Who Has the Right to Decide What is Right? When Everyone Is Right From Their View

Ethical Analysis of Conflicting Moral Perspectives and Decision Authority

Siddhant Bali
(2022496)

Rishabh Kumar
(2022402)

Anshul Jain
(2023102)

Saarthak Saxena
(2022421)

Table of Contents

Introduction

In a scenario where individuals, groups, and institutions have different yet logically consistent moral views internally, the problem of who actually has the authority to make the right call becomes the main issue in applied ethics. What looks like a justified action from one side may be vehemently opposed from another, thus creating moral terrains where everyone thinks that they are morally 'right'. Such conflicts can be found in issues of vigilante actions, invasion of privacy, geopolitical disputes, as well as in the realm of making everyday decisions about harm, justice, and responsibility. It is very important, however, when eminent moral stances meet to inquire if moral rightness can be ascertained by majority view, institutional authority, cultural norms, or universal ethical principles, and also if any of these sources are unbiased. This investigation is about the way moral decisions should be taken when there is disagreement, what makes the authority legitimate, and why just point of view cannot decide the question of right and wrong.

Meta-Ethical Background

Relativism

Moral relativism is the theory that moral judgments are accurate or reasonable only from the point of view of a certain culture, community, or individual. Such a definition implies the absence of a universal standard according to which all deeds can be judged. Instead, correctness of a moral act depends on its being in the right context, coming from one's upbringing, and being part of the shared norms. Relativism is instrumental in understanding how different groups such as vigilantes, offenders, nations, or families can all think that they are doing the right thing within their own moral framework. On the contrary, relativism has a big problem: if we accept all viewpoints as equally valid, then we lack the grounds for condemning, e.g., harmful practices, unjust punishments, or biased authorities. This drawback makes relativism not enough to be used in situations where there are conflicts between morally correct claims of different parties.

Moral Objectivity

Moral objectivism, on the other hand, asserts that there are some moral truths which exist even if no one personally or culturally recognizes them. Objectivists argue that concepts like independence, justice, proportionality, and treating people as ends in themselves give us universal standards by which to judge the morality of

our actions. According to this interpretation, if an agent thinks that they are right but their view violates objective moral requirements, for instance, if it causes harm that is not proportional or if it deprives another person of her basic rights, then their perspective is ethically wrong. So, objectivity constitutes a basis for making the call when confronted with opposing moral claims, for instance, where one's feelings, social pressure or majority opinion might mislead one into thinking that something is ethically right.

Epistemology of Moral Disagreement

The epistemology of moral disagreement deals with the question of how to know moral truths and what it implies if smart and honest people come to different conclusions. Moral disagreements call into question evidence, reasoning, emotion, cultural background, and the trustworthiness of moral intuition. They also make us think about whether we should become less certain of our judgments just because there is disagreement. Some philosophers claim that constant disagreement indicates that morality is subjective, while others believe that disagreement is caused by lack of information, biased perspectives, and unequal power rather than by the absence of moral truth. Knowing the reasons for disagreement is necessary for determining the right moral authority: an authority must be one that is able to support its decisions by clear reasoning rather than by perspective or power.

Normative Frameworks

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a moral theory that considers only the consequences of an action. The best, morally right action is the one that produces the greatest happiness or the least suffering for the greatest number of people. In disputes where each side thinks it is right, utilitarianism still operates by asking which action will bring the best results to all those affected, not only to the moral agent. For instance, a vigilante may feel that punishing someone is the right thing to do because he wants immediate retribution, but a utilitarian analysis reveals more general harm: terror, loss of confidence, violence getting out of control, and the possibility of punishing an innocent person. By emphasizing the well-being of the community in the long run, utilitarianism opens up a way of looking at moral issues which goes beyond one's own point of view and emotional impulse.

Deontology

Among other things, deontological ethics and in particular Kant's framework tend to highlight aspects like duties, rules, and respect for persons rather than focus on the results. From this perspective, it is stated that activities like privacy violation, coercing others, or simply using someone as a means are inherently unethical irrespective of the positive side of the outcomes. Deontology is very firm in its defense of autonomy and dignity, hence, it is a very effective way when there is a moral issue to be solved. The theory even goes as far as to say that agents, even if they think that they have good motives, must still respect moral duties if they want their actions to be legitimate. By doing so, it resolves the kind of disagreements that arise from different points of view by basing the judgments on principles that are valid for all rational beings.

Social Contract Theory

According to social contract theories (Hobbes, Locke, Rawls), moral and political rules get their legitimacy from such agreements that individuals would rationally accept under fair conditions. These theories explain that legitimate authority, like courts, laws, or democratic institutions, has the right to make moral and punitive decisions because society has collectively agreed to these structures for the protection of everyone's interests. The social contract is violated by vigilantism, mob justice, or unilateral moral judgment in that they go beyond the fair, impartial processes which confer legitimacy to authority. Social contract theory thus offers a way of figuring out those who have the right to decide: the institutions that are justified by mutual agreement, fairness, transparency, and equal protection.

Principles of Autonomy and Rights

Both rights and autonomy-based ethics are among the most fundamental of these paradigms that recognize moral claims as coming directly from the fact that a human being is a person. Rights, like the right to personal privacy, due process, physical integrity, or fair treatment, specify the limits of what can be done to a person by others, also if they are acting from a sincere and morally motivated perspective. A person's idea that he/she/it is "right" is not a license to break the rights of another. Autonomy is about respecting people's ability of self-governance and rights protect them against being forced, exploited, or getting an unfair share of the pain. These concepts set boundaries for morality that go beyond one's point of view and thus they give the basis of moral authority not to be dependent on majority rule or subjective conviction but to be grounded in universal respect.

Case Study 1: The Ethics of Digital Vigilantism in *Black Mirror*

This case involves a Black Mirror episode "Shut Up and Dance." In this story, a stark clash is depicted between moral rights and consequentialist justice within the digital realm. The main character is Kenny, a young boy who is caught in a hack that secretly captures a compromising personal video of him through his laptop's webcam. The hackers (vigilantes), having this leverage, do not cooperate with the police by informing them about the potentially illegal act. Rather, they use the video to extort Kenny to carry out a series of crimes of growing severity, initially, they trick him into stealing something of little value, then they force him to commit armed robbery, and finally, they coerce him into killing another person they say is guilty of something else.

The intruders are motivated by a sense of duty to be the judge, jury, and executioner of their "off-the-books" immediate justice, thus they reason that the result of saving the society from the so-called predators justifies the extreme methods of force, invasion of privacy, and criminal manipulation that they use. Such a case compels one to determine whether a desirable goal can serve as a moral justification for the use of deeply immoral means.

Analysis Using Core Ethical Theories

Utilitarianism (Consequentialism)

From a utilitarian point of view, one could say that the hackers' actions were, at least, not entirely wrong. Their actions follow the principle of Act-Consequentialism, which considers the morally right act to be the one that leads to the best outcomes. The hackers represent themselves as agents who, by punishing a criminal, deterring others, and removing a threat to children, are increasing overall social utility. Accordingly, the enormous suffering imposed on Kenny (the disutility) is compensated for by the supposed greater good resulting from their self-made justice system and the societal benefit of solving a failing judicial process. Such a framework, which is associated with thinkers like Jeremy Bentham, who put the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" principle first, is open to legitimizing instances in which individual rights are gravely violated if the social benefits are considered to be significant enough.

Deontology (Kantian Ethics)

On the other hand, a Deontological moral evaluation, guided by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, regards the hackers' behavior as morally wrong. Deontology emphasizes the fulfillment of one's duty and the inherent rightness of a moral act irrespective of the outcomes. By using Kenny merely as a tool for their self-serving

goal (dispensation of justice and obtaining deterrence), the hackers fail the Categorical Imperative. Among the duties of rational moral agents, committing hacking, blackmail, and forcing a person into a criminal act are in opposition, since the maxim of their action (universal hacking and coercion for private justice) cannot be a universal law without it destroying the prerequisite moral community, namely Autonomy and respect for persons, necessary for a functioning ethical community.

Virtue Ethics

Virtue Ethics, based on Aristotle's philosophy, looks at the character of the moral agents. The hackers' behavior shows the presence of vices like cruelty, arrogance, and lack of compassion or phronesis (practical wisdom). Although seeking justice is a good thing, it should be done as a balanced mean. The hackers' angry, unrestrained, and overly harsh way of acting is showing their character as defective. Justice, as a virtue, necessitates fairness and giving back only as much as is received, i.e., being proportional, both of which are glaringly missing when they ruin the life of a fellow teenager and his harmless sister just because they feel like it.

Moral Justification and Ethical Authority

Moral Justification: Who is Correct?

While none of the original crimes nor the revenge actions can be considered morally right, the hackers' actions constitute a morally more serious wrong. Utilitarianism tries to justify their means by looking at the consequences, while the Deontological critique reveals that the violation of basic rights and duties is excessive and wrong by its nature. The hackers' actions, among which the coercion of a minor, violation of his and his sister's Privacy, and forcing him to commit violent felonies, constitute a massive breach of the moral principle of not using people as mere means to one's ends. Their chasing of justice is a case of Slippery Slope reasoning, which implies that permitting such off-the-books digital vigilantism eventually results in a lawless, arbitrary, and cruel Torture Culture of punishment.

Ethical Authority

The really proper Ethical Authority is with the established judicial and governmental systems, as per the idea of Social Contract Theory. Basically, this authority is based on the citizens' voluntary giving up of the right to solve justice by themselves in exchange for an impartial and regulated due process. Hackers, as a result of their actions outside this contract, have no legitimate authority. Their

vigilante justice is, by definition, Agent-Relative, which means it is only from their self-serving perspective and lacks the Impartiality required of a robust moral system. Their decision-making grounds are their own biased moral convictions, so their final "verdict" is ethically illegitimate, regardless of whether the victim is initially guilty or not.

Case Study 2: India;Pakistan Moral Framing

Perspective Conflict

The conflict India and Pakistan have had for a very long time is a good example of how two sides can have completely different yet still logically structured moral stories within themselves. Looking at things from India's side, the past incidents of terrorism, cross-border militancy, and threats to the internal security have contributed to the building of a moral structure in which the taking of strong defensive measures looks like something both justified and needed. On the other hand, from Pakistan's point of view, the military responses of the Indian army, the border policies, and the political actions may be regarded as aggressive or unjust. Each party filters the events through its own historical sufferings, national identity, and political priorities thus ending up with moral stances that to them are very obvious and have the right of existence but from the outside look like they are biased or even distorted. The conflict in question shows how moral judgment gets mixed up with national perspective, collective memory, and geopolitical interests.

Role of Incomplete Information

International ethical evaluations are, as a rule, based on only some aspects, partly on the types of information that are either filtered or strategically curated, in other words - they are not fully informed. It is a common practice for governments to disclose only selected facts, whereas media outlets choose and emphasize particular narratives and citizens get information which is formed by their national loyalties. Due to the limited understanding of the decisions taken across the border and security operations, it is so that neither of the populations, and often even the global community, has not got a full access to the facts that are necessary for an impartial moral assessment. Insufficient information increases the importance of perception, thus moral disagreement becomes more fierce and less of a possibility that they can be resolved through reasoning only.

Who Gets to Draw Moral Equivalences?

One of the major ethical issues is the propensity of different external observers, in particular Western commentary, global media, and foreign policymakers, to draw parallels between India and Pakistan even when the causes, the proportionality, or the contexts vary drastically. The very act of calling two sides "equally responsible" or "equally aggressive" can be a moral judgment in itself, one that may merely gloss over the realities that are not symmetric, erase the sufferings of the past, or omit the patterns of the side that is being provoked versus the one that

is responding. Identifying moral equivalence implies a thorough examination of intention, proportionality, causality, and accountability rather than a mere superficial symmetry. If not, equivalence becomes a deceptive narrative that favours simplicity rather than accuracy.

How Authority & Global Institutions Judge

Large global structures like the United Nations, international courts, and major geopolitical power centers are very often considered as moral authorities by default in the case of international conflicts. Nevertheless, their verdicts are influenced by political friends, strategic interests, and the pressure of diplomacy and not by pure ethical principles. Their authority is more procedural than objective: they have some influence, but not necessarily the moral clarity. Hence, their evaluations may, from time to time, reveal as being inconsistent, biased, or even as being far off the ground as the experiences of the peoples living in these regions. This instance brings to the fore the problem of moral authority which is at the core of the project: the authority of morality is questionable when institutions are not neutral, do not have access to full information, or are not protected against geopolitical incentives. In such conflicts, real moral legitimacy necessitates, inter alia, the transparency of the reasoning process, the understanding of the context, and the adherence to impartial ethical principles rather than positional power.

Problems With Majority as Moral Authority

Herd Mentality

The thinking of the majority is often influenced less by logic and more by factors like emotion, fear, propaganda, and social pressure. An individual who is a part of the herd mentality can take up opinions that he has not personally verified, simply because those opinions are prevalent in his community or the media. When the biggest authority of right and wrong is based on what the majority think, then the ability of the individual to judge ethically is at risk of being influenced by the change of public mood and collective outrage. The situation becomes very risky if it is related to stigma, national conflict, or moral panic because then the majority can become very quick to condemn without giving due process or a rational evaluation a chance. Therefore, the decisions that find majority backing can be a reflection of the people's impulse rather than of moral truth.

Historical Atrocities by Majorities

The past provides a lot of instances where the opinion of the majority was on the side of evil practices such as slavery, segregation, witch hunts, caste discrimination, colonialism, political purges, and mass persecution. The examples mentioned above prove that just because a view is accepted by most people, it does not necessarily make it morally right. There are quite a few societies in which, very recently, majorities have been advocating for the very same actions which we presently recognize as serious violations of human rights. The major moral failures of majorities throughout history make it clear that ethics cannot be decided by numbers and that in most cases, moral correctness comes from minority groups, reform movements, or those who dissent on principle.

Ethical Safeguards: Rights and the Rule of Law

The implementation of rules based on rights, constitutions, and fair trials is an attempt to guard against the risks posed by the tyranny of the majority in ethical and political systems. The safeguards guarantee that even if the majority wants to impose punishment, exclusion, or harsh treatment, the individuals will still have certain rights which are beyond the collective power of the group. The rule of law introduces the steps that must be taken in order to stop a quick, unjust decision of the majority, such as asking for evidence, impartiality, and proportionality before taking any actions. The rights that minorities enjoy give them the power to express their views as well as protect them, vulnerable people, and unpopular groups against the moral instability of the crowd. The implementation of these safety

measures which limit in a principled manner what the majority can decide, therefore, lead to moral authority being based not on public opinion but on fairness and universal respect.

Conclusion

Conflicts between different kinds of morals, be it between individuals, groups, or countries, indicate that neither one's own belief nor the opinion of the majority can solely determine what the ethically right thing to do is. Each side may argue that their view is the right one, yet none of these perspectives can be the basis of moral truth. Hence, the real moral power has to belong to the principles and the institutions which are not affected by subjective bias and emotional reaction. Ethical decision-making, if it is to be truly warranted, has to be:

➢ Unbiased; not having any kind of personal animosity, political benefit or ideological distortion.
➢ Rights-respecting; implementing privacy, autonomy, fairness, due process, and proportionality for everyone involved.
➢ Rational; coming from the facts, having clear reasoning and being consistent with the moral principles rather than being guided by the impulse or the feeling of being outraged.
➢ Institutionally legitimate; its power coming from the open, accountable and democratically based systems like courts, laws, and public supervision.
➢ Including minorities and dissenting voices; making sure that councils and decision-making bodies have among them people with radically different, unpopular, or even seemingly foolish ideas, also those who challenge or criticize the authority itself.

The fifth condition here is crucial: without minority viewpoints, ethical councils may turn into chambers where the majority's blind spots, biases, and errors are not only unchallenged but also reproduced. The dissent protection helps to prevent moral stagnation, majority tyranny, and the silencing of alternative viewpoints which might contain indispensable moral insight.

The case studies, the Black Mirror's scenario of a vigilante hacking and the moral framing of India-Pakistan tensions, show how just one perspective can lead to a distortion of ethical judgment. Vigilantism is still morally wrong because it does not respect due process, it infringes on rights, and it exchanges public accountability for private coercion. Any judgment of a geopolitical nature without full context or the inclusion of dissenting narratives usually leads to shallow or unfair equivalences.

Finally, moral authority is not only about being more confident; it demands a principled, inclusive, rights-protecting, rational, and institutionally grounded way of coming to a judgment. It is only through such safeguards that societies can stave

off the perils of biased perspectives and make moral decisions that are fair, justified, and universally defensible.

Bibliography

1. Moral Relativism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://iep.utm.edu/moral-re/
2. Moral Objectivism and Ethical Relativism - Indian Hills Community College, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://webcontent.indianhills.edu/_myhills/courses/PHI105/documents/lu03_moral%20objectivism_relativism.pdf
3. accessed on November 17, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categorical_imperative#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20Kant's%201785%20Groundwork,should%20become%20a%20universal%20law.%22
4. The Categorical Imperative – Philosophical Thought, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/chapter/the-categorical-imperative/
5. The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham | Faculty of Laws, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/research/research-projects/bentham-project/collected-works-jeremy-bentham
6. Original Position - Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/original-position/
7. John Rawls, Social Contract Revivalist (Chapter 12) - The Social ..., accessed on November 17, 2025, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/social-contract/john-rawls-social-contract-revivalist/8737063EDA7C1155F450E4B298845765
8. The Challenge of Cultural Relativism, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://faculty.uca.edu/rnovy/Rachels--Cultural%20Relativism.htm
9. Moral Epistemology - Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-epistemology/
10. (PDF) Moral Coherence and Political Conflict - ResearchGate, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333594276_Moral_Coherence_and_Political_Conflict
11. Deep Moral Disagreement and Unthinkable Possibilities - Taylor & Francis Online, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09672559.2025.2519269
12. Disagreement - Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/disagreement/
13. Moral realism, disagreement, and conceptual ethics - PMC - PubMed Central,

accessed on November 17, 2025,
https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11473052/

14. Professional Medical Ethicist: A Weed or Desired Member in Medical Ethics Debates? - DiVA portal, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:21914/FULLTEXT01.pdf

15. Benthamand utilitarianism in the early nineteenth century (Chapter 2), accessed on November 17, 2025, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-utilitarianism/benthamand-utilitarianism-in-the-early-nineteenth-century/607CF25A407002BDE89C19CACE0C67C0

16. Alexis de Tocqueville on the Tyranny of the Majority | NEH-Edsitement, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://edsitement.neh.gov/curricula/alexis-de-tocqueville-tyranny-majority

17. Tyranny of the majority For Tocqueville, the inevitable advent of democracy is accompanied by multiple threats that are inherent, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://tocquevillefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Tyranny-of-the-majority.pdf

18. The Rule of Law - Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rule-of-law/

19. The Rule of Law: "A" Relation Between Law and Morals - Huskie Commons, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1873&context=niulr

20. Digital Surveillance in the name of National Security - A Deontological, Consequentialist and Paternalistic interpretation of Edward Snowden's revelations in 2013 - Lund University Publications, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/9105587/file/9106782.pdf

21. More utilitarian judgment in Internet addiction? An exploration using process dissociation and the CNI model - NIH, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8933780/

22. Shut Up and Dance (Black Mirror) - Wikipedia, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shut_Up_and_Dance_(Black_Mirror)

23. Can someone please explain the appeal of Shut up and Dance? I don't understand the fan fair. : r/blackmirror - Reddit, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://www.reddit.com/r/blackmirror/comments/157w3lk/can_someone_please_explain_the_appeal_of_shut_up/

24. Framing Analysis of Pak-India Relations in Elite Press: Peace and War

Journalism Perspective, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://www.poverty.com.pk/old/uploads/JADS%20Vol%2010%2C%20Issue%202-2021%20Page%2066-84.pdf

25. Narratives in Conflict: Media Framing and Propaganda During the 2025 India-Pakistan War, accessed on November 17, 2025, http://socialworksreview.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/240

26. The geopolitics of militarism and humanitarianism - PMC - PubMed Central - NIH, accessed on November 17, 2025, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8801667/