MalxA>
 - c. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MP8JQySTKY&t=308s>

Assessment Activities

1. Do Exercise # 3 and submit.
2. Submit Reflection Paper # 3.
3. Write a reaction paper on the question “**Are we always responsible on our human actions? If yes, to what extent that a person is morally responsible? If not, what are the factors that lessen or diminish ones responsibility?**”

Course Materials



One other component of meta-ethics is the inquiry into the *correct method* for answering moral questions. If there is a correct method for answering moral questions, similar things would be true of it: it would not itself contain answers to particular moral questions (for example, whether wilderness should be preserved only if it is economically profitable to do so); rather, it would specify how we must approach questions if we are to give moral answers to them – if, that is, we are to give answers “from the moral point of view.”

Whether there even exists such a method, not surprisingly, is very controversial question. Some philosophers think there is, some think it is one thing while others think it is something different.

It will not be possible to examine these controversies in all the detail they deserve. Instead a rough sketch will be given of some of the central issues. Two ideas in particular are of important. First, there is the matter of how *not* to answer moral questions. Second, there is an ideal moral judgment.

How Not to Answer Moral Questions

1. ***Moral Judgments and Personal Preferences*** In all these cases disagreement in preferences exists. Someone likes something; someone else does not. Are moral disagreements, disagreements over whether something is morally right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, the same as disagreements in preferences? In general, when two persons express different personal preferences, the one does not deny what the other affirms. It is perfectly possible for two opposing expressions of personal preference to be true at the same time.

The difference between expressions of differing personal preference and conflicting moral judgments points to one way not to answer moral questions. Given that moral judgments are not just of personal preference, it follows that moral right and wrong cannot be determined just by finding out about the personal preferences of some particular person. This is true even in the case of our own preferences. Our personal preferences are certainly important, but we do not answer moral questions just by saying what we like or dislike.

2. ***Moral Judgments and Feelings*** closely connected with personal preferences are a person's feelings, and some philosophers have maintained that words like

“right” and “wrong” are devices we use merely to express how we feel about something. In this view. What one conveys is that one has certain positive feelings/feelings of disapproval toward something.

This position encounters problems of the same kind as those raised in the previous discussion. It is not appropriate to ask for justification in the case of mere expressions of feeling. As in the case of a person’s preferences, so also in the case of person’s feelings: neither by itself provides answers to moral questions.

3. **Why Thinking It So Does Not Make It So** the same is true about what someone thinks. The fact that one happens to think what one does is just as irrelevant to establishing whether one ought or not ought to do. And the same is true concerning what we happen to think. Our thinking something right or wrong is not what makes it so.
4. **The Irrelevance of Statistics** someone might think that though what one person happens to think or feel about moral issues does not settle matters, what all or most people happen to think or feel does. A single individual is only one voice; what most or all people think or feel is a great deal more. There is strength in numbers. Thus, the correct method for answering questions about right and wrong is to find out what most or all people think or feel. Opinion polls should be conducted, statistics compiled. That will reveal the truth.

This approach to moral question is deficient. All that opinion polls reveal is what all or most people happen to think or feel about some moral question. What such polls cannot determine is whether what all or most people happen to think about such an issue is reasonable or true, or that what all or most people happen to feel is appropriate. There may be strength in numbers, but not truth, at least not necessarily. In times past, most (possibly even all) thought the world was flat. But the question of its shape was not answered merely by finding out what most people happened to think or feel. There is no reason to believe moral questions differ in this respect. Questions of right and wrong cannot be answered just by counting heads.

5. **The Appeal to a Moral Authority** suppose it is conceded that we cannot answer moral question just by finding out what others happen to think or feel, or by finding out what all or most people happen to think or feel. After all, single individuals, or most or all people like them, might think or feel one way when they should think or feel differently. But suppose there is a person who never is mistaken when it comes to moral questions: if this person judges that something is morally right, it is morally right; if it is judged wrong, it is wrong. No mistakes are made. Let us call such a person a “moral authority.” Might appealing to the judgments of a moral authority be the correct method for answering moral questions?

Most people who think there is moral authority think this authority is not an ordinary person but a supreme being/god. This causes problems immediately. Whether there is god (or gods) is a very controversial question, and to rest questions of right and wrong on what an alleged god says (or the gods say) is already to base morality on an intellectually unsettled foundation.

The difficulties go deeper than this, however, since even if there is a god who is a moral authority, very serious questions must arise concerning whether people always understand what this authority says about right and wrong. Problems of interpretation abound.

Problems of interpretation aside, it is clear that the correct method for answering moral questions cannot consist merely on discovering what some alleged moral authority says. Even if there is moral authority, those who are not moral authorities can have no good reason for thinking that there is one unless the judgments of these supposed authority can be checked for their truth or reasonableness without relying on these judgments themselves as grounds for their truth and reasonableness, and it is not possible to do this unless what is true or reasonable regarding right and wrong can be known independently of what this supposed authority says.

Thus, since in the nature of the case there must be some independent way of knowing what judgments are true or reasonable in order to test for the authority of another's moral judgments, to appeal to this or that "moral authority" cannot itself be the method that we seek for answering moral questions.

The Resolution of Moral Disagreements and the Ideal Moral Judgment

What now needs to be described is an approach to moral questions that is not open to the objections raised against the methods previously considered so far. The approach described in what follows turns on how the following question is answered: "what requirements would someone have to meet to make an ideal moral judgment?" considered ideally, that is, what are the conditions that anyone would have to satisfy to reach a moral judgment as free from fault and error as possible?

Several methods for dealing constructively with moral disagreements have been employed in the past, and each deserves recognition as a method of easing and perhaps settling controversies. Here are the methods that can at least help us manage dilemmas, even if no entirely satisfaction resolution emerges. The following are different ideas that must find a place in our description of the ideal moral judgment.

1. ***Obtaining Objective Information*** – First, many moral disagreements can be at least partially resolved by obtaining factual information concerning points of moral controversy.

We cannot answer moral questions in our closets. Moral questions come up in the real world, and knowledge of the real world setting in which they arise is essential if we are seriously to seek rational answers to them. We have to come

out of our closets to answer any moral question (or to find the answer others have reached on the basis of their research); and answer it we must if we are to reach an informed judgment about the morality of a certain act. The importance of getting the facts, of being informed is essential. It applies all across the broad sweep of moral inquiry.

2. **Providing Definitional/Conceptual Clarity** – Second, controversies have been settled by reaching conceptual or definitional agreement over the language used by disputing parties. In some cases, stipulation of a definition or a clear explanation of what is meant by a term may prove sufficient, but in other cases agreement cannot be so conveniently achieved.

Philosophers frequently use the words “conceptual analysis” to refer to the activity of clarifying our concepts or ideas. Since we use words to express our concepts, the goal of conceptual analysis is to reach a clearer understanding of the meaning of words. Achieving such clarity is absolutely vital.

One way to think about conceptual analysis is in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Conceptual analysis can be understood as the attempt to state the necessary and sufficient conditions of the correct use of a given concept. The aims of conceptual analysis, on this view, are thus (1) to state, so far as it is possible, those conditions which, if they are not satisfied, prevent the concept in question from being correctly applied – the necessary conditions of correct use – and (2) to state those conditions which, if they are satisfied, permit the concept to be correctly applied – the sufficient conditions of correct use. In this view of conceptual analysis, an analysis is itself correct to the extent that it states the necessary and sufficient conditions of correct use.

We should not expect all concepts to be analysable in the way concepts in mathematics are. Some defy analysis in the sense that it is not possible to give a complete set of quite precise necessary and sufficient conditions. However, in the case of these concepts, one ought to strive to reach the highest degree of completeness and precision possible. The more complete and exact we can make our understanding of a given concept, the more likely we will be to understand those questions in which the concept figures.

3. **Coolness** – all of us know what it is like to do something in the heat of anger that we later regret. No doubt we have also had the experience of getting so excited that we do something that later on we wish we had not done. Emotions are powerful forces, and though life would be a dull wasteland without them, we need to appreciate that the more volatile among them can mislead us; strong emotion is not a reliable guide to doing (or judging) what is best. This brings us to the need to be “cool.” “being cool” here means “not being in an emotionally excited state, being in an emotionally calm state of mind.” The idea is that the hotter (the more emotionally charged) we are, the more likely we are to reach a mistaken

moral conclusion, while the cooler (the calmer) we are, the greater the chances that we will avoid making mistakes.

People who are in a terribly excited state may not be able to retain their rationality; because of their deep emotional involvement, they may not be able to attain impartiality; and when they are in an excited, emotional state, they may not even care about what happened or why. Like the proverb that shooting first and asking questions later, a lack of coolness can easily lead people to judge first and ask about the facts afterward. The need to be cool, then, seems to merit a place in our list of ideal moral judgment.

4. ***Using Examples and Counterexamples*** – Fourth, resolution of moral controversies can be aided by a method of example and opposed counterexample. Cases or examples favourable to a one point of view are brought forward, and counterexamples to these cases are thrown up by a second person against the examples and claims of the first.
5. ***Rationality/Analyzing Arguments*** – Fifth, one of the most important methods of philosophical inquiry, that of exposing the inadequacies, gaps, fallacies, and unexpected consequences of argument, can also be brought to bear on moral disagreements. If an argument is inconsistent, for example, pointing out the inconsistency will change the argument and shift the focus of discussion. There are, in addition, many more subtle ways of attacking an argument than pointing to straightforward inconsistencies.

The one aspect that concerns us here is when rationality is understood as the ability to recognize the connection between different ideas – the ability to recognize, that is, that if some statements are true, then some other statements must be true while others must be false. Now, it is in logic that rules are set forth that specify when statement follow from others, and it is because of this that a person who is rational often said to be logical. When we speak of the need to be rational, then, we are saying that we need to observe the rules of logic. To reach an ideal moral judgment, therefore, we must not only strive to make our judgment against a background of information and conceptual clarity; we must also take care to explore how our beliefs are logically related to other things that we do or do not believe.

6. ***Impartiality*** - Partiality involves favouring someone or something above others. In some cases, partiality is a fine thing; but a partiality that excludes even thinking about or taking notice of others is far from what is needed in an ideal moral judgment. In striving to reach the correct answers to moral questions, therefore, we must strive to guard against extreme, unquestioned partiality; otherwise we shall run the risk of having our judgment clouded by bigotry and prejudice.

The idea of impartiality is at the heart of what is sometimes referred to as the formal principle of justice: justice is the similar, and injustice the dissimilar, treatment of similar cases. This principle is said to express the formal principle of justice because by itself it does not specify what factors are relevant for determining what makes cases similar or dissimilar. To decide this, one must supplement the formal principle of justice with a substantive or normative interpretation of justice. While the principle of justice does not by itself tell us what are the relevant factors for determining when treatment is similar or dissimilar, that principle must be observed if we are to make the ideal moral judgment. Not to observe it is a symptom of prejudice or bias, rational defects that must be identified and overcome if we are to make the best moral judgment we can.

7. ***Adopting A Code/Valid Moral Principles*** – Seventh and last, resolution of moral problems can be facilitated if disputing parties can come to agreement on a common set of moral principles. If this method requires a complete shift from one starkly different moral point of view to another, agreement will rarely if ever be achieved. Differences that divide persons at the level of their most cherished principles are deep divisions, and conversions are infrequent. Various forms of discussions and negotiations can, however, lead to the adoption of a new or changed moral framework that can serve as a common basis for discussion.

The concept of a moral principle has been analysed in different ways. At least this much seems clear, however: for a principle to qualify as a moral principle (as distinct from, say, a scientific or a legal principle), it must prescribe a conduct for all moral agents. Moral agents are those who can bring impartial reasons (i.e., reasons that respect the requirement of impartiality) to bear on deciding how they ought to act. They are conceived to be both rational and autonomous. Only moral agents can be said to have moral obligations to do, or to refrain from doing, what is morally right or wrong. And moral principles can apply only to the determination of how moral agents should behave. Normal adult human beings are the paradigmatic instance of moral agents.

How does the idea of a valid moral principle relate to the concept of an ideal moral judgment? In an ideal moral judgment, it is not enough that the judgment be based on complete information, complete impartiality, complete conceptual clarity and so on. It is also essential that the judgment be based on a valid or correct moral principle. Ideally, one wants not only to make the correct judgment but to make it for the correct reasons.

The idea of valid moral principles will be discussed more fully below in separate topics.

EXERCISE # 3

Cite one current and socially relevant ethical issue in the Philippine society and fill out the necessary data using the chosen ethical issue in order to resolve the moral controversy at hand.

Make sure there will be no duplication of ethical issue among you. It is imperative that you have to announce to the class and agreed among yourselves which ethical issue you will be assigning to yourself.

Current and Socially Relevant Ethical Issue:	
1. Objective Information	
2. Definitional/Conceptual Clarity	
3. Examples and Counter Examples	
4. Arguments	
5. Valid Moral Principle	
Moral Decision:	